Supporting English Language Learners in Intermediate Grades Reading Class:

What could General Education Teachers do?

By

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Elementary schools in Ontario currently have the most linguistic diverse group of learners. However, literature suggests that General Education Teachers (GET) are struggling to support the English Language Learners (ELL) in their mainstream classrooms. This research examines the GETs’ values and practice in terms of supporting ELLs’ reading improvement in Language Art class, and the challenges they encounter in the field. The findings of the study imply some effective pedagogies and teaching strategies in the ELL teaching practice, as well as the areas where resources are expecting enrichment in order to fully improve ELLs’ learning experience and maximize ELLs’ learning outcomes.

Keywords: English Language Learners, General Education Teachers, reading, support, mainstream classroom
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research background

Canada is well known as a multicultural country with a large population of immigrants. In 2014 the number of new permanent residents exceeded 240,000 (Government of Canada, 2014). Ontario, as the most populous province in Canada with communities that come from all over the world, is thus facing an unprecedented diversity in its elementary and secondary education systems (Flessa, Gallagher-Mackay, Parker, 2010). Despite the fact that the Ontario Ministry of Education has set up English proficiency programs in which the English Language Learners (ELLs) are target students, the academic achievement gap between them and their English-speaking peers is still wide (Roessingh, 2008). As for middle school students, they only have two more years left before entering senior high school, where a high level of English proficiency would be an asset to support more intense content knowledge learning. Improving English becomes an urgent and common concern among ELLs, their parents, as well as their teachers (Flessa et al, 2010). Among all subjects in elementary school, Language is regarded as the biggest challenge for ELLs to catch up with their English-speaking peers, as they are learning English literacy by using English language (Cox & Boyd-Batstone, 2008).

1.1 Research Problems

ELLs, according to Ontario Ministry of Education, is defined as “students in
English-language Schools whose first language is other than English. They can be Canadian-born or new comers from other countries (Coelho, 2012).”

Because the instructional language in at school is English but not their mother languages, learning content knowledge and skills in class takes ELLs more energy and time. Modifications, differentiated instructions and resource assistance are needed to cultivate academic success (Coelho, 2012).

Schoolwork can become relatively challenging for ELLs compared to native English students. Statistics about Grade 6 ELLs’ performances on Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) tests shows that,

[...] for new immigrant ELLs who were born outside of Canada, it takes five or more years for them to catch up with their English-speaking peers in English Language and literacy skills. And judged on the data of 2005 and 2006 EQAO tests, an estimated proportion of the 20% students in Ontario’s elementary and secondary schools are ELLs (Coelho, 2012).

Researches have been done to examine the factors that constrain the improvement of second language acquisition, and age appears to be an important one (Roessingh, 2008). For middle-school-aged ELLs, the need of closing the achievement gap becomes more urgent, considering that they are about to enter secondary school. In secondary school,

[...] the pressure on study can be heavier and heavier and the (ELLs) would be left behind farther and farther as reading comprehension comes to dominate all aspects of the curriculum.(Lesaux, Crosson, Kieffer & Pierce, 2010)

To be more specific, students will be taught different subjects within a larger academic scope, and their learning process will require greater amounts of in-depth reading, writing, analyzing and researching compared to elementary school learning. Not being able to use English skillfully will cause more struggle for ELLs at this
Another factor that may influence the effectiveness of second language acquisition, according to Freeman and Mercuri (2003), proves to be the proportion language takes during the study of a certain subject. They find that Language Art class can be where the achievement gap is exacerbated and where the need for using special strategies by teachers becomes the most urgent. Other researchers agree to their conclusion by quoting statistics from national standardized testing record. It shows that about 51% of 8th grade ELL students are left behind in reading and math, meaning that the scores for one out of every two will have to improve for the group to achieve parity (Pry, 2007).

Despite the fact that besides ESL teachers, General Education Teachers (GETs) are also responsible to ensure ELLs learning success, they reported that they are not ready to fulfill the needs of the linguistic minority in their home rooms (Johns, 2002).

GETs’ insufficient preparation for teaching ELLs, according to Johns, is mainly attributed to the negligence of Second Language Acquisition in teacher programs in the 1990s and 1980s. However, the demographic changes in recent decades require that they be responsive to the diversity in their classrooms, including the ELL students in their classrooms (2002).

The unbalance between what students need and what GETs are able to offer can also lead to other problems. As Walker, Shafer, and Liams described in their research:

Due to the increasing population of ELLs in the nation’s schools, and the increasing pressure placed on teachers and schools to be accountable for the educational achievement of these students, there is a critical potential for negative teacher attitudes to develop and/or increase (2004).
Therefore, it is crucial to examine the current teaching practices of GETs and the learning experiences of ELLs in mainstream classrooms in order to track down potential difficulties and pull out possible solutions.

1.2 Purpose of Research

Studies shed much light on effective teaching strategies for ELLs (Chamot & O’malley, 1987; Adamson, 1990; Powers, 1993). However, less attention has been given to how to engage ELLs in mainstream language arts classes and/or what strategies can be taken to ensure their progress (Johns, 2002). In this context, there is a need to investigate how to prepare teachers to support new immigrant ELLs effectively in English Language Arts classes. One avenue towards that end is to learn from some exemplary teachers committed to this practice. I shall use literature to analyze the interviewees’ opinions and hopefully address the areas where further research can be carried out.

The purpose of the research is to learn how a sample of middle school Language Art teachers support the reading achievement of their ELL students so that more teachers can broaden their instructional repertoire to be responsive to the needs of their ELL students.

1.3 Research questions

This research study asks: How is a sample of middle school language arts teachers supporting the reading achievement for their ELL students?

Subsidiary questions include:

What instructional strategies and pedagogical approaches do these teachers enact
SUPPORTING ELLS IN INTERMEDIATE READING CLASS

and why?

What factors and resources prepared and support these teachers in this work?

What challenges do these teachers encounter in supporting the reading achievement of ELL students and how do they respond to these challenges?

What indicators of learning do these teachers’ observe from their ELL students as outcomes of their instructional support strategies?

1.4 Background of the researcher

I have a Bachelor’s of Arts Degree in Second Language Education, and I worked as an English teacher in Guangzhou, China. Most of my students are hopeful that they will one day gain admission into an English-speaking academic institution, and I have consistently observed them struggling in developing their English proficiency. In China, one of the most challenging aspects of learning English is the lack of English environment. Students have little chance to actually practice English outside of classrooms. The professional experience and my close observation of those students aroused my curiosity: How will they be taught once they really get into schools where English is the instruction language? When English exists as a background language and becomes something unavoidable, while students’ English proficiency is still limited, how will students react to it? What strategies could teachers use to balance the needs of ELLs with the needs of other English-speaking students? In order to seek for the answer to my questions, I came to Canada to study and decided to make this the focus of my research.

I have a cousin who is 12 years old right now. She is a Grade 7 student at a public
school in Scarborough. As a new immigrant, she came to Canada in 2013 with her family and enrolled in elementary school right away. She learned in both her regular Grade 7 class and at an ESL center, but she shows obvious preference for studying in an ESL center. When sharing with us her first-year experience at school, she described her ESL teacher as “more considerate” and “knows me better,” while she described her GET as someone who “always speaks English too fast” and whose instructions are “sometimes really confusing”. Although she claims she is more used to the English environment at school, she still requires lots of help in her after-school assignments. I once guided her on her language class assignment, and that was when I realized the text she was reading would not show up in English classes until at least Grade 11 in China. Considering that she learned English in China at a much slower pace and suddenly got placed in a class where her peers’ English proficiency was at least four years ahead of her, she must have so many stressful moments at school.

Thus I decided to narrow down my research question into a smaller investigation range: language class in Grade 7 and 8. Children at this age who are immigrating to Canada as ELLs will confront great obstacles. For them, the second language is not as easy to pick up as they were in primary and junior grades. As adolescents, they can be self-conscious and tend to be more sensitive to how their peers and teachers judge them, which could result in a decrease on learning motivation. Meanwhile, language class can be particularly challenging for them as English proficiency plays as a foundation of everything else, such as the comprehension of text, the analysis of literature structure, the imitation of writing skill, and so on.
While teaching English in China, I found that most of my students struggled in reading comprehension. I personally consider reading ability as one of the most essential skill in English as a second language acquisition, and the most effective assessment tool in English teaching. Reading comprehension requires thorough understanding of English vocabulary, grammar, text structure, cultural background, etc. A student who is able to comprehend, analyze, infer from, relate to, and comment on various texts usually shows talent on English learning in general. Thus, I finally decide to do research on ELLs reading performance.

1.5 Overview

In this research paper, Chapter 1 includes the research background, the purpose of the study, the research questions, as well as my former experience that developed my interest in this topic. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature in the areas of multilinguals of mainstream classroom, second language acquisition and authentic classroom practices. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and procedures used in this study. It also includes information about the sample participants and data collection methods. Chapter 4 identifies the 3 interviewees in the study and describes the data as it addresses the research question. Chapter 5 identifies conclusions, recommendations for practice, and areas for further study. References and a list of appendixes presenting my interview questions follow at the end.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

What GETs can do in terms of supporting ELLs’ reading improvement in a mainstream setting must be examined through different lenses because it involves different groups of participants (the ELLs, their parents, the mainstream students, GETs and the Ministry of Education, etc.) and is influenced by different factors (Second Language Acquisition process, Adolescent Psychology, ELLs’ socioeconomic situation, Academic assistance resources, etc.). In order to know what teachers could do, we need to address the areas ELLs are struggling in, concerns educators have in mainstreaming ELLs in school, strategies that have been taken and the outcomes. Next we need to articulate details about ELLs’ backgrounds. How do they go through second language acquisition in schools? Does age affect the acquisition? How and to what extent? What is the greatest obstacle in their way? How big is the gap between them and their English-speaking peers? How would reading contribute in their future academic achievement? In this chapter, I answer these questions by reviewing literature mainly in areas of the Mainstream class, Second Language Acquisition, and Differentiated Teaching.

2.1 Struggles ELLs going through in mainstream classroom setting
Now that ELLs struggling in school is an undeniable fact, in order to obtain more insights into ELLs school life, I will examine literature addressing the initial considerations behind involving ELLs in mainstream classes, some specific struggles in reading ELLs are facing, and the limitations of ELLs mainstreaming programs.

2.1.1 Considerations behind integrating ELLs into mainstream classes

The considerations behind placing ELLs into mainstream class mainly include: the assumption that every student should have the opportunity to an “equal” education in which the curriculum standards and the expected learning outcomes are the same for all students; the belief that the more exposure to English the ELLs have, more quickly they will reach the desired English proficiency level (Carrasquillo & Rodrigues, 2002, p10); and the wish of the ELLs’ parents that their children could assimilate the English-speaking culture (Montgomery, 2008). However, as the practice goes on, GETs are often at a loss when considering how to reach the ELLs who are apparently struggling through learning. The academic gap between them and mainstream students shows up in all content area and rings bells for GETs attention (Walker, Shafer & Liams, 2004).

2.1.2 The reading ability gap

In order to identify what kinds of difficulties ELLs are facing and where the achievement gaps become the widest, next I review the literature on challenges ELLs encounter in mainstream classrooms.

First of all, ELLs are found to experience a higher level of English Language Anxiety when they study in mainstream classrooms (Pappamihiel, 2002). English
Language Anxiety refers to the feeling of unease, worry, nervousness, and apprehension experienced when learning or using English. In her study, Pappamihiel states:

In an ESL classroom setting, English Language Anxiety decreases as English achievement increases. However, in mainstream classes students who were high achievers in their ESL classes seemed just as likely to suffer from high levels of English language anxiety as low ESL achievers (2002, p. 340).

Secondly, ELLs achieve poorly in standardized tests national-wide and State-wide (Fry, 2007). In Fry’s quantitative research, he compares the achievement differences of NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) scores between White native speaker students and Hispanic ELLs on Math and Reading. He concludes:

The results of national testing conducted in 2005 shows that nearly half (46%) of 4th grade students in the English language learner (ELL) category scored “below basic” in mathematics in 2005—the lowest level possible. Nearly three quarters (73%) scored below basic in reading. In middle school achievement in mathematics was lower still, with more than two-thirds (71%) of 8th grade ELL students scoring below basic. Meanwhile, the same share (71%) of 8th grade ELL students scored below basic in reading (2007, p. i).

Thirdly, ELLs feel excluded in mainstream classrooms due to the insufficient inclusion strategies their GETs adopt (Reeves, 2006). Reeves explores four categories within secondary teacher attitude towards ELL inclusion: (a) ELL inclusion, (b) coursework modification for ELLs, (c) professional development for working with ELLs, and (d) perceptions of language and language learning (2006). In her summary, she claims:

Findings from a survey of 279 subject-area high school teachers indicate a neutral to slightly positive attitude toward ELL inclusion, a somewhat positive attitude toward coursework modification, a neutral attitude toward professional development for working with ELLs, and educator misconceptions regarding how second languages are learned (2006, p. 131).
With these daily challenges interacting with each other, ELLs are restrained from making significant progress in their study, interacting well with their peers and/or GETs, and engaging in school community life (Reeves, 2006).

To obtain diagnostic reports on how well they perform academically, every Ontario student is given the opportunity to participate in large-scale assessments at various points throughout his or her education career. And teachers depend on the test results to grasp the overall direction of further instructions. However, ELLs seem to have exemptions or accommodations in every test. For example, there are policies saying that “decisions about exemptions or deferrals will be made according to the requirements articulated in the EQAO administration guide” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 38). The policy is made to ensure the fairness of test results. There is no way to know whether ELLs tested in English score low because of lagging content knowledge and skills, or because of limited English proficiency, or because of other factors that interfere with the test performance - or some combination (Ministry of Education, 2007). However, the exemption policy for ELLs give rise to the absence of a large-scale (beyond board-scale) standardized test for ELLs in Ontario, thus the lack of a valid database of ELLs’ overall English literacy proficiency.

2.1.3 Concerns with mainstreaming ELLs

With the accumulation of mainstreaming experience, educators and policy makers repeatedly raise the following questions: Do ELL students belong in the mainstream classroom in terms of education policy making and the individual development of ELLs (Fu, 1995)? Are mainstream classroom teachers ready to work with ELLs both
mentally and practically (Hamaya, 1990, Mohr, 2004)? Does regular classroom capable of providing an appropriate learning environment for all kinds of learners (Chaudron, 1988)? Does supporting ELLs involve meeting not just their linguistic needs, but also social and cultural needs (Yoon, 2007)?

Expecting to answer these questions, next I review literature that present authentic school experience of grade 7/8 ELLs and discuss the potential chances and challenges embedded in their intermediate years study.

2.2 How do ELLs learn in middle school mainstream classrooms?

In this section I review literature about the factors that influence middle school ELLs learning effects in regards to the significance of reading ability, the age of arrival (in an English-speaking country), their personalities, and socioeconomic status of their family. Only by having a thorough understanding of ELLs’ living and studying environment can we think of more specific measures to help them more effectively (Jones, 2002).

2.2.1 The significance of reading ability

In order to function successfully in the classroom, students need to obtain a level of English proficiency much more complex than day-to-day survival level (Weaver, 1988). Apparently, the daily conversations, such as greetings among people are less cognitive-demanding and energy-consuming than academic communication, such as giving a speech, doing an oral report and participating in group discussion (Cummins, 1980). To distinguish these two types of communication, Cummins (1980, 1981) poses two types of Second Language (L2) acquisition: language for general social
interaction and language for school. According to him, the former type of language acquisition aims to support “content-embedded” communication where a wide range of paralinguistic (e.g. gestures, facial expressions) and situational cues enhance the information conveyed. However, the latter type, which is expected to be acquired through schooling, is more likely to be “content-reduced”. It relies mainly on linguistic or pure language-based cues to make senses and is significantly more difficult to comprehend and produce (Cummins, 1981). For example, while completing reading comprehension questions after reading a narrative story, Grade 7 students would need to refer back to their prior knowledge of the category of “Narration” to judge if the story is an anecdote, a fable, an autobiography or a letter/Email. They would probably compare the characteristics of one type in the four to the text to see if they match each other. Then they would generalize their thoughts and phase them into grammatically-correct, well-organized, evident-supporting answers. Throughout the process, cognitive activities such as memorizing, comparing and reasoning take place, so do linguistic activities such as reading and writing. And all these activities are carried out in English.

In most of the on-going literacy programs in elementary schools, reading ability development is of primary importance because it is considered an asset for completion of most of the academic tasks in school. In other words, “reading” play double roles in schools: a content area of literacy class, and a cognitive tool to decode, comprehend and internalize other content areas of a variety of subjects (Antunez, 2002). Weaver (1988) defines reading as the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic
interaction (transaction) among the reader’s existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language, and the context of the reading situation.

Throughout reading education in school, students are supposed to achieve in all these areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension strategies (Antunez, 2002). These knowledge and skills are interrelated and interdependent in the study of any subject or domain they would like to pursue in secondary and post-secondary institutes.

2.2.2 The effect of age in second language acquisition

Some of the earliest research relating age issue to second language acquisition focus on proving or disproving Lenneburg’s critical period hypothesis (Collier, 1987; Rosseingh, 2008; Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978; Cummins, 1980 & 1981; Freeman, Freeman & Mercuri, 2003). Lenneburg (1967) believes that after lateralization (a process by which the two sides of the brain develop specialized functions), the brain loses plasticity, which limits the critical period of second language acquisition within roughly two years old to puberty (Collier, 1987).

As it is mentioned above, second language is a part of the content knowledge of literacy program for ELLs, as well as the linguistic tool for them to study other subject knowledge. Several scholars have examined the effects of age for students’ second language acquisition (Snow & Hoefnagel-Hohle, 1978, McLaughlin, 1978, cummins, 1981).

In Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle’s research, it is believed that reading and writing performances of younger students (arriving age between 4-7 years old) and older
students (arriving age between 8-12 years old) are compared by the researchers. It turns out that the older group are faster in early acquisition of second language skills, and over several years’ time they still maintain this advantage. In fact, in other wider-scale investigations, the achievement of students starting to receive formal second language education between the age of 8-15, surpasses the achievement of all other age groups significantly (Snow & Hoefnagel-Hohle, 1978). Several explanations are proposed, though none yet has conclusive research support (McLaughlin, 1978):

The most widely accepted one is that when children are asked to learn a second language for use at school after their first language has sufficiently matured to serve as a transferable skills, the learning task is not as burdensome to them as it is to less-matured learners - usually the younger children (p.41-43).

Other research also argue that older learners have an advantage in cognitive maturity, which provides them with more flexible strategies for acquiring a new language (Cummins, 1981).

However, when it comes to the length of time that ELLs take to be skillful in using English to support all content areas study, Collier (1987) finds that arrivals at age 12-15 experienced the greatest difficulty reaching grade-appropriate norms, requiring 6 to 8 years at average. This finding firmly contradicts the former generalization that older students who are non-native English speakers enjoy the benefit of acquiring a second language more rapidly than younger students. This may also points out the complexity of second language development at succeeding grade level.

2.2.3 Other factors that may influence the second language acquisition of ELLs

Besides age, students’ personalities, cognitive abilities and socioeconomic status
are also identified as important factors shaping their second language acquisition experience (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1964; Carraquillo & Rodriguez, 2002; Moss & Puma, 1995; Laidra, Pullmann & Allick, 2007).

Initial researchers in the area of children cognitive development, Piaget (1952) and Vygotsky (1964) both agree that learning is a process of constructing knowledge through the interaction of thought and experience. Vygotsky (1962) argues that the knowledge children retain must relate to their cultural and social backgrounds and attract their interest, and it should be taught in a language they could understand. Their active engagement is an asset on their way towards learning. Therefore, it’s schools’ responsibility to create a wide range of experiences to facilitate language development for social interaction, as well as language for academic purposes (Carraquillo & Rodriguez, 2002).

In Moss and Puma’s qualitative research measuring the family socioeconomic status (SES) of students, statistics show that SES is a powerful factor in predicting students achievement in traditional content areas such as reading and math, regardless of they are language minority or native language speakers (Moss & Puma, 1995). A family with low SES is more likely to undermine the formal education of their children because everyone in the family, including children, must work to contribute to household financially. Students form these families are more possible to drop out of school, get less in-home academic support, and face learning difficulties.

As we all know that students come to school with different personalities, thus they hold different beliefs, habits and style of learning, which requires teachers to
adopt adaptive instructions to teach effectively. It is suggested statistically that there is a significant positive interrelation between openness, conscientiousness and academic achievement (Laidra, Pullmann & Allick, 2007).

So far, the characteristics of middle school ELLs and their learning experience have been discussed. But how well would GETs deal with their multilingual classroom teaching? In the next section, I review literature that tends to answer this question.

2.3 How do GETs’ respond to teaching reading in a multilingual classroom

In this section I review literature on teachers’ preparation and practice in supporting ELLs in their mainstream classrooms. I also address the weaknesses of some of their pedagogical approaches. My research will be carried out in order to fill these “gaps” identified in the literature.

2.3.1 GETs’ beliefs about readiness and self-competency

For too long educators only value the training of ESL teachers because they are the ones who are in charge of the linguistic development of ELLs. However, the fact is that ELLs spend over 90% of their school time studying in mainstream classes under the instructions of GETs, who are not adequately trained to support them or hold debilitating pedagogical beliefs about ELLs’ education (Breen, 2001). It is not a surprise that teacher programs today fall short preparing GETs with certain second language teaching background. In fact, around 50% of the public school teachers in the U.S. report to have ELLs, while only 20% claim that they feel ready confident to teach them (Gruber et al, 2002). The case of Canada is similar. In large-scale
quantitative research, Byrnes et al (1997), discover that backgrounds like multiculturalism courses, formal ESL training, teaching abroad experience and exposure to the ELL population are accountable for positive attitudes towards ELL teaching.

2.3.2 Common misconceptions GETs hold

Though GETs do not feel so prepared when they have ELLs in their classrooms, most of them still believe that a second-language-only classroom setting is beneficial for ELLs. Unfortunately, the well-intentioned efforts are often based on misconceptions about effective instructions of second language learning (Candace & Ester, 2004; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Vanpatten, 1993; Pica, 1994; Candace & Ester, 2004; Selinker, 1972).

Pure increase of exposure and interaction in an English environment does not always encourage English learning. The misconception that ELLs develop English-language skills naturally and fully when provided with meaningful and social interaction opportunities is problematic due to the wrong assumption that ELLs learn English the same way native speakers do (Candace & Ester, 2004). Researchers’ clarification include two evidences: First, mere exposure to the target language is insufficient for ELLs to develop a second language system, especially for ELLs older than 12, who need to negotiate the abstract concepts and complex language of classrooms and textbooks (Lightbown & Spada, 1990). To develop grade-level English for academic communication, ELLs need not only exposure to English, but also assistance to figure out the relationships between the forms and functions of the
target language (Vanpatten, 1993). Second, interactions with English native-speaker can not provide sufficient input and practice for ELLs. Limited by their English proficiency, ELLs are always found in a passive position when assigned academic tasks. They are not able to question, agree, disagree, present personal opinions, ask for clarifications or assistance appropriately (Pica, 1994).

Another misconception that should be corrected is that ELLs all learn English in the same way and at the same rate (Candace & Ester, 2004). It affects the way teachers interpret ELLs’ errors in practices. Some errors are produced by cognitive disorders, when ELLs don’t comprehend the content knowledge by its nature. While other errors appear with a disconnection, or mistranslation, between ELLs’ first and second languages (Selinker, 1972). Teachers’ accuracy of error-analyzing is restrained by their knowledge of English language structure and their understanding of “language transfer” theory (one’s native-language habits will be transferred upon second language).

2.3.3 Efforts and achievements of GETs

As ELL population percentage rises every school year, some GETs are willing to search for supporting resources, among which the experience and professional knowledge of ESL teachers are highly-valued. Working collaboratively, incorporating ESL teaching strategies into mainstream class teaching, creating coteaching programs to help ELLs settle in mainstream class, these GETs aim at the enhancement of ELL learning and the development of teacher leadership.

Coteaching traditionally refers to the collaboration between GETs and specialist
teachers (such as a reading specialist, teachers of gifted program, and ESL teachers etc.) for all of the teaching responsibilities and of all of the students assigned to a classroom (Gately & Gately, 2001). In some cases, the GET and the ESL teacher teach in the large group (the entire class), taking turns to play the leading role; in some other cases, the GET and ESL teachers are responsible for one group each, and the group could be all-native-speaker, all-ELL, or a mix; in the rest of the cases, the whole class are divided into multiple learning groups, and the two teachers facilitate different learning tasks while rotating among groups. The two teachers make decision of a certain mode of coteaching on the basis of specific students’ needs, classroom physical arrangements, content knowledge delivered, learning activities designed, and personal preference (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010).

Coteaching is proved to be an effective way of differentiated teaching in the following ways: Firstly, it reduces frequent interruptions for pull-out services, which helps ELLs to concentrate on their works for a longer time span; secondly, it lowers the difficulty level of collaborative tasks on which ELLs work with their peers and stimulates their learning motivations; thirdly, compared to the traditional seperated ESL-classroom teaching, coteaching increases ELLs’ sense of belonging to the class and self-esteem (Frattura & Capper, 2007).

However, the wide-scale promotion of coteaching still faces several challenges: on one hand, coteaching requires higher human resources budget from school boards. Assigning two teachers to one classroom as well as inviting more ESL specialists to host workshops or seminars in schools cost money. On the other hand, coteaching
only goes well when both of the teachers reach a firm agreement on a series of
decision-makings: instructions, lesson plans, communication with students and

Speaking of specific strategies used in reading class, there are mainly two
approaches to categorize them. One is through the stage of reading activity that these
strategies could be used to help ELLs (prereading strategies, guided reading
strategies, and post-reading strategies). Carrasquillo and Rodriguez (2002) take this
approach, emphasizing two elements: the provision of background knowledge and the
development of key vocabulary necessary to contrast meaning from text. The other
approach is to categorize them by the level of English proficiency of targeted ELLs
(young English-language learners, beginning learners, transitioning readers, and
advanced readers). Drucker (2003) combines the two approaches and points out the
reasons behind the following strategies (which are all recognized as “effective”
strategies in real classroom practices): previewing, choral reading, shared reading,
paired reading, books with taps, multicultural literature, language experience,
interactive writing, total physical response, narrow reading and read aloud.

Previewing provokes prior knowledge of ELLs by connect the content of the text
to some parts of their life. Another way to do previewing is phrasing brief discussion
questions which answers could be found in the text. Choral reading is a way of
providing comprehensive inputs for ELLs. It usually involves the recitation of poems
or short text, as well as gestures, sound effects and emotions (McCauley & McCauley,
1992) to enhance ELLs understanding by act it out dramatically.
Listening and reading are interrelated by their natures: reading is the phonological decoding of the written text, and written text is the representative symbols when words are sounded out. Shared reading, read aloud, books with taps, and paired reading can all help ELLs match the written form of vocabulary to their pronunciations. And for the ELLs coming from a culture in which writing directionality is right-to-left, shared reading helps them to get familiar with English writing system.

Reading comprehension may differ among students from different cultural backgrounds, and that’s why multicultural literature and language experience should be introduced into reading classrooms. When ELLs feel that their home cultures are valued in the mainstream classroom, they are more likely to maintain high self-esteem and stronger motivation for study (McCarrier et al., 2000).

2.3.4 Weaknesses of the existed literature

First of all, the research, as well as many teacher guidebooks these days, usually distinguish ELLs by their English proficiency or their cultural identity, in order to provide more in-depth guidance on differentiated teaching. But the reality is that GETs are teaching in classrooms where ELLs of different levels of English proficiency sit together to learn (Carrasquillo & Guez, 2002). Some of them may be born abroad and come to Canada in preschool age, some may come with a background of a certain amount of formal education in their first language but have not come across English before, some may be able to complete daily communication but not for academic purposes. And school only assign them to mainstream classes
according to their AGES. Therefore the challenge in front of GETs is even more complicated (Collier, 1987).

Secondly, few literature mentioned about the valid strategies to ensure ELLs’ engagement in mainstream classes. The inclusion of ELLs is an essential part of classroom practice because it provides ELLs a more comfortable environment to study in.

Last but not the least, the assessment strategies and tools that GETs can use to evaluate ELLs achievement is another issue that has been overlooked in the literature. Differentiation of the success criteria and evaluation standards for ELLs shows teachers commitment to different types of learners.

Hopefully these “gaps” could be new entry points of my research, and I will pay consistent attention to them in all stages of my research.

2.4 Overview

In this chapter, I reviewed the existing research in the areas of multilinguistics of mainstream classroom, second language reading skills development and authentic Language Art classroom practices.

I analyzed the current situation of mainstreaming ELLs from both ELLs and GETs perspective. I articulated the challenges for both parties and pointed out the obstacles that GETs need to overcome to support the success of ELLs in their Language Art classes. I learned from the practical experiences of GETs in literature, which helped me get an overview of the existing pedagogical approaches. In Chapter 3, I talk about the methodology I choose in order to learn experiences from 3
experienced GETs in the related field.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the research methodology in detail. I start by defining the nature of the study, articulating its approach, procedure and instruments. Next I elaborate specifically on participants sampling and selection. Later I analyze the strengths and limitations of my study, as well as the ethical considerations of conducting interviews. Finally, a summary of my key methodological decisions is provided at the end of the chapter.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedure

This research study looked at GETs’ effective teaching strategies to engage ELLs in literacy, specifically reading. It is a qualitative research study that includes a review of the existing literature and face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 2 GETs from Toronto District School Board (TDSB).

I choose to do a qualitative research study because it allows me to collect data in the field at the sites where participants experience the issue or problem under study (Creswell, 2007). As a result, qualitative research techniques allow me to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily life (Berg, 2001). I am interested in learning more about the phenomenon under study by interviewing two exemplary teachers. These teachers work in the setting where my research is set and they participate in many cases where
my research questions are answered.

3.2 Instruments of data collection

The only instrument of data collection in this qualitative study is a semi-structured interview protocol. Semi-structured qualitative research typically involves observations, interviews and similar methods for data gathering. Methods for analysis are based on systematic coding of the data (Blandford, 2013). The reason why I conducted semi-structured interviews is that, on one hand, they allow me to pose interview questions of different dimensions based on the themes I generalized from literature review (which is a predetermined structure); on the other hand, I want to leave my interviewees some freedom to extend their answers to the areas I have not mentioned in my interview protocol (see Appendix B). My interview questions are broken down into four blocks which include examining GETs’ background, attitudes, practice and the challenges they encounter respectively in regards to improving ELLs reading performance.

The data was collected during the interviews through audio recording. Interviewees were invited to reflect upon their ELL teaching experience in Language Art class. They were also encouraged to talk about their concerns and challenges that they confront in their practice, as well as the available resource they apply to support them in this work.

3.3 Participants

I felt that interviewing several exemplary teachers in this field is necessary and appropriate for learning how educators support the literacy practice of ELLs. As a
teacher candidate, experience from exemplary teachers can provide me with insights into creating an authentic classroom setting, addressing the challenges that arise when supporting ELLs in reading, as well as guide me to locate the strategies that have been practiced and deemed effective.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The criteria of selecting my interviewees are:

1. They must be teaching or have taught Language Art in an ELL-involved classroom in the recent 3 years;
2. They must have not been trained to be certified ESL teachers;
3. They are recommended as exemplary teachers in this field by their colleagues; and,
4. They have demonstrated leadership and/or expertise in the area of supporting literacy for ELLs.

The interviewees must be very familiar with teaching reading to ELLs in intermediate grades mainstream classroom setting. And since the public education system in Toronto has witnessed a rapid increase in ELLs enrolling in the past 5 years, the recent teaching experience is of paramount relevance to this study (Flessa, Gallagher-Mackay, Parker, 2010). Therefore I set my primary sampling criteria on teaching experience. While there are a wide range of studies focusing on teaching strategies of ESL teachers in ESL classrooms, I focus on the strategies GETs use in mainstream classrooms. Typically GETs are not specifically trained to be ELL teachers, so their attitudes, teaching strategies, and experiences will vary. This is precisely why it is a worthwhile to investigate the nature of these differences. I also
make sure that my interviewees are not teachers who happen to have some ELLs in their classrooms, but ones who demonstrate leadership in the field and have made significant achievement in ELL teaching.

### 3.3.2 Sampling procedures

I have three samples: one is my friend who is a long-term occasional teacher of an inner city middle school, one is currently a graduate student in OISE who was referred to me as an exemplary ESL teacher by other schoolmates, and the last one was an experienced History teacher recommended by one of my instructors in OISE. The sampling procedure that is used in this study is convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling that involves drawing from a sample that is part of a population that is convenient. The advantageous of convenience sampling for this study is ease of access due to my limit on time and resources; the disadvantage is that the sample cannot be used to make strong generalizations about the total population because it would not be sufficiently representative (Boxill, Chambers, & Wint, 1997). Given the research constraints involved in this study, such as the time allotted to complete this thesis, the limited sample size of teachers that I can interview, certain ethical constraints that disallow interviewing students or their parents, convenience sampling is the most convenient method to gain extensive qualitative data that will permit me to answer the relevant thesis questions.

### 3.3.3 Participant Biographies

Among my three interviewees, Martin’s and Justin’s cases are more similar
compared to Mandy’s in terms of age, teaching experience, and future career expectations.

Martin and Justin are both young teachers in their late 20s who graduated from Teachers College within recent 5 years. They both went teaching abroad upon graduation and gained first-handed experience of teaching ESLs before starting teaching in Canada. Right now, they are both on the occasional teaching roster of public school boards in Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Mandy works for an independent school in GTA, and has much longer teaching experience in history and drama. She has been teaching in the same school for 17 years, but has never been a designated ESL teacher. Besides longer experience, Mandy has another advantage in terms of learning about ELLs compared to Martin and Justin. She is the only one who has her own homeroom class. Thus she is able to carry on constant observation and assessment to diagnose her students’ learning outcomes.

All three interviewees are OCT certified teachers, but none of them has ever taken Additional Qualification course in ESL teaching. However, Martin and Justin both acquired Teaching English as to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) certificate in order to be able to teach abroad. Though according to Justin, the content of TESOL course is relatively vague and general, and the strategies and resource it provided does not necessarily apply to every classroom, they did gain an overview of the Second Language Acquisition and ESL pedagogy.

3.4. Data analysis
Once the interviews were completed I transcribed them. The transcripts were read slowly one at a time. Anything that stood out during the first read-aloud was underlined and I made notes in the margins of the transcripts.

Next, I read the transcripts numerous times in-depth, identifying categories of data and then themes within these. Next, I synthesized themes by merging some of the ones that are similar into the broader categories (Burnard, 1991). Later, I interpreted these themes through the lens of the existing literature in this field.

Referring to the existing literature, these categories were elaborated one after another, with the support of excerpts from the interview transcripts. I quoted my interviewees’ words in some places, and paraphrased the interviews in some other places as needed. I also interpreted the data looking for null data, or what the interviewees did not say.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

This study follows the ethical review approval procedures for the Master of Teaching program which stipulate that a consent letter must be sent to the interviewees prior to the interview (see Appendix A). Interviewees were asked to read and sign the consent letter and were given a copy for their records. The purpose of giving out consent letter is to introduce the content, consent, and procedures involved in the interview.

At the very beginning of the interview, I stated my research topic and articulated the main blocks of my questions. Interviewees were informed that they could refrain from answering any question that they did not feel comfortable with, and they would
have the chance to review or revise the transcripts at a later date. The consent letter is located in Appendix A. During the duration in which I present the consent letter, I explicitly inform each participant that there are no known risks to participation, that the data will be stored on a separate flash drive that only my research advisor and I will have access to, and that this data will be deleted five years after the completion of this study.

This study values the confidentiality of all individual-specific information, such as the name of the students in the examples my interviewees raised or the names of certain committee(s) or third part(ies) that are mentioned in the interview. Participants were assigned pseudonyms and any identifying data was excluded.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

I realize that my interview sample is small. But the goal of this research is to learn from exemplary teachers’ experience and prepare myself for literacy teaching in multilingual classroom. For this reason I find that conducting two semi-structured interviews is suitable. Due to the constraints of the ethical protocol, I was not able to conduct long-term in-class observation, hold interview with students, or collect data from more teachers of more school boards.

There are perspectives both in this area and in the relevant literature sources that I overlooked and was not able to include in this reviews. I chose the works of some leading scholars, such as Jim Cummins (1981), Yvonne Freeman & David Freeman (2003) and Nonie Lesaux (2010), as my literature foundation, and I mainly included the other studies that were done on the basis of these ones. I also feel like I haven’t
done enough literature review in the specific area of “improving ELLs’ performances on reading”. I would adjust my research direction more into “READING” in my future study.

In spite of the limitations above, there are some strengths of my study. I carefully selected these three teachers as my interviewees as I have witnessed and/or heard about their achievement in supporting ELLs. The techniques and teaching strategies they used in class caught my attention and became part of the initial motivation behind my choice of the topic. The mutual trust that was established over personal socializing with the interviewees contributes to creating a safe and comfortable atmosphere throughout the interview. The interview serves as an opportunity to validate their experience and the meaning they make from it, as well as a chance for me to explore the explicit answers to some of the questions I am concerned about in regards to ELL teaching.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained the rationales of my methodological decisions. My research topic requires direct contact with the participants in the teaching practice, which are the two exemplary teachers in my case. I decided to conduct two semi-structured interviews with these teachers discussing about their practice experience, comments and beliefs in regards to supporting ELLs on reading. After that I gave a detailed introduction of my sampling procedure, which include my sampling criteria, the location of my interviewees and their biographies. Finally I examined the ethical concerns in conducting these face-to-face interviews and analyzed the strengths and
limitations of my methodological decisions. Next, in Chapter 4 I report the research findings.
Chapter 4: Interview Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I will be reporting and discussing the findings I gathered from my interview data. I will be presenting my findings in the following areas, each of which will be in alignment with one of my subsidiary research questions in chapter 1: strategies and pedagogical approaches the interviewees enact; the interviewees’ professional preparation in ESL teaching; teacher resources that are available for the interviewees; the challenges interviewees encounter in terms of supporting ELLs; as well as some possible teaching strategies and pedagogies interviewees employ to overcome these challenges.

The discussion below is organized into the following themes that emerged from my analysis: GETs perception of ELLs in mainstream classrooms; teaching strategies and pedagogical approaches GETs enact to support ELLs in reading; GETs selection of appropriate resources to support reading proficiency; and challenges GETs encounter while supporting ELLs. Each of these are discussed in relation to existing literature on the topic.

4.1 Teachers’ described ELLs as, in general, being more timid, distracted, and are at risk of lower self-esteem due to language challenges

Attitudinal assessment is important because the teachers’ attitudes and beliefs
about language-minority children play a crucial role in determining the educational outcomes for this population of students (Valdes, 2001). Therefore, the first part of my interviews asks about the perceptions GETs hold regarding ELLs: how do they study, and what should they study in a mainstream classroom.

One of the highlights that every interviewee mentioned is that ELLs are less likely to participate in class activities. By others or by themselves, they are “building a wall around them”.

There are many reasons behind this phenomenon. According to Martin, “…they might be timid, they might be uncertain, usually they are very unwilling, not because they are...let’s say they are intellectually behind, it’s maybe because they are unsure of how to structure their thoughts in speech.” Not being able to follow the interviewees’ instructions or their peers’ progress, ELLs are found more easily to get distracted or off-task during classes (Hamayan, 1990).

Along with being distracted comes low self-esteem. Not being able to excel in English language leads into lower self-expectation, which then causes even greater failure academically (Chaudron, 1988). Therefore, how to boost ELLs’ confidence was a concern for all three interviewees.

Justin described a female student who moves between Canada and China from time to time, thus her English learning is inconsistent and her proficiency fluctuates. In this context, Justin underscored the importance of ongoing assessment in supporting ELLs. On-going observation and assessment as/of/for learning provides teacher insightful notes about the student’s growth and the areas he/she might need
When we land on the specific field of reading, all three interviewees spoke highly of “choosing the appropriate tools.” Good book choice means that the book is not only engaging by its content/style, but also level-appropriate and beneficial for students’ language learning (De Jong & Harper, 2005).

Finally, teaching students how to build up an inclusive community where ELLs feel safe and comfortable to be themselves and show their real English proficiency is also considered an urgent issue by the interviewees.

In general, there is a disconnect between “what ELLs need” and “what GETs know” (De Jong & Harper, 2005). Luckily, exemplary teachers, like my three interviewees, are aware of the disadvantages that lack of communication brings long, thus they always approach students and discuss their difficulties with them.

### 4.2 Teaching strategies and pedagogical approaches GETs enact in supporting ELLs’ reading progress

Before addressing the specific strategies that interviewees enact, I asked my interviewees about the learning goals for ELLs in mainstream classrooms in their opinions. As the goals they set for students have great influence on their lesson plans, the materials they provide, and the teaching strategies and pedagogical approaches they apply, it is necessary to have this discussion.

To sum up three interviewees opinions, they all agree on the following goals: a) to gain more confidence while using English (Cox & Boyd-Batstone, 2008); b) to
enhance general English language comprehension (Jones, 2002); c) to encourage more daily communication with native English speakers; d) to build up learning ability in English – understand how to apply English to learn (Cummins, 1981); e) to cultivate living independency in Canadian society.

In order to guide ELLs to achieve these goals, my interviewees experiment different teaching pedagogies in the classroom. Pedagogy is an array of teaching strategies teachers adopt to enhance students’ learning outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 1995). On one hand, in the context of a certain pedagogy, there may be some strategies that do not work on a certain group of ELLs. On the other hand, my interviewees also mention some self-developed or self-modified strategies that was worth sharing.

4.2.1 Culturally Responsive Approach

One common pedagogy my three interviewees apply was a Culturally Responsive Approach (CRA). A CRA is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. According to literature, it is evident that teachers applying CRA in their classroom witness greater improvement in academic growth of linguistic minority students (Villegas, 1991; Pajewski & Enriquez, 1996; Jones, 2002).

Integrating other three components of English learning – speaking, listening, and writing – while teaching reading was also an explicit goal of two of my interviewees. Justin elaborated on his experience in supporting ELLs both in Korea and in Canada, by pointing out that it really helps comprehension when ELLs are able
to associate the pronunciation and the spelling of a word, while Martin articulated how he encouraged a new comer grade 7 ELL to start reading in English – by sitting down with him and recounting orally the achievements of their favorite basketball player, which eventually served as a starter of the student’s daily English reading routine.

4.2.2 Differentiated Instruction

Interviewees also considered Differentiated Instruction (DI) as a pedagogical approach that was worth taking (Lesaux et al., 2010; Pappamihiel, 2002; Carrasquillo & Guez, 2002). DI is a framework or philosophy for effective teaching that involves providing different students with different avenues to learning (often in the same classroom). This approach is consistent with Tomlinson’ (2000) research. Lack of English proficiency constrains ELLs learning process in all subject areas, thus they should be considered one type of “special need students”.

Justin and Mandy both explained how they accommodate/modified their lessons for ELLs in the areas of reading material, time allowed for reading, difficulty level of reading material, forms of reading material, and so on.

4.2.3 Self-developed strategies of interviewees: Personal Attachment, Dual-lingual Environment, Synthesized Literacy Skills, and Cross-curriculum Planning

The very first common strategy all my interviewees shared is to engage ELLs and encourage their participation in classes (Chaudron, 1988).

Mandy, for example, emphasized the effective strategy in her practice that
includes personal, emotional attachments of students in the lesson plan. Things that they are familiar with, personally prefer, and culturally relevant to are all good material to be integrated into an effective lesson plan.

Secondly, the language environment is another factor that may enhance ELLs’ learning motivation. Carrasquillo and Guez gave very detailed orientation about how to build a learner-friendly environment in their book *Language Minority Students in the Mainstream Classroom (2nd version)*. Justin used the strategy of creating a dual-lingual learning environment in his classroom to engage ELLs. He described his experience of relating English study to ELLs’ first language study. He said:

> So if I have 10 new words for them, they will have the English translation on one hand, but if you could relate this to their Korean language as well, it will really bring out their passion. I will say one word in Korean, such as ‘pegupa’ which means ‘hungry’, then they will pronounce and explain it in English. Students were literally lit up when they heard me saying a word in their language, and they laughed so hard when they saw me trying.

Thirdly, Martin made a point that considering that reading - as well as speaking, listening, and writing- is an inseparable part of English learning, teachers should encourage ELLs develop reading ability by using other three literacy components as tools (Cox & Boyd-Batstone, 2008; Cummins, 1980; McCarrier et al., 2000).

For example, Mandy used to play movies about certain historical events that her students were learning, and asked them to write in role. For ELLs, she gave them detailed writing templates, word bank, as well as printed scene from the movies. She sat down with them and gave further instruction by rotating among them. This activity
also corresponds to the requirement of CRA (Villegas, 1991).

Referring to Mandy’s example, Justin and Martin both emphasized the importance of oral communication. Martin stated that he would try to get ELLs involved in as many group talks as possible. He described that the initial step of applying a new language is by listening to others speak, try to memorize their choice of words and way of expression, then copy them consciously or subconsciously.

Finally, my interviewees also attempted cross-curriculum teaching. As an experienced history teacher, Mandy utilized artifacts that were symbolic and popular in certain historical periods to boost students’ interests in learning about its cultural details. In one of the lessons Mandy recently delivered, she taught students how to make Celtic Knots in the unit on Celtic History. Her rationale was that “art is universal, and you do not need language as a medium to understand”. In this case, ELLs were as engaged as everyone else and gained more confidence by achieving on the same level as their peers.

Justin, combined Daily Physical Activity (DPA) with English teaching. He made use of game modes where physical transitions are required, expecting that ELLs would be more immersed and concentrated as they felt like they were “playing games”.

Above all, three interviewees all spoke of highly of the flexibility of utilizing strategies according to specific student groups and specific teaching situations. This is also one of the core principles of DI (Tomlinson, 2000). As Justin concluded that “there’s no such a strategy that fits into every classroom, or every ELL. It is part of
our job to find the ones that work in our own classrooms”.

4.3 Selection of teaching resources by interviewees

In years of experience of supporting ELLs, my interviewees all have favored resources they would turn to for help. Next, I will mainly discuss about resources in the following areas: interviewees’ professional development plans; publication resources; and assisting technology.

4.3.1 Interviewees’ professional development plans differ due to education background, teaching experience, age, and current position

Answers to the question “what professional development do you plan to have?” vary between the attitude of young teachers and that of experienced teacher(s).

Justin and Martin both plan on getting an AQ in ESL teaching in the near future. Coming back from Korea, they both believe that teaching ELLs requires special training and qualification simply because the pedagogies of teaching second language and first language are distinctively unique. Besides, “getting more AQs means better chances to secure a permanent position”. While Mandy does not think it is necessary for her to attend ESL training course/workshop anymore, because she feels very confident about her teaching skills and the teaching resource she has gathered over years, judging from her students’ achievements in the past.

However, there is one statement that all of them agreed on: Despite the fact that the ELL population in Ontario’s public education system grows rapidly, Teachers Colleges in Ontario - no matter it was 17 years ago or now - does not value ESL teaching in their curricula. Teacher candidates graduating from it every year will
probably only acquire limited understanding in the domain. Whether they will be qualified to teach ELLs or not simply depends on their individual Professional Development plans.

Generally speaking, teachers who enter the field recently value more about professional development. They are more aware of the rapid growth of ELLs in schools and are more devoted in taking ELL teaching as a career path. However, experienced teachers who have already secured a permanent position are highly confident about what they already know, and show less interest in updating their understanding of ELL teaching.

4.3.2 Publication resources – textbooks, dual-lingual reading material; and level-appropriate dictionary

For subjects that have textbooks, such as history, my interviewees tend to make modifications on textbooks. Simplify vocabulary and sentence structure, make use of all the non-textual components (e.g. illustrations, videos in digital textbooks, etc.), and provide translation of the story in textbook in ELLs’ first languages are all common accommodations for ELLs (Hamayan, 1990). Mandy also mentioned that she would go for dual-lingual, culturally comparative texts that are relevant to textbook content in order to engage students (Chaudron, 1988). Dual-lingual books are useful for ELLs who have received formal schooling in their native countries because their first language will help with the reading comprehension (Carrasquillo & Guez, 2002). Culturally-comparative texts refer to the books containing similar content examined from various cultural perspectives. Reading culturally-comparative
texts deepens ELLs’ understanding of the culture of the country they live in currently, as well as encourages critical thinking (Cox & Boyd-Batstone, 2008).

Justin also mentioned that the dictionaries in his Long Term Occasional (LTO) homeroom are not proficiency-appropriate for ELLs. He explained that “sometimes they use synonyms to state definitions which the students won’t know. I have to list some age-appropriate dictionary references on my PowerPoint for them”. For ELLs, dual-lingual dictionary, thesaurus, and online graphic dictionary are all alternative tools to help them overcome comprehension difficulties (Drucker, 2003).

4.3.3 Integrating assisting technology into literacy program

Justin likes integrating technology into his class. He developed PowerPoint games to introduce new vocabulary.

I start with something simple. Say, a woman crying. And there will be four chairs in the four corners of the classroom. I then show them four assumptions describing the situation. There may be some new words, but they are able to infer the meaning from the context. Their task is to choose the one assumption that they prefer, go to the corresponding corner and develop a short story with peers in the same group.

Online library is also regarded as a convenient literacy resource. Martin recalled that he usually assigns independent reading tasks to different students, and let them do a reading response on the books they chose. For ELLs, he would do diagnostic assessment on their reading levels on certain websites, then assign the appropriate leveled reading material to individuals. Usually the software/online reader would read aloud and highlight new vocabulary for ELLs during reading, and provide
comprehension practice to check for understanding.

4.4 Challenges and constrains for GETs supporting ELLs

4.4.1 Lack of public funded resource and qualification training

When asked about “what external resource are provided by the school, the board, or the Ministry?” only Mandy mentioned the ESL resource teacher in her school. Martin and Justin both admitted that they hadn’t had a chance to reach out. Martin is on the supply list, and “has very limited access to the school and board resource”. Besides, he rotates among several schools, thus he doesn’t have the opportunity to explore the details of a certain school’s resource (e.g. school library). Justin’s reason for not seeking for resources provided by school or board was that he found his ample materials accumulated in Korea already enough for supporting the ELLs in his class.

As new teachers who are employed by the school boards in the recent 2 years, Justin and Martin indicated that the boards did not have any kind of orientation towards teaching ESLs.

4.4.2 Challenges GETs find when addressing ELLs’ learning needs

In the last part of our interviews, interviewees are invited to share their insights into constrains in their way of supporting ELLs.

One of constraint that my interviewees addressed is the pace of teaching. As Martin said:

The teacher has his own agenda, sometimes it is sink or swim (for students). If they give up, they will be left behind, and the standards (for their achievement
goal) will go down. Unfortunately, sometimes teachers won’t even notice (any difficulties students have). There’s 29 other students, they don’t have time for one-on-one.

When the class’s schedule is full of different subjects, extra-curricular events, assemblies, and teacher has all kinds of exceptional needs to take care of, it becomes very easy to overlook the needs of any individual student. The longer the negligence lasts, the further they drop back.

Besides, some ELLs suffer from considerable peer pressure and family pressure. Sitting in the same room with a group of peers who are native speakers already puts pressure on ELLs. For those who excelled in their home country schools and who are raised up in a culture where academic performance is highly valued, achieving below their own or their families’ expectations can discourage their confidence even more.

Overall, ELLs are minority in the classroom, whose needs may be neglected, whose pressure is invisible but heavy, and whose progress is greatly counted on teachers. GETs need to make room for their growth by approaching them, asking about their needs, easing their pressure, and being there for them as trusted mentor.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I displayed the findings of my research in light of existing literature. All data were closely examined and grouped under four themes: a) perceptions GETs hold about ELLs and their learning; b) strategies and pedagogical approaches for supporting ELLs’ reading; c) accessible resources GETs apply to support ELLs; and d) challenges and constraints for GETs supporting ELLs.
In the next chapter, the implications of this study will be discussed. I will consider the implications in terms of improve support for ELLs in the mainstream setting for various stakeholders such as: teacher candidates, current GET, schools, and school boards. Finally, the recommendations for practice and their rationale will be provided.
Chapter 5 Implications

5.0 Introduction

This research asks how a sample of GETs (General Education Teachers) support English Language Learners (ELLs) in mainstream reading class. Based on the findings in Chapter 4, exemplary teachers prepare themselves for having ELLs in class, and they believe ELLs require differentiated educational plans in order to achieve well in a mainstream setting. The strategies and pedagogies they enact in class, such as Differentiated Instructions (DI) and Culturally Responsive Approach (CRA), are proved effective in addressing ELLs learning needs and supporting their language proficiency growth.

However, the challenge highlighted by all interviewees the most, is that even though these teachers are now comfortable and confident in teaching ELL-integrated mainstream class, their ELL teaching professional development does not have a systematic structure, and highly depends on their initiative in learning. None of the three interviewees was prepared for teaching ELLs back in teachers’ college, neither did they know much about second language acquisition until they got their first jobs. They were learning more and more about ELLs while teaching them. Therefore, all three interviewees encountered the same problem of not getting enough external support, which rings a bell for the wider educational community, school boards, Ministry of Education, administrative teams, that there are resource/support gaps to
fill for supporting the ever growing linguistic-diverse learners in Ontario’s elementary schools.

In this chapter, I give a brief review and summary of my research findings, and pointing out the significance of them. Next, I suggest the implications of my findings for the broad education community and for myself as a teacher and researcher. Then I list recommendations for practice at each level of educational institutions/organizations. Finally, I emphasize areas for future research and give a general conclusion to my research project.

5.1 Overview of the key findings and their significance

In chapter 4, I identified five more themes that resulted from an analysis of interviews with Martin, Justin, and Mandy. These themes include: a) GETs’ expectations of teaching ELLs in their mainstream classroom (see 4.1); b) effective approaches and strategies GETs enact to support ELLs’ literacy development (see 4.2); c) appropriate and accessible resources GETs apply to support ELLs in reading (see 4.3); d) challenges GETs encounter when addressing ELLs’ needs and finding support (see 4.4); and e) GETs’ suggestions about how to improve the learning experience and outcomes of ELLs (see 4.4).

Teachers’ perceptions about students of students plays an important role in determining how they will teach them (Byrnes et al., 1997). ELLs are described by all three interviewees to be more timid, unengaged, and silent in mainstream classrooms. Therefore, there is a lack of information for GETs to consider before making lesson plans. The findings under the first theme shed lights on the reasons why a disconnect
between GETs and ELLs is easy to form. It also alerts all the GETs about their responsibility to initiate interaction and be proactive about addressing problems.

My interviewees managed to sum up several approaches and strategies that stand out in their teaching practice. The two pedagogical approaches CRA and DI, with all the other teaching strategies (e.g. read-aloud, visual presentation, dual-lingual teaching, etc.) highlighted by your participants are also supported in the literature (Cox & Boyd-Batstone, 2008; Freeman, Freeman & Mercuri, 2003; Santamaria, 2009). My interviewees’ successful practice of the pedagogies and strategies not only add to the validity of them, but also provide the most recent cases where new teachers can learn experience from.

Challenges my interviewees faced may take place in every mainstream classroom with ELLs: lack of supporting resource, intense teaching agenda, large class size, and so on. According to all three interviewees, cooperation among all educational organizations and educators is in terms of eliminating existing obstacles and making appropriate help accessible to all ELLs (Pappamihiel, 2002). I address the suggestions from my interviewees and literature on how to improve the situation in 5.3.

5.2 Implications of my findings

5.2.1 Implications of the findings for the educational community

According to Justin and Martin, GETs have noticed that ELLs in mainstream class tend to conceal their true feelings and opinions in a mainstream setting. For example, they could be hiding the fact that they do not understand the instruction by
simply imitating whatever their peers are doing. Even though communication with students at all times are highly valued by all of my interviewees, when students tend to hide their true thoughts, teachers can feel very clueless even with a strong intention to help (De Jong & Harper, 2005). Students who may or may not understand what is going on in class, feel excluded when not getting GETs’ attention. A student’s negative impression of GETs can result in unsatisfactory, frustration and low self-esteem among ELLs, and eventually could constrain their academic achievement (Cummins, 1980 & 1981).

Many ELLs’ parents are part of a linguistic minority in Canada, too. Not being able to communicate with GETs, they are put at an even darker corner where information is not sufficient for them to tell whether their children are getting enough support in school (Montgomery, 2008).

Teachers college programs still have not fully integrated ELL Teaching Pedagogy into curricula (Jones, 2002). According to Martin, compared to Special Education, Aboriginal education, and Gifted Education, the discipline of English as a Second Language (ESL) is not made mandatory courses in teachers’ programs. And this has been recognized as a flaw of the teacher’s program curricula design since the 80s (Cummins, 1980 & 1981), however, the situation hasn’t been improved a lot.

As for teacher candidates expecting to have a class of their own, it’s necessary to learn from exemplary teachers’ practice, and to know where possible resources are located and how to access it. When realizing any resource shortage, teacher candidates should be accountable for reporting it to supervisors, and provide
proposals to solve the problem if possible, says Justin.

The administrators, including principles, have different attitudes in terms of supporting ELLs, says Martin. Mandy and Justin both agree that the only resource they will go for support when they need advice on teaching ELLs, is the ESL teacher. However, they also mentioned that in some schools, ESL teachers either take other subjects or are pretty overwhelmed by the limited teaching resources, program budget, and growing number of ELL students.

Therefore, providing ELLs with appropriate guidance, assistance, and more attention to their needs become hard for GETs. Some do not know how; some cannot find the right teaching resource; some have wrong pre-perceptions or stereotypes about ELLs; some are not even able to recognize their essential role in educating ELL (Youngs and Youngs, 2001) Future educational research agenda should focus more on supporting teachers in the field to expand their understandings about the ESL discipline, and performing educational reform on each level of educational community to catch their attention on the urgency of preparing teachers to be capable of working with ELLs (Cummins, 1980).

5.2.2 Implications for my professional identity and practice

The literature suggests that, generally speaking, GETs are not sufficiently prepared for supporting ELLs (Cummins, 1980 & 1981; Hamayan, 1990; De Jong & Harper, 2005). My research findings converge with these feelings. I am grateful for what I have learned from my interviewees in the course of conducting this study; as a teacher candidate there are several implications of this study for my own teaching
This research has led me to update my teaching philosophy to be more devoted in supporting ELLs. I have realized from studying both the literature and the interviews that teachers need to adjust their attitude towards teaching ELLs, and understand that it is a collaborative responsibility for every teacher and staff in school to make learning experiences more welcoming and joyful for ELLs (Pappamihiel, 2002).

Secondly, as all of my interviewees suggested, I will keep track on the latest research in the field and attend seminar/workshop/AQ courses in order to prepare myself for more diverse need of my ELLs. Justin said, “Not all strategies will work on a certain group of students, so teachers need to be flexible.” Addressing the strategies and approaches that work best on the ELLs I teach requires me to be more knowledgeable in the area, and based on which I can experiment with different strategies/approaches and select the most suitable ones.

Thirdly, in the long-term, as a teacher-scholar, I see myself as a member who can contribute my teaching experience and wisdom to the ELL Education community. I am willing to hold informal community meetings where my colleagues can share their resources and ideas together regularly. I am also interested in advocating for curriculum change in professional development for elementary teachers and changes in the curriculum of teachers colleges, since deeper understanding and interaction between the two parties (ELLs and GETs) will be beneficial for teaching quality and student achievement in the future.
5.3 Recommendations

Measures need to be taken at all levels of educational institutions/organizations so that they can coordinate better to support ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

The Ontario Ministry of Education should: a) integrate instructions and examples about how to support ELLs across curricula (Ministry of Education, 2007); b) continue to develop new and/or build on the original ESL programs to fulfill the needs of more diverse learners; and c) emphasize the need to apply inclusivity policies in all schools.

School boards, according to Martin and Justin, should plan to train more current teachers to be, or select more teacher candidates who are already, ELL-teaching qualified. Teachers who can relate to ELLs will be an asset in schools, as an ESL resource teacher or a GET.

School principals should be more attentive and supportive in terms of providing ESL program enough funding, strengthening parent-school relationship with linguistic minority parents, and offering ELLs both age-appropriate and ability-appropriate learning tools/devices.

All teachers in school need to pay extra attention to both ELLs’ English proficiency improvement and their academic improvement (Walker, Shafer & Liams, 2004).

5.4 Areas for further research

The first “blind spot” of former research I encountered in the literature review
is that there is no provincial-wide database that keeps records of ELL achievements in Ontario. All current research I accessed about the achievement gap between ELLs’ and their English-speaking peers were conducted in the United States (Pajewski & Enriquez, 1996; Fu, 1995; Fry, 2007). Even though the education institutional settings in the US and Canada share many similarities, the differences in specific educational policies, ELL demographics, and assessment systems are still obvious. I believe a long-term, large-scale research examining how well ELLs are doing at Ontarian schools is necessary and beneficial for teachers, principals, school boards, and educational policy makers. Knowing where ELLs struggle the most can better prepare all teachers to work on these challenges with them in class.

Current research that aims at determining the relationship between ELLs arrival ages (the time they arrive at a second-language-speaking country) and the degree of struggle at school mainly address ELLs’ academic performance (Fry, 2007; Lesaux et al., 2010; Coelho, 2007). However, there are other aspects where they may struggle, such as low self-esteem, social helplessness and exclusion, peer pressure, family culture pressure, and so on (Fu, 1995). We as teachers must take a close look at all aspects of ELLs’ school life and work towards creating a positive environment for developing the “whole child” within each student.

Last but not least, the existing literature states that most GETs have low expectations and readiness when it comes to supporting ELLs in their classroom (Gonzalez, 2007). However, as teaching abroad becomes a more and more popular option for newly certified teacher candidates in Ontario, the extensive ESL teaching
experience they acquire at the beginning of their career may provides them with broadened horizon and strong foundation in the discipline of ESL. When these young teachers come back from abroad and work for local school boards, they are very likely to become asset to the success of ELLs in their classes. Therefore, a research that addresses how teacher candidates’ overseas English teaching experience affect their domestic ELL teaching practice is worthy of conducting. It may reveal another important avenue for professional development that prepares teachers to be more qualified in supporting ELLs.

5.5 Conclusion

My research provides insight into interactions between GETs and ELLs in the Ontario elementary school system. It explores how a sample of exemplary GETs support the ELLs in literacy study, especially reading, in a mainstream classroom setting. The three interviews examined the interviewees’ education background, attitudes, and practice in terms of ELL teaching.

Anyone who is interested in supporting ELL learning in elementary schools may find the following highlights of the findings illuminating:

a) ELL population has drastically increased over the past 10 years, which calls for more dynamic and differentiated teaching practices in today’s Ontario elementary classrooms. It is important for all teachers (not just ESL resource teachers) to be aware of this fact.;

b) ELL students are developing a second language and learning about all subject areas using the second language at the same time. Thus teachers need to
associate literature study with real classroom practice to testify and locate the most effective strategies used on a specific group of ELLs;

c) CRA and DI are highly recommended by experienced teachers for supporting ELLs in a mainstream setting. Other strategies, such as building dual-lingual environments, planning cross-curriculum lessons, and attaching to students’ personal interests, are also useful;

d) Teachers need to be more proactive in reaching out for resources throughout teaching, and educational organizations as well as all educators (e.g. Ministry of Education, school boards, principals and other administrators) are accountable for providing more material/human resources as students’ needs go up.

I’m very grateful for the opportunity that the Master of Teaching Program provides me to reflect on my teaching practice, and combine theory study with classroom practice of exemplary teachers. This study clarified the questions that remain and the professional path I would like to take. I shall also expect that this study will bring the great need of ELLs to the attention of educational policy makers of all levels and eventually contributes to a greater scale student-centered educational reform. By then, the study shall also shed light for further research in the field.
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Appendixes

Appendix A: Letter of Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

(date)

Dear (name of participant),

I am a graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies of Education (OISE), University of Toronto. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Teaching (MT) program. For the purpose of completing a graduate research paper, I am studying how general education teachers support reading for ELLs in intermediate grades. I think that your professional knowledge and experience would provide many insights into this topic.

I am writing this report paper as a requirement of MT program. The instructor of the course that provides support for the assignment this year is Dr. Rodney Handelsman. The purpose of the research is to explore the areas of education that we are the most interested in, as well as learn the techniques to conduct qualitative research. My data collection consists of an initial 45-60 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you allow me to schedule an interview with you at a place and time that are 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 any information that may identify you in my written work, presentation, or publications. This information remains confidential and you will be assigned a pseudonym. The only person who will have access to my assignment work will be 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 for you to participate in the interview.
Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,
Yiqiao

Researcher: Yiqiao Mo
Consent Form

Course Instructor: Rodney Handelsman

yiqiao.mo@mail.utoronto.ca
rodney.handelsman@utoronto.ca

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 Yiqiao Mo and agreed to participate in an interview for the purpose described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: _______________________________________________________

Name (printed): ___________________________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Protocol: Supporting English Language Learners in Intermediate Grades

Reading Class: What could General Education Teachers do?

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. This research study asks: How is a sample of middle school language arts teachers supporting the reading achievement for their ELL students? All the interview questions are broken down into four blocks, focusing on your background as a teacher, your attitude towards supporting ELLs (especially in reading), your classroom practice in the domain, as well as the challenges you encounter in the practice respectively. Please do not hesitate to tell me if you are uncomfortable answering any of the questions and you maintain the right to review and revise your answers to the questions all the time. I would also like to let you know that neither your name or any information that would compromise the anonymity of your participation will be released through this study. Finally, please do not hesitate to tell me anytime you would like the recorder to be turned off. Now do you have any questions before we start?

Interview questions:

Block A: Background

1. Can you tell about your current teaching position? What grades/subject areas do you teach?

2. How long have you been teaching? How long have you taught intermediate grades Language Art (LA) class?

3. Can you tell me more about the school where you currently teach? (e.g., size, demographics, program priorities). How long have you taught at this school?

4. Do you fulfill any other roles in the school besides your role as a classroom teacher? (e.g.
advisor, coach, counselor, leader, etc.)

5. As you are aware, I am interested in learning how GETs support the reading achievement of ELLs. Can you tell me more about how you became interested in this area? What experiences informed not only your interest, but also your skill development in this area? Do you have an ELL additional qualification (Part One, Two, or Three)? Are you planning to get one?

6. In your experience, approximately what percentage of your students are ELLs? How many ELL students do you currently have in your intermediate grades LA class (out of how many students in total)?

**Block B: Attitude**

7. In your experience, what are some of the common challenges that intermediate level ELLs experience in language arts class? And in the reading strand specifically?

8. What do you believe are the primary learning goals for ELLs in a mainstream LA class? And what would you say are the primary goals concerning their reading practice, specifically?

9. Generally speaking, what do you believe are some of the best practices for supporting students to meet these goals and why?

10. In your view, how is a GETs’ role different from an ESL teachers’ role in literacy education for ELLs?

11. Why do you believe it is important to support the reading achievement of ELLs?

12. In your experience, what are some of the factors that constrain ELLs’ reading improvement in your classes the most?
Block C: Practice

13. What instructional strategies and pedagogical approaches do you enact to support the reading achievement of ELLs in your teaching and why? What resources do you use and why?

14. Can you give me an example of how you have supported the reading achievement of a specific ELL student?

- Who was this student? (Grade, home language)
- What did you observe about this students’ learning needs and struggles in reading?
- What opportunities for learning did you create and why?
- How did this student respond? What indicators of learning did you observe?

Block D: Supports, Challenges, and Next Steps

15. What range of factors and resources support you in your capacity to support reading development for ELLs?

16. What challenges do you encounter in this work? How do you respond to these challenges? How might the school system further support you in meeting these challenges?

17. What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to supporting the reading development and achievement of ELLs in the intermediate years?

Thank you for your time and participation.