English Language Learners and the Classroom: Inclusive Strategies and Beliefs of Ontario Teachers

By

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Abstract

Ontario classrooms continue to have many English Language Learners and the recent Syrian newcomers show promise that they will continue to represent a significant portion of our classrooms in the future as well. However, the decline of ESL programs in Ontario pose an issue around support for these learners. The purpose of this research is to explore the decline of ESL programs by taking a lens that focuses on the classroom teacher’s strategies in supporting and adapting to the needs of English Language Learners. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with two participants: both elementary school teachers, in the Greater Toronto Area. The findings highlight the importance of an inclusive learning environment and significance of communication and collaboration with various stakeholders in the ELLs learning. They suggest that educators believe new teacher candidates should be better prepared to support English Language Learners in areas of instruction and assessment. The implications from these findings range in scope, suggesting that a lack of training and competence in supportive and effective teaching strategies could have a detrimental effect on English Language Learners’ language acquisition and overall learning.

Key Words: English Language Learners (ELLs); Classroom Teachers; Beliefs; Inclusive Strategies; Support
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context and Problem

With approximately half the population born outside the country, Toronto continues to be known as one of Canada’s most multicultural cities. In addition to its somewhat steady growth in welcoming new immigrants, from the end of 2015 to the beginning of 2016, Toronto was also one of 36 communities involved in Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s election plan, of bringing 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2016). With many immigrants currently entering our city with hopes and dreams of creating a better future for their children, how does our education system appear through their eyes? What are we doing to make education accessible for children whose first language is not English?

In Ontario, about three-quarters of the English language elementary schools have English language learners (ELLs). The term ELL refers to students who require additional support to help them attain proficiency in the English language because their first language is not English or their spoken dialect of English is different from the standardized language of instruction used in schools. Although the province has a high number of ELL students, only about a third of elementary schools actually have English as a Second Language and/or English Literacy Development (ESL/ELD) teachers (People for Education, 2013). Over the years, boards have made substantial cuts to funding, with ESL classrooms experiencing a huge hit (Duffy, 2004). That being said, it is important to mention that there are some schools that have ESL teachers who either provide support to classroom teachers or take students out of the classroom for part of the day, to provide extra help. The schools, however, that lack specialized ESL teachers put the responsibility of providing support and teaching onto the classroom teacher. These classroom teachers, in majority of these cases, do not have training in ESL (People for Education, 2009).
Although our education system falls under the provincial government, for research purposes when focusing on just the greater Toronto area, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) stands out. This is because, the TDSB, which is actually the largest school board in Canada, encompasses a diverse group of students from various ethnic background (Johnston, Queiser & Clandfield, 2013). People for Education (2005) point out that although the number of immigrants continues to increase, the number of schools with ESL-specific programs experience a continuous decline. Many students that are still becoming accustomed to the English language are now at a disadvantage because many of them cannot cope with regular classes without the support of the ESL class (Duffy, 2004). This in turn leads to dropout rates that show ELLs as more susceptible to dropping out of school compared to non-ELLs (Echevarria, Powers, & Short, 2006). Nevertheless, as Bullock (2000) mentions, the issue of cuts to ESL classes is not one of jobs, as those teachers will be reassigned to other teaching roles within the school; rather the issue is regarding “the effect of the cuts on ESL learners in the public school system” (p. 2). Bullock (2000) further adds by stating:

All students are entitled to equal access to the public school system, no matter where they were born or how long their families have lived in Ontario. An ESL learner who unable to understand and master the language of instruction at school is at risk for becoming a marginalized member of Canadian society. Poor school performance leads to a higher likelihood of dropping out, with consequent heavy costs to society. […] The progress of English language learners is compromised when there are fewer ESL classes to offer support. (p. 2)

So, why has the TDSB, an important school board within a city that identifies, as Basu (2011) outlines, through its motto “Diversity Our Strength” (p. 9) continuing to follow this route?
One of the issues to ESL program cuts can be traced back to a funding issue. Funding is provided for English language learners that have been in Canada for three years or less. Although not all ELLs qualify for this funding, those that do usually do not always end up benefiting from it. Dusty Papke, President of the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, admits that unfortunately “the Learning Opportunity Grant for students at risk, ESL and school renewal is actually used [by the board] to pay for general salary costs” (as cited in People for Education, 2005, p. 1). Johnston et al. (2013) pointed out that the TDSB, despite openly advertising its mission regarding equity and inclusivity, was once again “balancing its budget on the backs of the students with the greatest need” (p. 3).

While this is one lens that can be used to look at this issue, Elizabeth Coelho, a professor at Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, looks at the issue differently and says that unlike other programs such as swimming, special education or even French, where parents voice their discontent, the ESL program was easy to make cuts to “with relative impunity” (as cited in Regier, Goossen, DiGiuseppe, & Campey, 2005, p. 24). This is because many ELLs’ parents are most likely English Language Learners themselves and therefore are unaware and/or uncomfortable questioning authorities of changes that affect their child’s learning.

Other than these two lens that focus on the ESL program itself, another lens that can be used is one that leads away from the ESL program and looks at the competency of the classroom teacher. Harper and de Jong (2004) point out that since the majority of ELLs’ school day is spent in the classroom, regardless of whether or not they are pulled aside for ESL class/support, the classroom teacher should be prepared to teach these learners, especially given the increasing number of ELLs that continue to enter the classroom. Coelho argues that although teacher
training programs are preparing elementary teachers in a variety of subject areas and skills, few
Ontario teachers are taught how to meet the ESL students’ needs, even though almost all of them
will have that responsibility when teaching in large-city classrooms (as cited in Duffy, 2004, p.
6).

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Given the issue regarding this area of education, the purpose of this study is to explore
the decline of ESL programs by taking on a lens that focuses on the classroom teacher’s
strategies in supporting and adapting to the needs of English Language Learners. I aim to
investigate the problem of teachers’ preparedness towards teaching ELLs. Dr. Jim Cummins, a
professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education for University of Toronto, says “We’ve
had 25 years of discussion about multiculturalism, yet we continue to churn out teachers with no
knowledge of anything related to language development. Building in one required course into the
mainstream teacher qualification is essential” (as cited in People for Education, 2005, p. 11).
Even though the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education offers a mandatory course related to
teaching English language learners to its teacher candidates in the graduate Master of Teaching
program, teacher candidates in other teacher training programs state that despite increasing its
program length to two years in 2015, teaching ELLs continues to be listed as one of the electives.
Due to many school boards decreasing ESL programs and putting the responsibility of an
immigrant student’s English language development on the shoulders of the classroom teacher, it
is especially crucial that teachers take such courses during their training program (Duffy, 2004).

Changing mandatory course requirements to a teacher’s training program is a process
that, if successful, takes a number of years before seeing its implementation. Hence, keeping that
mind, another purpose for this research is to learn and report on what inclusive strategies
teachers incorporate into lessons to integrate students into the classroom and how they work with ESL teachers to provide the best learning opportunity for the students. I would also like to learn effective ways of preparing to teach and assess ELLs. It is my hope that by sharing these findings with the educational research community, it will inform teachers and teacher candidates, who have not taken language teaching courses, ways in which they can prepare to teach and assess ELLs as well. This in turn will support their teaching across various areas of the curriculum when entering their own classroom.

The success of our all our students, especially ELLs is important for our society. Given that Toronto continues to be known for its diversity, English language learners represent a substantial portion of our student population and thus possess a great potential of influencing our future society at a provincial, national, and even global level. For that reason, the need for teachers to be prepared to teach all students ensures that all children are equally capable of achieving what they desire.

1.2 Research Questions

With the increasing number of English language learners that are in the classroom, this inquiry is guided by the primary question: how does a small sample of Canadian elementary school teachers (Non-ESL) prepare to teach English language learners in the classroom? To further guide this study, the subsidiary questions include:

- What ways do teachers use inclusive strategies to integrate the English language learners to the classroom? How much coordinating do classroom teachers do with ESL teachers to benefit the English language learner?
- What attitudes and beliefs do classroom teachers have toward teaching English language learners?
• What did these teachers do to increase their competency in teaching English language learners?

• What resources and support through professional development is there for teachers through the school or school board?

This study aims to not only investigate the ways in which a mandatory ELL course in teacher training programs would help prepare teachers, but also ways in which teachers can support ELLs, regardless of training. It inspires teachers to be mindful of their own beliefs and practices while teaching English language learners and integrating them into the classroom.

1.3 Background of the Researcher

The topic of teaching English language learners is particularly interesting to me as a graduate student from the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program that I completed alongside my Bachelor’s of Science in Mathematics for Education. During this time, I was made aware of three troubling realizations: 1) that many teachers mistook a lack in language proficiency to be a lack in academic knowledge, that 2) funding dedicated for supporting English language learners was, in most cases, used to meet other school-related purposes and that 3) teacher training programs did not even require teacher candidates to take courses related to teaching students that accounted for more half of the student population.

During my undergraduate degree, my program had me looking at mathematics through a different light. I began to see mathematics as being interdisciplinary with a huge emphasis in the arts. By third year, I began to question the methods being used to teach math to students in schools today and became intrigued in learning about the education system in Ontario. I went on to attending conferences and at the end of third year, I did presentations on how our education system continues to undermine the mathematical ability of our students, and also on the decline
of mathematics in the Ontario Curriculum. In fourth year, I was accepted into the TESOL program and the research I had done around the Ontario education system had me concerned about the teacher’s training program and how it prepares teachers to teach English language learners. This led me to question the education system overall: Why was our province still not doing anything about the cuts towards ESL programs? Why were teachers continuing to graduate with little experience in teaching English language learners? A few weeks into starting this project, I wondered why the introduction of the new two-year training program did very little to incorporate a stronger, mandatory emphasis on teaching English language learners through either the implementation of a required course or as a component within other core courses.

As an aspiring educator in the teacher education program, I am specifically interested in not only what teachers can turn to, in order to help them better support learners, but also in elucidating the strategies that allow English language learners to integrate better with the classroom. During TESOL training, when observing during placements, I noticed how teachers seemed at times to not know what to do with the English language learners when they were not with the ESL teacher. I feel that since I had the privilege of being born in Toronto, considering English to be my first language, I might, similar to the teacher I observed, fall back into assuming the ELL understands the way I normally teach. Although my TESOL courses have made me more confident towards teaching ELL students, I would like to learn, from teachers directly, how they integrate the students into their classroom and what attitudes and teaching styles to take on when teaching ELL students. The TESOL course inspired me to make the most out of my learners’ abilities. Hence, I would like to see strategies and resources made accessible to all. In addition, the resources available should be brought to teachers’ attention along with
training provided as necessary. Doing this will ensure that this province is able to provide an education that meets more of our learners needs.

1.4 Overview

To respond to the research questions, I conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview two teachers about their instructional strategies for meaningfully integrating ELL students in classroom learning and their attitudes towards teaching ELL students. In chapter 2, I review the literature in the areas of language learning and teacher attitudes, looking into to Ontario Ministry and policy documents and compare them alongside of what the scholars have to say around the topic of English Language Learners. Next, in chapter 3, I elaborate on the research design, describing the reasons behind my chosen interview style and the advantages and limitations they hold for my study. I also provide the criteria used for choosing participants for this research study and provide a brief introduction about them. In chapter 4, I report my research findings and discuss their significance in light of the existing research literature, and in chapter 5, I identify the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice, and for the educational research community more broadly. I also articulate a series of questions raised by the research findings, and point to areas for future research. References and a list of appendices are found at the end.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction to Chapter

In this chapter, I review the literature in the area of government documents, perceptions and attitudes towards English language learners (ELLs), teachers’ professional development, and teacher strategies towards English language learners. More specifically, I review government policies, curriculum and other ministry documents in Ontario to see what they have addressed in respect to English language learning/teaching and consider what aspects of those documents require changes or clear focuses in the development of English language programs. Next, I consider the beliefs and attitudes different groups of people have towards English language learners and inquire as to how that affects the progress of ELLs as well as what needs to be done to change certain perspectives. From there I examine training provided for teachers and teacher candidates to shed some light on the impact it has in classrooms. Finally, I outline some of the strategies that have been suggested and/or have already been implemented to develop the Ontario educational experience for ELLs and analyze its effectiveness.

2.1. ESL Education and the Government

Ontario, a province that receives many immigrants, has recognized the importance of English being essential for newcomer’s success and survival. Since the education in Canada is governed provincially, the policies and curricula are separately decided by each province and is standard to all the cities within that province. Similarly, the province of Ontario, through its Ministry of Education, has made available such documents to outline the expectations for teachers in the province. Ontario has released these documents in an effort to make its education suitable and inclusive to English language learners struggling in acquiring the language. This
study explores how effective the ESL program is today, and how we can help English language learners integrate into the classroom?

In many cases, the term ELL and ESL are used interchangeably. However, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007), in their policies and procedures document, define English language learners, similar to the definition provided in the previous chapter, as:

Students in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario’s schools, and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English. (p. 8)

Hence, as the policy notes, the ESL programs and identification as ELL is not restricted to children born outside the country. Canadian-born students can also be identified as ELL if they fit the definition. For example, Aboriginal students are some Canadian-born students that can be identified as ELL (Bullock, 2000).

2.1.1 ESL Policies and Curriculum Documents

The Ontario Ministry of Education has introduced policies and curriculum documents relevant to teaching ELLs and the ESL program. These documents which range from policies and procedures around ESL/ELD programs to a document for classroom teachers on supporting these students in the classroom are found on the Ontario Ministry of Education website.

While the policies and procedures document goes over the various expectations around teaching ELLs, the portions related to teacher’s qualification seem to be quite contradictory. Under policy 2.5.1, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) acknowledges that core subjects “be taught by teachers who also hold English as a Second Language Part 1 qualification” (p. 22), but then in section 2.12.1 of that policy it states that classroom teachers who have ELLs in their
classroom are not required to hold that qualification, and instead put the responsibility on the school board to ensure the teachers are all provided “with opportunities for professional development in meeting the needs of English Language Learners” (p. 31). If the Ministry acknowledges that teachers should be qualified to teach ELLs, why have they not made it a mandatory course in teacher training programs? Why is it, instead, placed on the school boards to take on that responsibility and how is the Ontario Ministry of Education ensuring school boards follow through?

In addition to the policy, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2001), has also released a resource guide that teachers can use in conjunction with the Ontario Curriculum for grades 1 to 8. This document includes sample modifications for curriculum areas corresponding to the stage of proficiency of the ELL. It goes further to state that the “responsibility for students’ language development is shared by the classroom teacher, school staff, and where available, the ESL/ELD teacher” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 12). Although the Ministry has put out thorough resources, the extent to which the teachers are trained on how to implement them is still unclear.

2.1.2 History of ESL Education

Regier et al. (2005) note that ESL programs, similar to the school curriculum at the time, were unstructured and varied across school boards. They state that teachers were faced by challenges of educating ELLs as early as 1965 and that over the years, through an individualized process, school boards, schools and teachers began creating their own versions of ESL-like support programs to assist immigrant students (Regier et al., 2005). It turns out that the former boards that now make up the TDSB were actually responsible for coming up with and implementing ways to support these learners (Regier et al., 2005). However, once the boards
amalgamated and became dependent on the provincial government for funding, the ESL programming experienced change once again (Regier et al., 2005). One would think that similar to way technology advances, programming, over time, with the use of trial and error system, should be able to constantly improve and be more effective. However, it seems that the boards were headed on the right track before being hit with the problem of funding. Furthermore, it seems as if they constantly continue to hit the same wall instead of rerouting and trying new ways of improving the education system for the many ELLs within it.

2.1.3 Funding

What seemed to be possible before the amalgamation of the seven greater Toronto school boards, and before the reigns controlling the tax base of education were in the hands of the provincial government, is now seeming to be a short-sighted goal in education as these events have made the effectiveness of ESL programming a lot more difficult (Regier et al., 2005). Although not the primary focus of this study, it is important to note the impact funding has had on our ESL curriculum and what changed about it over the course of many years.

It would be incorrect to say no funding was allocated to ELLs, because the government has promised and made its contributions. The problem came, instead, when realizing how these funds were being used. As per the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2007) policies and procedures, section 2.11.1 states that “funding provided under the ESL/ESD component of the Language Grant is expected to be used for programs and services that are designed to benefit English language learners” (p. 29). However, People for Education (2013) argue:

There is a disconnect between Ontario’s ELL policy and how ELL is funded. The policy says that students should receive support until they have acquired the English or French skills needed to succeed academically. Yet the funding is based solely on students’ years
in Canada and Census data on recent immigration. Funding is not based on students’ language proficiency. (p. 2)

Hence, many ELLs who are Canadian-born do not receive this funding and are in turn not able to receive proper support. Unfortunately, English language learners that have been in the country for more than three years also fall into this category.

Moreover, in many cases the funding amount granted to those lucky few are not even used to benefit them. Dusty Papke, President of Council of Ontario Directors of Education, says that much of the grant is actually “used to pay for general salary cost” (as cited in People for Education, 2005, p. 1). Hence, much of the funding allocated to support ELLs’ learning is not being used towards its designated purpose.

Aside from the Learning Opportunity Grant, Regier et al. (2005) reveal that the Ontario Ministry of Education, in 2003, provided Ontario schools with yet another opportunity to support ELL learners by granting them with $112 million specifically for the purposes of students in poverty or in ESL. The TDSB, although having received $46 million of this allocated amount, used this money, without any collaborated discussions, to reduce its deficit (Regier et al., 2005). The issue here now seems to be one of accountability on the Board’s part (Regier et al., 2005).

However, while the funding the province is providing seems to be generous, the province itself has made and is continuing to make serval cuts, not only to funding, but also to ESL programs, through decreasing the number of ESL teacher positions, number of ESL classes, and narrowing what students they consider to be privileged enough to fall under the category of those eligible for ESL support. As Bullock (2000) mentions, “the provincial government’s funding formula has failed to identify properly all the children who need ESL support” (p. 2). She notes that First Nation children are among the many ignored. Bullock (2000) sums up her thoughts by asking:
Why does the Ontario Ministry of Education put in place with one hand a demanding curriculum which requires every student to meet designated high standards and then, with the other hand, limit the very programs that will enable ESL learners to acquire the language skills they need to achieve these expectations? (p. 3)

2.2. Perceptions and Attitudes towards English Language Learners

In the classroom, the teachers and students play a significant role in each other’s learning. The attitudes and beliefs each of these players hold, toward English language learners, are expected to have an impact on the learner and the classroom environment. However, literature relating to the attitudes and beliefs various players in the school community have with relation to this area of focus was limited. Teacher and student’s self-belief seemed to be the most prevalent in this topic area.

2.2.1 Teacher Attitudes

Teachers play a major role in the education of children. Although teachers are told to always make objective observations and not to judge, they often bring a lot of experience and previous knowledge into the classroom with them. When it comes to the perceptions teachers have about English language learners they either tend to overestimate or underestimate the ability of these students. Nevertheless, is there any relationship between the teacher’s attitude and their preparedness to teach English language learners?

It is important to note that in Swann’s (2014) study they found that many of the teachers actually enjoyed teaching a “diverse group of students” (p. 101). However, in many cases, teachers believe that understanding diversity is only to the extent of celebrating and appreciating their students’ differences (Webster & Valeo, 2011). Meskill argues that “many teachers are unaware of their roles and responsibilities towards ELLs in mainstream classrooms” (as cited in
Faez, 2012, p. 69). This leads them to usually hold similar expectations for both the ELL and the English speaking students. However, Meyer argues against this saying that this approach in assessing them the same “sets the ESL students up for failure” (as cited in Duffy, 2004, p. 3) and in turn leads many of them to be put into applied and special education programs because the labels are performance-based. Buck et al. and McLaughlin state that this misinterpretation of capabilities can somewhat be explained by our limited knowledge to supporting ELLs (as cited in Webster & Valeo, 2011, p. 106). Knoblauch & Hoy argue that beliefs held by the teacher about their ability to effectively teach English language learners had an impact on the way they taught (as cited in Faez, 2012, p. 69).

2.2.2 Student Attitudes

English language learners are impacted by the schooling process due to the effect that the language barrier has towards their learning. LeClair, Doll, Osborn, and Jones (2009) mention that strong relationships with classmates and teacher’s report of success, academically, influenced their ability to feel a sense of belonging at the school they were at. However, they were still inclined to feel frustrated with their incompetence and poor academic achievement. Furthermore, as Regier et al. (2005) remark, it often takes more than five years for ELLs to catch up academically with their classmates. This in turn affects their sense of belonging because of the social barriers that are created. So, is it not important, then, for teachers to be able to implement inclusive strategies to get the ELLs more acquainted with their peers in order to form a sense of belonging?

2.3 Teacher’s Professional Development

In many cases, the perceptions that teachers hold are brought in part by their preparedness to teach ELLs. Teachers in Ontario are required to have their certification through
the Ontario College of Teachers in order to be eligible to work at schools within the province. The teacher training program offers various courses, some mandatory while others not.

2.3.1 Teacher Training

Faez (2012) attests to the fact that the Ontario College of Teachers has not made the training to teach ELLs a mandatory component of the teacher education program. Faez (2012) points out that although we have many ELLs entering the classroom, “preparing teachers to teach in multilingual and multicultural classrooms does not receive sufficient attention in initial teacher education programs” (p. 66). Webster and Valeo (2011), on the other hand, give credit to Ontario teacher education programs mentioning that they have been “responding to the need of preparing future teachers for a rapidly growing population of ELLs in the regular classroom, but the effectiveness of these programs is unclear” (p. 106). It seems that this credit is given to the universities because they have indeed included ESL teaching courses, but these courses as Faez (2012) mentions are offered as electives, or as additional qualification courses for graduates of the program. Even though, they have made the initiative to include courses to address the needs of the learners, by not making the courses mandatory, how many teacher candidates will actually choose to take them over other electives offered? What seems to be more unpleasant and yet also contradictory is that additional qualifications are offered to graduated teachers, and these qualifications are made mandatory for ESL teachers; but not all teachers who teach ESL have qualifications such as those teachers who teach part-time (Regier et al., 2005). This seems to suggest that either ESL teacher could also be unprepared to teach ELLs, or that any teacher can teach ELLs despite not having training in the area.

2.3.2 ESL Infusion
Instead of requiring teacher candidates to take an ESL course, many faculties of education moved towards the initiative of what is called ESL infusion, which incorporates ESL teaching methods into all core courses (Schmidt, 2004). Terrill & Mark believe the ESL infusion programs prepare teachers better in closing that gap they notice when entering the school for the first time (as cited in Schmidt, 2004, p. 2). However, not everyone seems to be in agreement with it. Webster and Valeo (2011) consider the options of having either stand-alone mandatory courses implemented into the teacher’s education program or using the infusion approach. They argue that, based on those they surveyed, the people that were in courses using the infusion approach say that the content, on how to support ELLs within the topic they were studying, was done irregularly, around once or twice during the course duration. Webster and Valeo (2011) saw that participants preferred an in-depth mandatory course, as they felt it would have been more beneficial. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education which launched this initiative as well, has, since becoming solely a graduate school, made supporting English language learners a mandatory course towards their Master of Teaching degree.

2.4. Teacher Strategies towards English Language Learners

Many scholars have developed ideas about how to integrate English language learning students into the classroom. Some of these have been implemented and tested in classrooms while others have not. But how effective are these suggestions and what resources are available for teachers feeling overwhelmed in teaching ELLs?

2.4.1 Suggestions to use in Classroom

Many suggestions in the literature involve thoughts towards including a mandatory course in Ontario’s teacher’s education program. In addition to pointing out many of the problems in Toronto’s ESL program, Regier et al. (2005) have also taken everything one step
further by providing what they believe will resolve those issues. Some of these recommendations include increasing funding, hiring more support, and maintaining support for ESL classes. Although none of these are specific suggestions for use in the classroom, teachers can also learn to support ELLs regardless of their qualification. They should, as Swann (2014) mentions, modify their lessons to meet ELLs. Remembering that the learner’s lack of proficiency in the language does not correspond to a lack in academic knowledge, teachers can assess the ELL by altering assignments to make them shorter and changing test questions to multiple choice and true/false ones that would be easier to complete (Swann, 2014). However, is the use and availability of these resources standardized across all boards in the province? Would it not be ideal for all English language learners to have access to all these resources?

2.4.2 Implementations already in Place

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2001) does shift the responsibility of educating teachers around supporting ELLs onto the school boards; but in addition, it also makes available many resources on its website. They advise teachers to design lessons and use resources that match the students in their class by taking into account the experiences these students bring into the classroom. Although the Ministry has made attempts to make these resources publically available, training should be provided to complement what is available. As with any resource, training is crucial in ensuring teachers understand how to use it so that they are able to remember the resource and refer to it as necessary. Currently, the way in which this training is authenticated remains questionable.

Another implementation in some schools in Ontario and the United States is the collaboration, or in other cases co-teaching, between the classroom teacher and the ESL teacher (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010). While this implementation seems to be a great idea that should
implemented in all schools, People for Education (2013) mention that the cuts to education in Ontario resulted in additional cuts to the ESL teacher position. Hence, the lack of ESL teachers in many Ontario elementary schools would hinder the ability to implement such an idea.

2.5 Conclusion

In this literature review I looked at research on the context of teaching English language learners, the perceptions and attitudes towards English language learners (ELLs), teachers’ professional development, and teacher strategies towards English language learners. This review elucidates the extent that attention has been paid to the classroom teacher’s preparedness to teach English language learners in the classroom. It also raises questions about the current teacher training program and points to the need for further research in the areas of workshops to aid teachers feeling unprepared as well as the availability of resources to guide teachers on the right path. In light of this, the purpose of my research is to learn how teacher attitudes towards teaching English language learners have changed thus far, so that we can implement new changes and suggestions that will better equip our teachers to plan lesson that will benefit the learning of all our students, including the English language learners.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide details about the research methodology by recognizing the various methodological decisions that I have made, and my rationale for these choices given the research purpose of exploring how teachers are adapting their pedagogy to meet the needs of English Language Learners in order to address and compensate for the decline in ESL programs. My research explores the inclusive strategies used by classroom teachers in providing a welcoming environment and an effective learning experience for English Language Learners (ELLs). Furthermore, it seeks to find out how a small sample of Toronto elementary school teachers prepare to teach ELLs within the classroom. I begin with a discussion and justification of the research approach and procedure, before describing the main instrument of data collection. I, then, identify the participants of this research study, list out the sampling criteria, describe the sampling procedures, and provide some background information on the participants I have interviewed. After which, I proceed to explain how I have analyzed the data, before recognizing relevant ethical procedures and issues that have been considered and addressed. Lastly, I speak to some of the methodological limitations of this study, while also highlighting and acknowledging the strengths.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedure

This research is qualitative in nature and includes a literature review that analyzes teacher perspectives and pedagogies in teaching English language learners. Furthermore, it focuses on Ontario Ministry of Education documents and training opportunities for teachers around this topic. Holloway, as cited in Thorne (2000), distinguishes inductive from deductive reasoning by stating:
Generally, inductive reasoning uses the data to generate ideas (hypothesis generating), whereas deductive reasoning begins with the idea and uses the data to confirm or negate the idea (hypothesis testing). (p. 68)

Here, she connects deductive reasoning as being used in many quantitative research and inductive reasoning as being seen in qualitative research. Similarly, the purpose behind my research is to understand the effectiveness of the implementation of inclusive strategies in teaching ELLs. I strive to learn the many resources teachers can use to reach out to these groups of students. Hence, the data I collected allow me to generate ideas that I discuss in the final section of my paper. Heigham and Croker’s research further supports my reasoning as it mentions that the qualitative approach to research is used to focus on both the participants, and their personal experience around the topic the researcher is intrigued about learning (as cited in Levy, 2015, p. 555). Hence, my research also benefits from this approach as my interest is to learn more about my participants’ experience towards teaching English language learners. As a researcher and an aspiring teacher, who would be better in informing and shaping my understanding towards effectively teaching English language learners than the people who have experienced it first-hand? I hoped that the information I gathered from these teachers made this research current, relatable, and relevant to others in the profession.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The previous chapter focused on the review of existing literature in the areas related to the teaching of ELLs. These areas include: curriculum documents, history of ESL education, funding for ELLs, teacher and student attitudes towards this group of students, teacher training, ESL infusion and suggestions for the classroom. However, in the process of looking into various literature published on the topic, it became noticeable that it was rather difficult to find recent
Canadian literature around this matter published by scholars in the field. In addition, through the literature review process many questions were raised around the availability of workshops to aid teachers in teaching ELLs as well as the availability of resources to guide teachers towards effectively reaching out to these learners. Thus the interview portion of this study allowed me to get answers to the sections the literature failed to address.

This research study has been conducted on a small scale and as such Pathak and Intratat (2012) suggest semi-structured interviews to be the most beneficial as it is not only flexible, but also allows the researcher to gather useful information through interviews that continue to be focused while promoting conversational communication between participants. As qualitative research looks into understanding human experiences, semi-structured interviews provide the interviewer with a structured platform that facilitates an in-depth conversation around this specific topic (Adams, 2010). During the interview process, I ensured that the interviews incorporated rapport-building, thought-provoking interjections and critical event analysis to make the semi-structured interview effective (Pathak & Intratat, 2012). Hence, by doing qualitative research and conducting semi-structured interviews, I was able to produce recent, and relevant information from primary sources, teachers in the classroom who interact with ELLs on a daily basis.

All the interviews were conducted, face to face and were digitally recorded for accuracy. Each interviewee participated in a 45-60-minute interview session arranged to meet their schedule. The questions asked were organized such that it started with questions about (1) the participants’ professional background, gradually moving towards gathering information on: (2) their beliefs and perspectives around teaching English Language Learners, (3) their practices of teaching ELLs in a classroom setting, (4) the challenges and support they had in teaching this
group of students, and finally ended with the (5) next steps and tips they had for both themselves and aspiring teachers in the profession. The interview questions can be reviewed in Appendix B.

Throughout the course of the interview process, I also kept a log of my own notes. These notes were made to record observations of how the participants answered questions. This allowed me to make observations of the body language and reactions I observed during the interview that I felt might help me, after the interview, in analyzing the answers.

3.3 Participants

Participants play a significant role in any type of study. Additionally, their contribution to a qualitative study shape it and create different interpretations within it. Robinson (2014) deems there is a “four-point approach to qualitative sampling: (1) defining a sample universe, (2) deciding on a sample size, (3) devising a sample strategy, (4) sourcing the sample” (p. 26). Accordingly, this section, gives details in correspondence to this approach, and I review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment. I also review a range of possible avenues for teacher recruitment. In addition, I have included a section wherein I have introduced each of the participants I have interviewed.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

My research study relates on a provincial level as it looks at the Ontario education system with respect to how it is able to meet the needs of the English language learner through the teachers that carry out the teaching of its curriculum. Hence, I interviewed two elementary school teachers, from the Toronto District School Board, who had experience teaching within the grade range of 4-6. The following criteria were used in selecting the teachers for the interview. They should:

1. Be currently teaching in a school within Ontario for at least four years;
2. Have attended a teacher training program (BEd, MT program, etc.) at a university in Canada, and preferably in Ontario;

3. Have experience teaching English language learners and preferably teaching ELLs currently;

4. Incorporate differentiated learning techniques within their classroom;

The reason I wanted the participants to be practicing in Ontario is so that they would be familiar with the Ontario education system and the teacher education program. This will provide current, and relevant information to the research. Although, I was made aware of fewer schools having ESL programs, there was rarely any literature showing this. Many of the current literature around this topic was American-based and it was important to me to ensure my research highlighted teaching practices within Ontario, in order to share ideas within a relevant context. By incorporating the interviews into my research, I hope that the results from this study will be valuable to current and future teachers in this province. In addition, I also wanted to focus on both, teachers that did not have training on teaching English language learners as well as those that did, as I wanted to compare and contrast pedagogies, attitudes, and experiences. Since this research project is to highlight the best practices of teaching English language learners, I wanted each participant to have had the opportunity of working with English language learners in their classroom in order to hear their experiences around it. Therefore, my only requirement in the area of English Language Learners related to their experience with this group of learners rather than the training they have received directed towards teaching them.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedure

Many qualitative research studies that involve semi-structured interviews, similar to the one I conducted, benefit from a purposeful sampling technique as it involves being selective about the participants I include in the study while continuing to collect data that is both rich and
depth in its insight around the topic of supporting ELLs (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). As my study is required to meet the parameters outlined by the Master of Teaching program at the University of Toronto, they have only permitted the interviews of two to three teachers. Hence, with such a small sample size, I cannot conduct a random sample as the participants I pick needed to represent my research topic and be able to share their experiences with me. Therefore, a purposeful sampling ensures that the two participants were useful to my research topic.

In addition, being in a program with other fellow aspiring teachers who have also had practical experiences with students and teachers in schools. I reached out to my fellow colleagues in the Master of Teaching program to share and get in contact with the participants in their network that would fit my sampling criteria. I, then, asked teachers if they knew anybody else, within their circle, who would help my study. This snowball sampling is usually seen in purposeful sampling as it also continues to suggest participants who share the experience of teaching ELLs (Marshall, 1996). Although I would have had the opportunity to interview three participants with the help of this snowball sampling, the third participant was unable to reply back within the time frame provided by the program.

Since I relied on my existing contacts and networks to recruit participants, it is important to state that I already knew the participants, but that this was the only way to conduct a purposeful study that still fell within the parameters of interviewing two to three participants.

3.3.3 Participant Bios

Alex is an elementary school teacher, in Toronto, Ontario, who, at the time of the interview was teaching the grade five and six split class. He teaches all the subjects except French. Alex did his teacher training in Canada, but outside Ontario. He has been a teacher for about fifteen years. The school he teaches at has a high number of English language learners
with much of the student population consisting of South-Asian students. During the school year that related to the time of the interview, the majority of the students in Alex’s class were English Language Learners. Alex is Canadian-born and does not have formal ESL training but has had many years of experience teaching English language learners in the classroom.

Derek is also an elementary school teacher, in Toronto, Ontario, who was also teaching the grade five and six split class. He teaches all the subjects except Drama and Dance for his students. Derek also did his teacher training in Canada, but outside Ontario, and has been teaching for about twenty years. Although he has not had formal ESL training, he feels lucky to have had experience teaching English Language learners during an LTO position where he filled in for an ESL teacher. The school he teaches at has a diverse student population and Derek has taught English language learners over the years. During the school year that related to the time of the interview, there were a few English language learners in Derek’s class.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The two interviews were recorded with consent from the participants. These recordings were then transcribed and I began the analysis by reading and re-reading the transcribed interview data. Key phrases and words were highlighted and noted along the margins. I then dove deeper into identifying the meaning of the data, as well as some of the implications hidden in it (Thorne, 2000). After this stage, I compared and contrasted data around similar themes amongst participants and recorded them using a t-chart. By using this method, I was able to easily distinguish intricacies of ideas that shared similar themes as they emerged. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) believe the method I have used in analyzing the data is more effective as the collection of data and its analysis was undertaken simultaneously and allowed me to constantly refer back to my research questions to conceptualize the data more effectively.
The next step of the analysis was to use and review the t-chart used to compare and contrast the ideas present in the interviews, to pinpoint the most prevalent and relevant themes that were common among participants. These themes were included in the final discussion of my results.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

As Damianakis and Woodford (2012) mention, in semi-structured interviews, like the one I conducted, “the researcher temporarily enters the participant’s world and accesses experiences and reflections, which might be highly sensitive and involve future or unforeseen risk for the participant and possibly others” (p. 709). Hence, this research study followed the ethical review procedures of the Master of Teaching program. The participants of this study were given and asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix A), which outlines: the exact purpose of the study, the commitment they will need to make, exactly how their identity will be protected, and their rights as a participant to stop the interview at any time. The form also informed the participants that their interviews would be recorded for accuracy purposes and that the information they provided would be used strictly for the purpose of this study. Furthermore, it gave the participants the right to receive a copy of the full written report of the study upon its conclusion, if they chose. I also made myself available by email to answer any questions and concerns the participants had regarding the study and interview process.

My participants’ time and information were greatly and appreciated and therefore, all interviews were arranged, in-person, at a time that worked around their schedules and best suited them.

I do not anticipate any ethical issues to arise as the information being asked of from the participants were not overly controversial, sensitive or intrusive. Hence, I do not believe it will negatively impact the lives of the participants. To ensure that my participants were comfortable
answering the questions asked, I allowed the participants to view the interview questions ahead of time. In addition, I still mentioned that they did have the right to refrain from answering any questions that they do not feel comfortable answering and re-stated their right to withdraw from participating in the study at any time. The names of the participants and their schools remain confidential as pseudonyms were used when writing this paper. In addition, all recordings were deleted once transcribed with transcriptions safely stored on my personal computer. They were given the opportunity to review the transcripts, to clarify or retract any statements before I conducted the data analysis. By demonstrating my commitment to keeping them informed, my participants were more willing to open up and be honest in answering the questions I ask (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). I had already ensured that I avoided questions that were leading or loaded but one point I was aware of during the interview, as mentioned by Gill et al. (2008), was to remain neutral emotionally and make sure I did not interject signs of agreement or surprise to what the participants shared “The strategic use of silence, if used appropriately, can also be highly effective at getting respondents to contemplate their responses, talk more, elaborate or clarify particular issues” (p. 292). Therefore, the steps taken throughout the interview process meet the guidelines of the ethical review committee and should prevent any issues from arising.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

This study had three main limiting factors which were the small sample size, lack of varying group perspectives and the recent changes to the teacher education programs. While this research study aims to share the ELL inclusive strategies that different Ontario certified teachers implement in their classroom – only three Ontario teachers participated in this study as per the Master of Teaching Research Project guidelines. This sample size limited my ability to seek out
patterns I saw in answers. I could not really generalize my findings as it is only based on the information three participants provided. Having said this, a small sample size can still provide interesting and important information about teaching English Language learners in the classroom, or about the TDSB schools themselves (Gibbs et al., 2007).

Another limitation is the lack of perspectives from various groups. One such group perspective not really represented in this research is the students. The guidelines set by the Master of Teaching program at the University of Toronto requires that all students complete their research study by conducting interviews with teachers and other educators but does not permit them to observe or interact with students due to ethical issues. Hence, this study does not include the voices of the students. In addition to the lack of student perspective, the study also lacks direct perspectives of Ontario Ministry of Education and OCT authorities, outside of the policy documents and records they have produced. These groups’ thoughts on the teacher education program’s attention towards English language learners would enhance the research and provide differing views with a well-rounded focus. However, further research in this topic could and should include not only an ELL student’s perspective and experience but also non-ELL student’s perspective in addition to the other group perspectives.

Lastly, this research study has been conducted within two years. The start of this program coincides with the start of the new changes within the Ontario teacher training program. Since the program is still fairly new, there is still time before current and relevant articles are found around this topic. My research has incorporated some of the details of how the new education program is shaped with respect to English language learners. However, further research in this topic might explore perspectives of teachers who are graduates of future OISE classes to note changes to the program.
Despite this, however, my research does analyze the responses from experienced classroom teachers. In addition, as my study is done shortly after two recent events, the recent arrival of Syrian refugees and the change to the length of the teacher education program, both of which are sure to have great impact and change to our education system in the near future, this study and research findings are unique and very much relevant. The time period, in which this research is being done, is another strength to this study.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I clearly articulated the research methodology and how my research was done through a qualitative research lens and the effectiveness of using this to gather information regarding how ELLs are integrated into the classroom. I, then, highlighted the main instrument being carried out in this qualitative research as being a semi-structure interview and discussed how this type of interview is most suitable to this study. Next, I articulated the participants of this study and outlined the criteria used in finding my participants. Also, I explained the recruitment procedures and explained how it was based on selective and convenience purposes to ensure that participants had experience around the topic of teaching ELLs. I, then, proceeded to explain how I would be examining the data I collected and acknowledged that I would be looking for common themes among participants’ responses. Lastly, I consider ethical issues within my research study and also listed the limitations and strengths of carrying out such a study within the parameter provided by the Master of Teaching program. In the following chapter, I elucidate the research findings and results from my interview with these participants and begin to share some of the ways the interviews have shaped my understanding of supporting ELLs in the classroom.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.0. Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter, I will be reporting and discussing my primary findings to address the research question “How does a small sample of Canadian elementary school teachers (Non-ESL) prepare to teach English language learners in the classroom?” The data for this study was collected from two semi-structured interviews with experienced teachers who have had insight into teaching English language learners (ELLs) in their own classroom. The two participants, Derek and Alex, were both teachers, in the junior division, currently teaching a grade 5/6 class. A more detailed description of them can be found in the Participant Bios section of Chapter Three: Research Methodology. My findings from these interviews are organized into five themes: Time and Experience, Factors related to English language learning, Inclusive learning environment, Communication and Collaboration, and Strategies to Teaching ELLs. I will be discussing my findings, in relation to the each of the themes, around what the educators’ perspectives were on the topic of supporting ELLs and how these perspectives and experiences link to the scholarship in the field. I will conclude with a brief discussion that summarizes and connects the themes before considering how these finding inform us on our teaching practices in Chapter Five: Discussion.

4.1 Time and Experience

Both participants expressed time as being relevant in their experience teaching English language learners. In addition to the context of time and experience being used to describe growth in the teacher’s competency, it was also interchangeably used to mention the change in support offered to English language learners. These are the two subthemes discussed below. This
concept of time in relation to experience was significant in providing insight into the educator’s teaching practices in meeting the needs of English language learners in their classroom.

4.1.1 Teacher Preparedness/Competency

The two participants interviewed were both teachers who had done their teacher training outside of Ontario. They shared the fact that teaching English language learners was not really part of their province’s teacher training program. Therefore, their first experience teaching ELLs was something, they both agreed, they were not exactly prepared for. Although both participants mentioned having experience teaching up North, and expressed this experience as being a learning moment that informed their teaching of ELLs in the classroom, Derek also mentioned that his Long-Term Occasional position teaching in an ESL classroom was another learning moment that informed his teaching in this area. Both participants mentioned adaptability as a key skill they developed during the first few years of being a teacher and that it has allowed them to be able to alter their lessons and activities to meet the various abilities in their classroom.

During the interview, Alex shared that earlier in his career, when he got a new student, he would check the card he got to see how many years the student had been in Canada. However, he says that over the years, the anxiety he experienced when learning the student was new to Canada had decreased and was instead replaced with calmness and wonderings about how he as a teacher could meet the learner’s needs. Knoblauch & Hoy argue that beliefs held by the mainstream teacher regarding their ability to effectively teach English language learners had an impact on the way they taught (as cited in Faez, 2012, p. 69). Both Alex and Derek expressed importance that teacher training programs in Ontario should, if they do not already, have a full course on supporting these learners. Alex mentioned that it made sense to him that his teacher
education program did not focus on it, but that a city as diverse as Toronto should be preparing their teachers to meet the needs of their students.

4.1.2 Changes to Support

During the interview, the two participants mentioned that they had not had a specific course related to teaching and supporting English Language Learners in their teaching education program. Although their teacher training program was completed outside the province, Lucas, Villegas and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008) mention that most classroom teachers in schools lack training in teaching English Language learners in the classroom. Hence, for a number of years, schools have been fortunate to have ESL teachers who worked with English language learners on a more individual or small group basis to best meet their learning abilities.

During the interview it was noticeable that the schools these participants were teaching at had somewhat varying support for their English language learners. Although, both participants were teaching in areas that were welcoming the new influx of Syrian students and were schools in which most of their students came from homes where English was not the primarily spoken language, they did not seem to share a similar support system. Alex described that although their ESL program had faced cuts over the year, they were grateful that they still had two ESL teachers that worked with most of their ELLs until they were ready to fully assimilate into the classroom. On the contrary, Derek notes that the ESL classrooms they once had, has been replaced with itinerants who come into the classroom, to support the students, once a week. He mentions, “[because] they’re only here like one period a week, there’s only so much they can do.”

The changes these participants have observed with regards to the ESL program coincides with the research done in the field. Over the year, People for Education (2013) state that there
have been numerous cuts made to different sectors within the education system, with significant cuts affecting ESL programs. As the support system for English language learners is not one that is consistent, due to these cuts, these teachers have had to find ways to support ELLs, despite their lack of teacher training in relation to this group of learners.

4.2 Factors Related to English Language Learning

English language learners’ competency in the language varies as they come into this country with different backgrounds and experiences. As the English language itself is complex, it would be understandable that learning the language would be impacted by various factors. This theme is subdivided into two areas: importance of the language being relevant to learners, and why we as teachers need to ensure students have a conceptual understanding of the language. Although this study looks specifically into supporting English language learners, the ideas discussed in this section would be easily relatable to any other student in the classroom.

4.2.1 Context/ Relevance

During the first year of my Master of Teaching program at OISE, we were taught that our teaching should incorporate culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. To many teachers being culturally relevant and responsive is just another one of those “routine teaching strategies that are part of good teaching” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 159), but the question of how many teachers continue to apply that in their teaching still remains doubtful. The participants during the interview both stressed that teaching should be relevant when teaching English language learners just as it should when teaching any other student in the classroom. However, they provide more depth, through the use of examples as to why the context and relevance of the language is important to the learner’s development of English.
Although the two participants focused on the importance of context and relevance for English language learning, Alex spoke on the matter with relation to evaluating work students produce. He mentions that when marking ELLs work in other “language heavy” subject areas, it was important to mark the knowledge demonstrated in that subject rather than let the student’s lack of proficiency in English get in the way. Students often get frustrated when they cannot communicate fluently or understand what the question is asking of them; hence, teachers should ensure the students receive accommodation and/or modifications so that they do not feel discouraged. On the contrary, Derek used the example of his teaching up North to illustrate how context and relevance is important in the learner’s development of the language. Derek states that although the kids there spoke English, they lacked some of the basic vocabulary as it did not apply to their surroundings. He goes on further to share:

Like, you’re reading a book to them and they’ll stop you for things – what’s a curb?
Because … they have dirt roads, they don’t have curbs. Yeah and so you get southern books versus northern culture and you’d be explaining things like what’s the bark of a tree to someone who’s never seen a tree.

The teachers mention relevancy and context of teaching to introduce the importance of conceptualization of the language, which is discussed as the next subtheme.

4.2.2 Importance of Conceptualization

The two participants felt it was important for teachers to teach a conceptual understanding of not only English but also other subjects in general. This idea was not only an understanding pertaining to just English language learners, but also the type of understanding they stretched beyond that and wanted all their students to hold. Alex reasons out why allowing children to speak their home language is important by saying:
If I just keep saying apple, apple, apple, apple, and I don’t show you what an apple is, then you don’t know what the word is, you’re just hearing me say the sound. But if I can show you an apple, and then have the word for it in your home language, like you can share that with me then you have a conceptual understanding of what I’m saying even when I no longer have the apple in my hand.

Derek follows a similar practice as he describes going around and associating words to objects to new students who came in with very little English background. He finds that students are able to retain vocabulary when they are able to form meaning visually. Hence, in their teaching Derek and Alex focus on ensuring their students form a conceptual understanding of words.

For this reason, Alex describes that he has stopped using class novels and spelling workbooks for this reason. He explains that giving kids a list of words to memorize does not show “a conceptual understanding of what the word is” because it shows evidence of the student’s ability to memorize rather than an overall ability of learning and understanding the word. In a way, it relates back to the relevancy piece from the discussion before; what benefits does memorizing hold for the English language learner.

The fact that both these teachers hold a similar view on the importance of conceptualizing language supports research in the field. Prince’s (1996) and Liao’s (2006) research shows that people often translate foreign words into their native language and are able to learn words more effectively when being able to connect it to previous knowledge, in this case it would the ability to associate the English word to the learned word in the first language. If this is a strategy that works best for learners, maybe more teachers should be embracing and incorporating it.

4.3 Inclusive Learning Environment
Creating an inclusive environment is important to the learning of all students in the classroom. Alex and Derek stress this point as being an important determinant in the ELLs’ learning as well. As the Syrian refugees were very much recent and relevant to the topic of ELLs when the interviews were conducted, the examples teachers provided showed that they had these students in mind while discussing the topic of inclusivity in relation to ELLs. Based on the participants’ focus in this area, this discussion has been divided into the following three subthemes: student belonging, setting classroom expectations, and importance given to preserving language. The learning environment stretched beyond the four walls of the classroom and looked at the school learning environment as a whole.

4.3.1 Student Belonging

Both Alex and Derek expressed taking into consideration student’s sense of belonging when ensuring their classroom environment was inclusive to all its learners. Derek looks at belonging in the terms of his attitudes towards English language learners being in the classroom. He says that the removal of the ESL classroom at the school has allowed English language learners to be fully integrated in the classroom. He says that it is “normal to have kids that are behind in your classroom.” On the other hand, Alex talks about ensuring that the student feels a sense of belonging from the moment they walk into the classroom. He makes it a priority to ensure the new student has someone from a similar background that will take them around the school. An advantage around student’s belonging in Alex’s school is the fact that the majority of the school had started out as English language learners themselves at some point during their school life.

The importance and focus these teachers gave to ELL students’ sense of belonging is not surprising as LeClair et al. (2009) have researched that strong relationships with classmates and
teacher attitudes influenced ELLs’ ability to feel a sense of belonging at the school they were at. So as classroom teacher we should continue to think of ways to create an inclusive classroom in which all the students feel they belong.

4.3.2 Setting Classroom Expectations

When students like English Language learners are in classrooms where their learning is modified or they need to be withdrawn for extra support, one would wonder if this withdrawal and modified instruction would be picked up by the other students in the class and if it would impact their relationships with them. When asked about the extent to which students were aware of the support the ELLs were receiving both teachers said the students in the class probably all knew. However, both participants stated that the students, although aware, did not treat the ELL any differently. This is quite different from what Regier et al. (2005) found as they remark that social barriers, due to the fact that ELLs are still academically behind, affect their sense of belonging in the classroom. A reason behind this difference could be traced back to the fact that both teachers laid out expectations for the class and explained to the students that behaviour such as that would not be tolerated. In addition to the fact that many students in Alex’s class are able to relate to the ELL as they have gone through the same process before, Alex also ensures that he does not single ELL students out when it is time for them to go to the ESL classroom. He also stresses to his students, “it’s all about improvement and it’s not about just being the best in the class, it’s about improving your best, kind of thing” and ensures he addresses any rude behaviour that arises. Similarly, it is evident that Derek also sets the tone for his class because he says:

[The other students] are aware that it’s going on because I have to take up the homework for both groups. So they know it but they also know there’s no tolerances for bugging
people about this. It’s -this is what they do, this is what you do and you need to be respectful of others.

Hence, creating an inclusive classroom environment really relies on the tone and expectations you set out for your students at the very beginning. It also involves making sure you follow through with those expectations for the rest of the year.

4.3.3 Preservation of Language

English language learners are working on overcoming a language barrier while simultaneously striving to learn material taught in class, be accepted by their peers and get used to the rules and routines of the classroom. Hence, allowing them to fall back on their first language as a safety net will make the learning process easier. Both teacher participants remark that they allow students to speak their home language in order to conceptualize learning in English. They both pair ELLs up with students that speak the same language for this reason. Alex went further to stating that during parent-teacher interviews, he encourages parents to speak the home language with their children and have the child answer back in English. He explains that “they’re not only understanding what you’re saying in the home language, […] but they’re also having to translate in their head and answer you in English.”

Early (2005) argues that students should be encouraged to speak their home language if needed at school and states some possible benefits of ELLs using their first language. The importance both teachers gave to ensuring that the student maintains knowledge of their first language suggests that there seems to be a larger initiative around embracing this at the school board level. This, in some ways, complements the points raised by Cummins et al. (2005) that educators should teach students ways in which to “transfer […] concepts and skills from L1 to English” (p. 5) as a way of tapping into the ELLs’ pre-existing knowledge. Fostering the
students’ home language will surely help them feel that their first language, which constitutes a portion of their identity, is recognized and not simply being seen as being unimportant.

4.4 Communication and Collaboration

There are many stakeholders in a child’s education. However, there are certain barriers that are involved when communicating and collaborating with the stakeholders involved in the English language learner’s education. The two participants mention the importance of communicating and collaborating to the ELLs’ success. They break down the ways in which communication and collaboration take place with ELLs’ parents/guardians, other students, and staff as it applies and the struggles that might be associated with each group. These three groups of people are the focus in the subthemes discussed below.

4.4.1 Parent – Teacher Communication

Parents and/or guardians are a major component in student’s learning. Ensuring that teachers maintain communication with parents about their child’s learning is important to student success and improvement. During the interview, the two participants explained their experiences communicating with parents. The language barrier was referred to as an obvious challenge to communicating as Alex mentioned that he needs translators for interviews because the parents often do not understand English; therefore, he says “usually I trust the student, but the student often has to translate to parents for me.” In a similar conversation, Derek mentions the school board being helpful as “they’ll give […] you a translator for Parent-Teacher Interviews if you need one. So, that comes in handy.” The participants expressed ways in which they were able to communicate with parents about student progress, despite there being a language barrier. They also showed an importance to keeping parents updated on student’s progress.
Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008), Guo (2006), and Ladky and Peterson (2008) all recognize that teachers and schools face struggles in communicating ELLs’ learning progress with their parents and/or guardians. However, although the participants mentioned the language barrier between themselves and the parents, their experiences communicating with parents seemed to be positive overall as they did not express any major challenges that prevented them from communicating with parents. In addition, they mentioned examples of some of the concerns parents had in their child’s learning and did not express any difficulty around contacting and/or getting parents involved. This finding seems to contrast the research that Guo (2006) and Ladky and Peterson (2008) include about the lack of involvement from ELLs’ parents/guardians being misinterpreted as a lack of dedication in their child’s learning. However, this difference is noticeable only because the participants’ experiences did not seem to suggest this. More research would have to be done around this to see if teachers’ belief regarding parent involvement has changed. From the participants’ experience, it is evident that, as teachers, we need to break communication barriers that parents and guardians face in order to effectively communicate and collaborate with them about their child’s learning.

4.4.2 Student Support

Teachers would burn out completely if they were to try and teach all students on an individual basis. The class time allotted to each subject does not allow for such teaching of lessons. Hence, teachers need to delegate and effectively facilitate a learning environment in which students are able to support one another in addition to the support given by the teacher. Alex and Derek both speak about the advantage of having students that speak the same language in the class who can be paired up with new or struggling English language learning students. Alex speaks about how he pairs a student and rearranges the seating plan before the ELL enters
the classroom. Similarly, Derek explains the matchmaking-like process involved in pairing students up, he says:

Partners is a big thing. You have to get good and this is where experience helps. It’s spotting kids who are bright, but not only bright but are compassionate and who can help somebody else out. And then putting personalities together. And that’s a lot of it, is figuring out which way each kid bounces and who would work well with whom. Cause [sic] if you put two kids together and they sit and scowl at one another that doesn’t help anybody.

The participants’ views coincide with the research on the topic, as Early (2005) states that students new to learning the English language benefit from the support of a “bilingual same-language partner” (p. 23). She goes on further to provide some ideas and activities that ELLs can work on with their buddies, if the ELL is fairly new to the English language. Hence, the dynamic of the classroom is something that a teacher might want to have in mind as a student support system has the potential to make the language learning process a little easier and less stressful for the student.

4.4.3 Collaboration with Staff

Dove and Honigsfeld (2010) remark that one strategy already in place and encouraged in schools, in order to support and make the most out of the ELLs’ learning experience, is the collaboration and communication that takes place between the classroom teacher and the ESL teacher. Alex was able to speak to this as he continues to practice this today due to fact that his school is still fortunate enough to have ESL support for their students. On the other hand, even though Derek’s school did not have an ESL classroom anymore, Derek still collaborated with other staff members in the school, such as the ELLs’ past teachers, or teachers who had reading
material at the level the ELL was currently at. Hence, even without the training around teaching ELLs, teachers can still effectively cater their lessons towards these learners by communicating and collaborating with the other staff members in the school.

4.5 Strategies to Teaching ELLs

As teachers, we are constantly striving to find ways in which we can improve, develop and grow; we seek ways in which we can become more versatile in meeting the needs of all our student as we want to see each one succeed. This section discusses teacher strategies and tips related to supporting these learners that the participants mentioned throughout the entire interview. Using the findings, from both these interviews, discussion in this section is divided into four subthemes: building relationships, English language learning in relation to special education, misconceptions related to teaching ELLs, and tips for new teachers.

4.5.1 Building Relationships

Building relationships is key to getting to know students and making them feel comfortable. Derek explains building relationships in his classroom by not getting to know the students, so that he is able to analyze with students he can pair up together, but also getting to know the abilities of his students to better accommodate for them during group and individual work. Similarly, Alex follows a similar technique but extends it to also include familiarizing himself with customs related to the student’s background and religion; he recalls:

In my early days – the Indians have the inverted cross they use and the kids were putting it on their tests, but it looks like a swastika […] from the Nazis […] but it has dots in it. I’m like why are you putting swastikas on. They didn’t know what I was talking about right, so-so there was that cultural divide. So I […] tried to take a lot of time, in my early years, just trying to get to know […] some of the customs and stuff like that […].
This seems to coincide with and illustrate Early’s (2005) views as she also suggests that teachers, “try to get to know your students and their stories. It will open your eyes and your heart and is a good opportunity to teach acceptance in your classroom” (p. 23). By getting to know our students, we are able to embrace their culture and cater our teaching to include it. The students also pick up on this interest and feel more welcome in the classroom. Although it is not a requirement of the curriculum we are teaching or modifying for these learners, it is a factor that impacts the way in which we teach that said curriculum as knowing the students informs us of their learning.

4.5.2 English Language Learning in Relation to Special Education

During the interviews, it was noticeable that both participants compared the teaching and creating modifications for the English language learner to doing the same for students with special needs. Alex elaborates that although he did not have specific courses on teaching ELL as part of his teacher training program, he did have a course related to teaching special needs students and explains that ELLs are “special needs in their own right”. He explains that their needs were not something to ignore. Similarly, Derek reasons that since teachers are required to differentiate instruction for the students with special needs in the class, it is not much different doing it for ELLs.

Although the two participants hold similar viewpoints on this, research to support it is rare. Nordmeyer, Wertheimer and Honigsfeld mention the use of strategies implemented in “special education inclusion classrooms” in supporting English Language Learners (as cited in Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010, p. 3). However, it does support the fact that accommodating with the intention of making learning easier for the students with special needs benefits many other students in the class. Derek speaks at length about this idea as well. He mentions that as teachers,
it is important to understand the abilities of the English language learner and be open to other academic needs the student might have in addition to the language barrier. He mentions examples of the student either having a learning disability or gaps in learning, if they had previously missed school for a couple of years due to war or other circumstances. In cases of academic gaps, Derek mentioned that the student might need to reach out to the Literacy Enrichment Academic Program (LEAP). Being open to this would mean not looking at everything the student produces or struggles with as being a result of the language competency (Artiles & Klingner, 2006).

4.5.3 Misconceptions Related to Teaching ELLs

Misconceptions exist around how the learner learns a new language and how we as educators assess it. Alex mentions that one of the ways he often accommodates ELLs is scribing for them when they are stuck on a test. He says that teachers should remember that “we learn to speak a language first, before we read it and then we write it. So writing will come last.” He also explains that teachers often mistake a student’s language abilities the same way some parents misinterpret the writing mark on the report card to represent neatness of handwriting. He says that some ELLs come into the class with amazing phonics and a teacher assessing their reading might hear them read and give them an ‘A’ but if the teacher were to ask the student follow up questions related to the reading, they would notice that the student did not comprehend what they were reading.

In a similar way, when supporting for learners, Alex notices that many teachers do not actually follow through with the accommodation and modifications they suggest. He explains this is because their expectations for the student does not match the modifications in place. He notices that teachers will mark mathematics questions wrong solely based on the fact that the
student had grammar mistakes when trying to communicate the answer. He further states that students do not have to actually write an answer in words to demonstrate their knowledge of a topic. Instead, he says that they should be able to draw a picture or orally communicate to you and that doing so is a valid representation of their knowledge. Even though math is not considered a language heavy subject, the use of words such as “justify” or “describe” confuse the learner. Hence, if an ELL leaves a question blank, there could justifiable reasons other than not knowing the answer. Buck et al. states that this misinterpretation of capabilities can somewhat be explained by our limited knowledge to supporting ELLs (as cited in Webster & Valeo, 2011, p. 106). So what needs to develop in our approach to teaching English language learners must then be the limited breadth of knowledge we hold around supporting these learners.

4.5.4 Tips for New Teachers

Although many of types of suggestions have been provided throughout the themes above, the two teachers still had ideas around accommodating and modifying the learning for English language learners and suggested that new teachers learn how to do this to best support their students. In meeting students’ needs, Alex mentions that each student needs to be looked at as an individual rather than as part of a whole. Even though we refer to English language learners as a collective, each learner’s abilities vary within that group and so it would not make sense to have a set way of teaching ELLs.

When mentioning ways in which they accommodate and modify for these learners, Alex explains that he uses word box, extra explanation, and scribing student’s work in order to accommodate the learning for that individual. On the other hand, Derek has modified worksheets to meet the abilities of the English language learner, and he also modifies the assignment and the resources expected for the assignment to fit the language proficiency of the learner. Derek
believes that many teachers come in with the mindset that if they are teaching grade 6, they need to prepare a grade 6 program, he states the importance of being able to multitask and cater to students at various grade levels within the class and ends this discussion off very nicely by saying:

We are like a prudent parent. Well does one parent chuck one kid just cause they’re inconvenient? No you don’t, you deal with it. And that’s the attitude you have to come with. So, you kind of have to be prepared that the grade you have been assigned is not as advertised. […] And yes, sometimes you’re going to have to make a lot of stuff for one kid. And that’s part of it.

So as teachers it is important for us to be prepared to change up our lessons and adapt to the needs of our students. This corresponds to research in the field as according to Swann (2014), who builds on the discussion in the previous section on being aware of other indicators outside the language barrier, teachers should modify their lessons to meet ELLs while remembering that the learner’s lack of proficiency in the language does not correspond to a lack in academic knowledge. Swann (2014) suggest that teachers assess the ELL and alter assignments to make them shorter and/or change test questions to multiple choice and true/false ones that would be easier to complete.

Another area that participants seemed to suggest as being hard for new teachers was assessment with relation to English language learners. Derek mentions that often new teachers are not prepared for the range of academic levels within the classroom. Using his split grade 5/6 class as an example, he says:

I think a lot of … newer teachers who aren’t used to juggling find it very daunting. They find it daunting to split grades. But then when you tell them you not only have split
grade-which is two grades, but you could also have Spec-Ed and ELLs which are two grades below that. So now you potentially have four grades of ability levels in your classroom and they find that juggling very-very difficult.

Having such beliefs make assessment harder for teachers as the teacher would have to be able to know how to differentiate their lessons and assessment for their different learners. Alex mentions the recent introduction of the STEP program and says, “classroom teachers are supposed to be able to use that themselves to do an initial diagnostic of students coming into their classroom.” He refers to the test and the importance of knowing it suggested that new teachers become competent in learning how to utilize it to assess ELLs. The conversation around the STEP program and its importance sparked curiosity as to how many teachers had knowledge regarding the assessment and were actually trained in using it. Lenski, Ehlers-Zavala, Daniel, and Sun-Irminger (2006) value assessment as being crucial to further instruction but as Alex and Derek have noticed, they mention that “nevertheless, many teachers are unprepared for the special needs and complexities of fairly and appropriately assessing ELLs” (p. 24).

The suggestions the participants provided, as areas new teachers should be aware, gives a focus around what new teachers should become competent in and look forward to in order to support ELLs in the classroom. Having these tips decrease the element of surprise and uncertainty that some new teachers might face when learning they have an ELL in their classroom and are expected by the board to use the resources and strategies shared by these participants.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I primarily described my findings about the practices of elementary teachers in supporting English language learners in their classroom. I found that although the
teacher participants of this study were not explicitly trained in how they could support English language learner, they held some experience of teaching or working with English language learners in the years prior to working in their current positions. From the findings, adaptability was a fundamental skill to the development of these participants’ competency in the area of teaching ELLs. The participants brought forth a variety of ideas for discussion among various aspects related to the teaching of these learners. The teachers emphasized how time and experience played a role in their teaching and examined differences in the ways that English language learning was viewed. The teachers emphasized the importance of collaboration and communication with various members within the school community and suggested recommendations for teaching English language learners.

The findings seem to support the research in the field. However, the participants did mention ideas and themes that were outside of the research literature and there seems to be a disconnect between the research and classroom practice, especially around the topic of student attitude and belonging. Moreover, the preparedness of teachers to teach these groups of learners seems to be a reoccurring discussion. This issue and the findings of this study will be further discussed in Chapter Five where I will review the findings and discuss their implications for the educational research community. In addition, I explore how the research findings will impact my own teaching practices moving forward and make recommendations for future work in this area.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction to the Chapter

In this study, I investigated the decline of ESL programs in Ontario school boards and the noticeable lack of mandatory training for pre-service teachers in supporting English language learners in the classroom. I questioned how a small sample of Canadian elementary school teachers (Non-ESL) prepare to teach English language learners in the classroom. Relevant literature related to English language learners’ learning in schools was explored especially regarding related policies, beliefs and attitudes of students and teachers, and how current teacher strategies were being implemented. Through semi-structured interviews conducted with two elementary school teachers, I found that although both the participants were not formally trained on how to support ELLs, time and experience allowed the teachers to develop a variety of approaches when trying to facilitate the learning of ELLs in their classroom. In this chapter, I start by providing a brief overview of the key findings described in Chapter Four before detailing some of the implications of these findings for not only the educational community but also for me as a teacher and researcher. I then proceed to provide some recommendations to support English Language Learners in the future and conclude the chapter with some suggestions regarding possible directions of future educational research of this topic area.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

Although the interview focused mainly on highlighting the ways in which teachers supported English Language Learners in the classroom, the participants’ preliminary responses, regarding the school demographic, the number of ESL classrooms in the schools, and the extent of teacher training, revealed that while ELLs were present at both schools, differing support was available for English Language Learners depending on the school. Hence, although both
participants had not had formal training on ways to support ELLs, over time, they developed their own ways of supporting and accommodating for these students regardless of whether or not the students had access to ESL teachers or itinerants to offer individualized support. Differences in support provided highlight an issue of equity for English Language learners, making one wonder about the decision making process involved in deciding which schools get access to ESL support. Perhaps there is an assumption that teachers will, with time and experience, overcome various challenges and develop teaching strategies on their own, as did the participants in this study. This topic may benefit from further investigation around whether these factors affect ELL student’s learning process.

Both of the teachers interviewed provided examples of several approaches for supporting and teaching ELLs in the classroom. This suggested that there was not one perfect approach that could be used widely among ELLs. Rather, because there were many factors involved in the learning of a language, there were, similarly, many approaches that teachers take into consideration when supporting learners. Some prominent instructional strategies implemented by these teachers included teaching for conceptualization of the language, using culturally relevant pedagogy, use of accommodation and differentiated instruction, and having students pair up with ELLs to support them. Some effective ways included strategies that appreciated student diversity and cultural differences, thus creating an inclusive classroom. The teachers did not mention any specific resources that brought awareness to the techniques they had developed over the years.

5.2 Implications

The findings from this research have numerous implications for both the educational community and for my own professional identity and practice, as a researcher and teacher. These implications are discussed in the sections below.
5.2.1 Broad Implications: The Educational Community

The participants in this study did not have formal training around supporting ELLs. Hence one of the key findings revealed that strategies used by these teachers seemed to vary quite a bit. The research in this field does not seem to contrast how teachers, with formal ESL training, differ from other teachers, without formal training, with respect to their strategies and approaches to supporting ELLs. However, the findings in this study seem to suggest that if teachers had had formal training, they would have been introduced to effective strategies to implement in their classroom. Moreover, these teachers would have had similar collections of useful strategies that have been recommended to them. This would most likely help newer teachers and teacher candidates. Hence, the absence of a mandatory course related to teaching ELLs would mean that the approaches would continue to vary greatly. Furthermore, it would be unknown whether these teacher, especially new teachers, have knowledge of such strategies. This is troubling as a lack of knowledge for such strategies and somewhat uniformity of strategies could have a detrimental effect on ELLs’ language acquisition and overall learning.

Another finding was related to assessing English language learners, “because assessment is a critical part of effective literacy instruction, it is important for classroom teachers to know how to evaluate ELLs’ literacy development” (Lenski et al., 2006, p. 24). The participants explained how they accommodated learners. The participants noted that it is possible for assessment, in subject areas outside of language, to be affected by the language barrier. Teachers may not be able to accurately assess the language proficiency of the ELLs or know how to effectively use the assessment results to support learners if they are not given proper training or professional development. One of the participants mentioned using the STEP initial assessment to determine the stage the learners were at in terms of language proficiency in order to better
support that student. Although the question asked during the interviews was not directly related to assessment, it was quite surprising to learn that one participant talked about having knowledge of the assessment, used to place ESL students, while the other did not. Clearly, there needs to be some clarity regarding assessment and the impact it has on supporting ELL students.

5.2.2 Narrow Implications: Professional Identity and Practice

This study has furthered my understanding of supporting ELLs and strengthened my belief that the topic of supporting English Language Learners in the classroom, is still relevant today. The teachers interviewed for this study provided various examples of strategies that could be used in the classroom and stressed the idea of an inclusive classroom, and ensured that the language barrier does not impact the student’s assessment of knowledge regarding concepts outside the language subject. Many of the accommodations these classroom teachers provide for English Language Learners are in fact quite useful to other learners in the class as well. This supports the research in the field. Differentiated instruction and the ability to accommodate any learner is just a part of good teaching practice. I continue to believe that all students, ELLs included, should be able to experience success in the learning process and that getting students to see themselves represented in the curriculum should be a priority of mine. Hence, the findings from this study have inspired me to start thinking of ways I can support ELLs in my classroom.

In addition, before this research study, much of my experience revolved around collecting quantitative data. However, this research journey has shaped my identity as a researcher as it has given me experience working with qualitative data, making me a more versatile researcher. I have also gained an appreciation for research collected through qualitative forms, which include personal interaction with the participants and hearing the anecdotes and example they provide in support of their response. However, the research has also had its limitations. Having completed
this research, I would definitely like to be able to go back and add some more questions if I were able to extend this research in the future. I would have also liked to include student’s voices as well as teacher candidates’ experiences, especially the recent candidates in the new two-year teacher’s program, to see if anything has changed regarding their training in the matter.

5.3 Recommendations

The varying instructional strategies teachers use to teach ELLs is something that would benefit from being addressed by the educational community. I suggest that the Ontario College of Teachers and the faculties of education consider introducing a mandatory course that prepares teachers around this topic, as our student demographics today show how relevant this topic continues to be. This may better equip teachers with effective strategies and assessment techniques that can be used in classrooms. Furthermore, I recommend that researchers publish a book on such strategies and techniques that provide a basic pedagogical strategies for teachers to support ELLs. Professional development is another important venue for teacher support. I would also strongly recommend that governments and school boards hold professional development on how to use the STEP initial assessment for all their teachers. Equipping teachers this way, ensures that teachers have the knowledge and awareness of the resources available to support ELL learning in their classroom.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Considering the findings of this study, there are some possible paths for further research regarding the topic of supporting English Language Learners. Research could reveal how well new teacher graduates feel regarding their competency and preparedness to teach ELLs in the classroom. In addition, research could also be performed to find out how many teachers were aware of STEP initial assessment and implemented it in the classroom with ELLs. The research
could further look at how teachers are adapting their teaching around it and what benefits, if any, it provided. As STEP is fairly new, research regarding teacher’s training on this, and the use of this in schools were scarce. Hence, researching this would inform educators and the government of whether the assessment is being used effectively. Another possible suggestion would be to conduct a longitudinal study that looked at the academic progress of ELLs from various classroom settings. The participants, children, would come from classrooms or schools where ESL teachers were present, or where itinerants offered extra support. These children would also come from classrooms where teachers had training in this area as well as ones where they did not have training regarding how to support them. Hence, the study would be focused on investigating whether the support system had an impact on their learning or ability to feel success.

5.5 Concluding Comments

I became interested in finding out more about the topic of supporting English Language Learners from doing preliminary research around the topic in the final years of my undergraduate degree. During this time, I learned of some situations in which the classroom teachers assigned unrelated work to ELLs that was much lower than what they were able to do. This led me to question whether teachers were prepared for supporting these learners in their classroom and how the teacher’s support impacted their learning. I learned that about three quarters of the students in Ontario were ELLs (People for Education, 2013); however, ESL classrooms were one of the sectors that were most impacted by the cuts to funding (Duffy, 2004). Hence, in response to the changes to ESL programs and lack of evidence regarding training for classroom teachers, with respect to the matter, I asked how elementary school teachers were preparing to teach and support ELLs in the classroom. Through the teacher interviews, I found that classroom teachers use a wide range of strategies to support ELLs, including teaching for conceptualization of the
language, using culturally relevant pedagogy, use of accommodation and differentiated instruction, and having students pair up with ELLs to support them. However, despite this finding, much of their approaches were different and the resources available to these teachers to help them support and teach ELLs more effectively were not really well-known.

These findings are significant because they provide insight as to how teachers approach teaching and supporting English Language Learners in the classroom and the accessibility and knowledge of the resources available to them. The findings from the interviews also provide all teachers, with strategies that can be implemented in the classroom as well as tips to consider when teaching English Language Learners. Further research can be done to expand the areas regarding the impact these teaching approaches have on ELLs. English Language Learners continue to be an important part of our classrooms and schools and with the support and collaboration of the various stakeholders in our educational system: researchers, teachers, students, school, and governments, we can ensure that all our learners are represented in the education system by providing the opportunity for all students to experience success at school.
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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

Date:

Dear ______________________________,

My name is Abiramy Sivalingam and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on English Language Learners and the Classroom: Inclusive Strategies and Beliefs of Ontario Teachers. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have experience teaching English language learners. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60-minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Abiramy Sivalingam
Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Rose Fine Meyer

Contact Info: [Email Address]

Phone: [Phone Number]

Consent Form

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

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

Signature: ________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol/Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn about the strategies teachers incorporate into their lessons to provide an inclusive learning environment for English language learners. This study is for the purpose of informing other current and future teachers of ways in which to meet the needs of English language learners. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of question focused on your experiences teaching English language learners. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Information

1. What grades and subjects do you currently teach?
2. How long have you been in this profession?
3. Where did you complete your initial teacher’s training?
4. Have you had any experience teaching English language learners? Could you briefly describe it? Do you currently have any English language learners in your class?
5. Have you taken any courses or done any professional development around teaching ELLs? If so, when? Were these courses mandatory or optional?

Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs

1. Could you describe what your beliefs and attitudes are towards teaching ELLs? Has this changed from your initial years as a teacher? If so, how?
2. How well do you see English language learners integrating into the classroom environment? What do you think are the main challenges they face?
3. What are your thoughts about the importance or lack of given to integrating ELLs into the classroom?
4. Does this school have an ESL classroom? If no, how do you feel about this? If yes, how would you describe its effectiveness for the ELL student?
5. How well do you feel teacher training programs prepare teacher candidates in the area of meeting ELLs’ needs?
6. Have you ever been in foreign country where you were immersed in learning how to speak their native language? If so, has this helped your teaching or shaped your beliefs around teaching ELLs?

**Teacher Practices**

1. What ways have you used inclusive strategies to integrate the English language learners to the classroom?

2. How much coordinating, if any, do you do with the ESL teachers to benefit the learning of ELLs? How useful do you find it? OR What do you think should be done with respect to this?

3. How have you increased your competency in teaching English language learners?

4. Could you briefly describe a strategy you’ve used? How did it turn out?

5. How do modify your lessons to meet ELLs? (Learning goals, assessment?)

6. What are some ways you create an inclusive learning environment for these students?

**Supports and Challenges**

1. What do you feel are some of the things teachers struggle with when it comes to teaching lessons with the ELLs in mind? How have you dealt with it?

2. What resources or support through professional development have you reached out to?

3. How do you feel the education system might further support you and other teachers in meeting these challenges?

**Next Steps**

1. What are your future or current professional goals in this area?

2. What advice would you offer to beginning teachers who are committed to increasing their competency in teaching ELLs?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.