Parents as a Teacher Resource for English Language Learners

By

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Abstract

Elementary schools have a growing number of English Language Learners (ELLs) within classrooms, and many teachers continue to struggle supporting these learners. These students continue to face issues because of their language barriers within school settings. There is a connection gap between the teacher and the student. This inability to connect with ELL students is due to the lack of resources available for the teacher. The only way to fill this gap is connecting their home and school environment together by creating parent-teacher connections. Parents are the ones that understand the whole child, but often are left out of the learning process because of different reasons. This study looks at how teachers can use parents as resources for supporting English Language Learners (ELL) in mainstream classrooms. The research provides strategies in which teachers can engage in more meaningful parent-teacher connections that will benefit the learner. Parents are able to provide insights on students’ learning styles and provide extra needed support at home. Results indicated that communication and involvement with parents can improve ELLs opportunities for academic success in school.

Key words: English Language Learners (ELL), parent-teacher connections, collaboration, inclusive classroom, mainstream classroom
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study

Canada is known for its cultural freedom, which is having the openness to express your culture by speaking your native language, dressing according to your traditional dress code, and being able to follow through with cultural customs. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act (Government of Canada, 1985b) within a multilingual framework, the Ontario Human Rights Code (Government, 1985b), and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Government, 1985a) are the most predominant official forms of recognition for cultural freedom of all Canadians. According to research, such policies help break down discriminatory attitudes, and cultural differences (Berry, 2006). The Multiculturalism Policy (Government, 1985b) seeks to improve intergroup harmony by encouraging all ethnic groups in Canada to develop themselves as vital communities, and by further encouraging their mutual interaction, and sharing; the assumption, which is quite explicit in the policy, is that such group development will lead to a personal, and collective sense of confidence, and this in turn will lead to greater ethnic tolerance (Berry, 1984. p. 353).

The Multicultural Policy has been criticized by many researchers like former professor Rocher (Quebec Cultural Policies, 2008). Rocher is a key contributor to the global policy on “cultural development” (Quebec, 2008). He argued that language is the greatest part of culture and if multiculturalism does not support language then the culture itself cannot be maintained (Berry, 1984).

According to Rocher and other researchers if language was an important part of culture (Quebec, 2008), why is the education system stagnant when it comes English Language Learners
According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (1999), English Language Leaners (ELLs):

...are those whose primary language(s) or language(s) of the home, is other than English, and who may therefore require additional service in order to develop their individual potential within [the] school system. Some students speak variations of English that differ significantly from the English used in the broader Canadian society, and in school; they may require ELL support (p. 6).

Elementary school is an important part of life because it facilitates and lays the groundwork for long-term positive educational outcomes (Turney & Kao, 2009). It is the very beginning and ELLs at such a young age face so many issues. Power, inequality, discrimination, resistance, and struggle play an overwhelming role in the lives of ELLs (Braine, 2013). The power of English in North America overrules Native languages, which can make it very difficult for English Language Learners (Braine, 2013). Most families that cannot speak in English face a number of struggles in daily tasks. There are often many instances of inequality and discrimination against people who cannot speak fluent English. This can include finding jobs, finding schools for their children, or even navigating in society. ELLs are taken advantage of by English speakers, which leads to fewer opportunities in life making them more resistant to fit in (Braine, 2013). Placing ELL children of diverse backgrounds in schools, where primary instruction is given in English often leads to the erosion of the child’s self identity and assimilates them into a singular popular culture (Pennycook, 1999). As a result, insuring all students are provided with an inclusive environment where they feel accepted, safe, and supported from an early age can have a monumental impact on their long-term learning (Turney & Kao, 2009).
According to North American statistics there is a growing number of ELLs. Over twenty-five percent of students are identified as English language learners in Ontario alone (Student Achievement Division, 2013). Fifty-eight percent of this group was born in Canada with parents who immigrated from different countries (Ontario, 2012). With these growing numbers, the Ministry of Education emphasizes the importance of supporting ELL students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). The Ministry of Education believes that the implementation of equity, and inclusion practices influences all aspects of school (2006). The inclusion strengthens the students’ sense of identity, and develops a positive self-image. The Ministry of Education requires schools “to adopt measures to provide a safe environment for learning, free from harassment, bullying, violence, and expressions of hate” (Ministry, 2006, p. 28). This safe learning environment fosters for more learning opportunities for ELL students. It encourages staff and students to value others, and show respect for diversity in the school and society at large (Ministry, 1999). Some of the ELL policies that the Ministry has created have made it clear that a student’s level of proficiency will not influence their grade level and school boards will have services available to help ELLs excel in academics while learning English (Ministry, 2007). These policies show that the inclusive classrooms are becoming of great importance with the rising numbers of ELLs. Responsible and effective inclusion is not the result of political correctness or cost efficiencies, but the resounding right of children to learn to their maximum potential (Horne & Timmons, 2009). Every child has the right to learn and educators need to ensure they try their best to reach out and provide the same opportunities to all of the students.

There are many different support models that are implemented into schools to support ELLs. Depending on the number of ELLs in the school and the number of students, a different model may be used. In the past the most common practice used was segregation, which was a
racial/ethnic isolation from the mainstream classrooms (Valencia, 2002). A model that is currently used is “Tutorial Support” (Ministry, 2008). This type of support is provided several times per week to small groups of Language Learners to provide opportunities for practice studies in the classrooms. This type is often used, alongside with the “Integrated Classroom Support Model,” this is when the classroom teacher and the ESL or ELD teacher collaborate with planning, instruction, and assessment (Ministry, 2008). The classroom teacher is the one that provides the instruction and there is ongoing assessment that takes place throughout the year (Ministry, 2008).

1.1 Research Problem

Research has found that segregating ELLs from mainstream classroom learning environments can have a harmful impact on students learning, self-esteem, and social interactions with native English speakers (Echevarria & Powers, 2006; Pappamigiel, 2001). The level of academic achievement for ELLs lags behind that of their native English speaking majority peers (Echevarria & Powers, 2006). In turn, ELL students are increasingly integrated into mainstream classroom learning environments. Nevertheless, research has found that many teachers regard ELLs as a “problem” in mainstream classroom learning environments (Reeves, 2006). To date, research has paid less attention to teacher attitudes towards inclusion of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Teachers working with ELL students face many challenges because they must modify coursework and feel unprepared to do so (Reeves, 2006). Many of these challenges are due to the fact that parent-teacher connections are weak. Research shows that ELL students and their parents commonly experience ambivalence and tension when they seek quick entry into mainstream classrooms because they find it to be a hostile and unwelcoming environment (Duff, 2001). Even within classrooms ELLs commonly feel uncomfortable speaking to Native English
speakers because they are afraid of being socially ostracized (Pappamihiel, 2001). Schools play a large role in the settlement of refugees, but research outlines the problems and limitations of educational support (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). There are resources available to teachers, but they seem to be unaware of how to prepare themselves for teaching ELLs.

Current research focuses on the barriers between teachers and ELL students. Teachers face a number of challenges when trying to teach students that do not speak English. According to research the findings show that there were five main challenges (Gandara, Maxwell & Driscoll, 2005). The first and most common challenge educators faced was the importance of teachers having communication with students and their families. Twenty-seven percent of teachers struggled with the language barrier between the parent and student (Gandara, Maxwell & Driscoll, 2005). This wall between the two did not allow teachers to connect and inform families about standards and expectations. This finding was common in both elementary and secondary school teachers. The second was the lack of time to teach ELLs. More than twenty percent of elementary school teachers found this a significant challenge (Gandara, Maxwell & Driscoll, 2005). The time was insufficient to teach the student all the subjects including English language development. The third, was the frustration with the wide range of ELLs in the classroom that performed at different academic levels. Teachers felt that the variability of academic levels was a huge challenge because they did not have the adequate support to work with ELLs. The fourth, was the lack of tools available to teach students, which included limited assessment materials, and instruments. Lastly, the lack of professional development designed to help educators teach students. Forty-three percent of teachers had fifty percent or more ELLs in their classrooms; however, received no more than one in-service that focused on ELLs (Gandara, Maxwell & Driscoll, 2005). Other teachers with twenty-six to fifty percent ELLs in their classes...
had no professional development at all (Gandara, Maxwell & Driscoll, 2005). Overall many teachers feel overwhelmed and unprepared to teach ELL students, and face a number of challenges with the growing number of ELLs in classrooms.

In conclusion, looking at the existing instructional strategies used in mainstream classrooms, the strengths and limitations of integration models, their parent-teacher connections, and resources available to them will help provide a better understanding of how to work with English Language Learners within an inclusive classroom.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The reoccurring challenges that teachers face when integrating ELL students in mainstream classrooms is what inspired this qualitative study. My intention is to learn how a sample of elementary teachers use parents as resources to support ELLs in the mainstream classroom. The purpose of this research is to utilize these findings as a part of my own teaching practices, so that I can understand how to provide an inclusive environment for all students and learn the importance of parent-teacher connections. The study would be beneficial to anyone working with students who do not speak English. It will inform research and practice in the area of supporting ELLs.

The study specifically identifies perceptions teachers have of inclusive ELL classrooms, since research has paid less attention to teacher’s attitudes towards inclusion (Reeves, 2006). I also examine certain challenges teachers face with having ELL students. This study is significant because it provides information about reliable resources teachers can use in order to provide inclusive classrooms. It will look at how much of a difference collaborating with parents of students can make on learning. These resources can lead to next steps for teachers which will enhance ELL understanding and will raise awareness to these educators who feel
unprepared for this type of inclusive environment. The research findings could benefit new teacher candidates because getting accustomed to the growing population is something we need to be prepared for and limited information is provided on this topic.

1.3 Research Questions

Main Questions

The primary questions this research paper asks is how is a sample of teachers providing inclusive classrooms for English Language Learners, and how do they draw on parents as resources for supporting ELLs in mainstream classrooms?

The following subsidiary questions will also be investigated:

1. What range of instructional strategies do these teachers enact to support ELLs in mainstream classrooms and what outcomes do they observe from their ELL students?

2. What resources and factors support these teachers’ work integrating ELLs in mainstream classroom environments?

3. What do these teachers believe are the strengths and limitations of integration models of ELL support?

4. What role, if any, does communication with parents play in these teachers’ work?

1.4 Background of the Researcher

As a first generation Canadian, my parents made the decision to enroll me in a private school because of what they saw as a lack of support for ELLs in the public school system. My older sibling attended a public school for four years and my parents felt that they did not get the proper support. They felt that their culture and religion were being side stepped, and eroded. My experience is a significant part of why I feel the need to learn more about why effective teaching practices for meaningful integration and support of ELL in these classrooms are not common. I
was privileged enough to be introduced to a private school where Punjabi was spoken alongside English. I want to be able to provide a learning environment where I will be able to teach ELLs. I want to be able to have parent-teacher interactions where the parents do not feel insecure about coming in because of language barriers. I would like to be mentored by ELL teachers that successfully incorporate inclusivity into their teaching skillset, so that I can incorporate their wisdom into my own practices within a public school setting.

The student-teacher or parent-teacher interactions can be difficult if the same language is not spoken. During my first placement experience I realized that there were many teachers in the staff room talking about how hard it it was to work with ELL students. They were so excited by the fact that there was a placement student in each of their classrooms that spoke the same languages as the ELL students. That’s when I realized how important it is to know how to interact with students and parents to build that connection. Being unprepared for such common classrooms does not benefit anyone. Getting to know the student’s native language ahead of time, and knowing how to interact with them so they do not fall behind is what I am interested in. Many experiences and interacts I have had lead me to understanding ways of breaking that barrier, and provides inclusive classrooms to ELL students.

1.5 Overview

To respond to the research questions, I conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview three teachers about how they use parents as resources for supporting ELLs. In Chapter Two I review the literature in various areas including: teacher’s perspectives of inclusive ELL classrooms, challenges teachers face, parent-teacher connections, and resources available for teachers to provide inclusive classrooms. Next, in Chapter Three I elaborate on the research design. In Chapter Four I report my research findings and discuss their
significance in light of the existing research literature. In Chapter Five 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.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The focus of this study is to highlight the various ways teachers are providing support to English Language Learners (ELLs) in mainstream classrooms and the way they are drawing on parents as resources. The population of ELLs within North American classrooms has increased dramatically over the past two decades, and educators continue to face challenges in working with these students (Brown & Howley, 2014). This literature review covers four key areas: instructional strategies, strengths and limitations of integration models, parent-teacher connections, and resources available for educators. Reviewing these categories will provide a better understanding of what teachers are doing, and what next steps need to be undertaken to facilitate inclusive classrooms.

2.1 Instructional Strategies used in Mainstream Classrooms

As mentioned in the introduction, teachers face many unexpected challenges when working with ELLs, which can create negative attitudes about wanting to teach in inclusive classrooms. Research shows that teachers’ perceptions of ELL students, and the number of ELLs in the school has a direct correlation to the strategies they use within the classroom (Brown & Howley, 2014). Brown (2014) and Howley (2014) found that characteristics of teachers also play a large role on the instruction strategies used. These characteristics could include: teacher’s coursework, their training on ELLs, bilingualism, gender, years of experience, and attitude towards ELLs (Brown & Howley, 2014). If teachers have negative attitudes they are less likely to implement new strategies (Brown & Howley, 2014). Other researchers like Karabenic and Noda (2004) agree with these attitudes. They found that results show that teachers with more favorable positive outlook “towards ELLs tend to take a mastery versus a performance approach
to instruction, and has a higher self-efficacy for teaching ELLs” (Karabenick & Noda, 2004, p. 55). According to various studies, teachers’ attitudes towards ELLs can be changed. In their research, Brown and Howley (2014), found that “the attitudes of teachers who received specialized training for teaching ELLs were significantly more positive than those teachers who did not receive the same kind of training” (p. 9).

There are a number of instructional strategies educators take in order to teach in large groups. The most common practice in smaller districts is the “pull-out instruction” strategy. Research “consistently finds pull-out instruction as a strategy for providing academic support to be among the least successful strategies for teaching ELL students” (Gandara, Maxwell & Driscoll, 2005, p. 5). More schools are moving away from this strategy and moving onto more efficient in-class methods. There is some research that contradicts this change. Dr. Reeves who has written a number of journals on teacher learning has focused mainly on English Language Learners (Reeves, 2004). She found that ESL classrooms provide more cultural diversity to students and whereas mainstream classrooms idealized norm for all students (Reeves, 2004). The students minimized the linguistic and cultural diversity they were bringing into the school setting (Reeves, 2004). In order to make a classroom work, strategies used within the classrooms can make a huge impact on students. Professional development is important because this training helps give teachers background knowledge about what should be expected. Since many teachers lack this development, they feel unprepared to teach and find modifying course work a daunting task (Reeves, 2006).

The four main instructional strategies most often used include: assessment, organization and communication, scaffolding and support, and direct vocabulary instruction (Brown & Howley, 2014). First, assessment consists of formative tests. These assessments allow an
educator to see how well the student is progressing and to see what level they stand at in relation
to the other students in the class (Brown & Howley, 2014). Making assessment accommodations
is important so the student does not feel overwhelmed with all the transitions. These
accommodations can include: giving the student extra time on doing tests or tasks, conducting
oral interviews to answer questions opposed to having to write down the answers,
demonstrations done through visual models, making graphic organizers when teaching rather
then paragraphs which rely heavily on English (Ministry, 2006). These small changes in teaching
can benefit ELLs.

Second, organization and communication consists of grouping practices, direct
instructional methods, and arrangement of the physical classroom environment. Providing a
warm and safe classroom environment can make the student feel at ease, which will allow the
students to try new unique learning opportunities (Brown & Howley, 2014). The learning
resources play a huge role in the feel of the environment. If there are learning resources
available, it will make the transition a lot smoother for the student. The Ontario Language
Curriculum encourages the use of different resources while teaching which includes: “visual
material, simplified text, bilingual dictionaries, and materials that reflect cultural diversity”
(Ministry, 2006, p. 28). These resources will allow the student to be independent whenever they
want to be because the resources will give the student something to refer to when working on
tasks.

Third, scaffolding and support is the actual one to one support given during programs,
and the intervention for the students. Scaffolding involves giving students support while they are
learning new concepts but releasing the support as they learn so they become more independent.
It helps ELLs by offering simple language, teacher modeling, and visual and graphic depicts of
concepts. This approach involves asking questions that have long oral or written responses in order to allow opportunities to speak English (Brown & Howley, 2014). The teacher will be required to give extra support at the beginning because the student is getting used to the change and support decrease over time which will allow the student to be more independent. This process could involve starting off with extensive use of visual cues, graphic organizers, previewing textbooks, pre-teaching key vocabulary, and peer tutoring (Ministry, 2006). Then slowly the teacher can move away from some of these strategies and start including more language based instructions. Over time there will be less accommodations and modifications for the students so the student can be independent (Ministry, 2006).

Lastly, the direct vocabulary instruction includes techniques linked to production of fluency in English. Instructional activities maximize opportunities for language. Cognitive complexity of activities in class can challenge the student to think outside the box and provide opportunities to learn (Brown & Howley, 2014). By giving the student exposure to this dialogue the student will often develop oral fluency quickly, making connections between concepts and skills needed in the first language, and English (Ministry, 2006). Although oral fluency does not mean the student actually understands what they’re saying, it can take anywhere between five to seven years to catch up to the other students in the class (Ministry, 2006). The older the child is the easier it is to have them catch up (Ministry, 2006).

There are many other instructional strategies but assessments, organization and communication, scaffolding and support, and direct vocabulary instruction seem to be the main ones that educators most often use. Incorporating them into the mainstream classroom seems to make the difference between a well integrated class or an unsupportive classroom (Brown & Howley, 2014).
2.2 Strengths and Limitations of Integration Models

Schools are now moving towards an integration model so it is beneficial to look at both the strengths and limitations of it. There are some benefits of having pull out sessions with students but in that case the limitations overcome the strengths which is why schools are slowly moving away from those methods and towards integration (Gandara, Maxwell & Driscoll, 2005). Some of the strengths of this model would include: more opportunities for students to learn from other students. The Departments of Educational Policy and Administration have done a lot of research that shows that the main concern with pulling students out of the classroom was about linguistic, and racial or ethnic isolation which limited the access to social networking (York-Barr, Ghere & Sommerness, 2007). She found that students were not able to have the same opportunities to hear and use language as the other student in mainstream classrooms (York-Barr, Ghere & Sommerness, 2007). Putting them into mainstream classrooms can both provide opportunity and motivation for language development. These inclusive classrooms can be a good model so the student can catch up with other students speaking English, and can help them learn about the sociocultural expectations, and create more cultural capital for the students (York-Barr, Ghere & Sommerness, 2007). The benefits do not just apply to the ELL, there are many benefits for all students in the mainstream classroom. ELLs can bring a rich diversity of background knowledge as well as experience into the classroom. This expertise does not only benefit the student, but will support other students by allowing them to learn more about other cultures. It becomes a “cultural asset in the classroom community” (Ministry, 2006, p.26). Educators can find many creative ways of incorporating activities into the class where diversity can be included to welcome the student into the classroom.
Some of the limitations of an integration model would include teachers lack of knowledge to carry on with this model. According to research when teachers were asked about their three greatest challenges for working with ELLs, twenty percent of them responded with lack of knowledge and skills in education ELLs (Batt, 2008). Others indicated that their colleagues lacked understanding of diversity and multicultural education (Batt, 2008). Overall the results conducted reflected the collected frustration with the levels, and support contributed by mainstream teachers and administrators (Batt, 2008). Angela Carassquillo and Vivian Rodrigues are two authors, and researchers who completely disagreed with Jennifer York-Barr’s views on the integration model. They discussed about how many teachers give their instruction the same way they do with all the other students, differentiated instruction is needed but these teachers often do not have any specialized training in this area (Carasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002). Teachers face many challenges when they view the student as the problem because they believe all students should know English before entering school (Carasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002). Carasquillo and Rodriguez believed that this lack of knowledge not only frustrates the student but causes confusion for the ELL because the student may know the content in another language but do not understand in English (2002). The segregated English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms are federally funded, and provides more one on one support to the student for language development. It provides that bridge for the students from their first language to English (Carasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002).

Mainstreaming students that have just arrived to North America or who were born here but cannot speak English is common. The educators need to understand the challenges the ELL has encountered before proving the appropriate strategies to teach the student. This awareness will allow educators to motivate the students, and challenge them in content, and in their English
development (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002). There are a number of additional skills teachers need in order to teach an ELL learner. They need to have a lot of background knowledge. Being able to recognize the orientation process of allowing the student to adjust into the classroom in a crucial step because learning a language is not easy and can have its own individual pace (Ministry, 2006). The first step for ELLs is the “silent period” where the student observes others and the surroundings of their new setting (Ministry, 2006). Using verbal language right away is not easy so ELLs often use body language until the student feels confident enough to interpret and respond to others (Ministry, 2006). Being aware of how students learn and not pressuring them into taking steps faster is important knowledge mainstream teachers should be aware of.

2.3 Parent-Teacher Connections’ Effect on Student Learning

Building parent-teacher connection is crucial when teaching students. The parent-teacher relationship is often used to adjust a student into a new environment. According to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Turney & Kao, 2009), parental involvement is important and research shows that when parents and teachers work together, students achieve more, are motivated, have higher levels of emotional, social, and behavioral adjustment (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). In Aris and Campbell’s article there are many critiques made on teachers viewing families as the problem rather then seeing themselves not being able to work with different populations (2008). The research in this article articulates that parents are perceived as a lack of resources to provide support from home for their children (Aris & Campbell, 2008). They also stated that many educators assume lack of participation as a lack of interest in the student’s school life (Aris & Campbell, 2008). Viewing participation or school involvement can vary because some teachers may look at the informal activities like nurturing, values, talking, and sending the student to school with clean clothes everyday as parental involvement (Aris & Campbell, 2008).
Dr. Patricia A. Duff shows the importance of parent-teacher connections (Duff, 2001). ELL’s and their parents commonly experience ambivalence and tension when they seek quick entry into mainstream classrooms because they find it to be a hostile and unwelcoming environment (Duff, 2001). This feeling of hostility makes them feel very uncomfortable with their own knowledge of English and their understanding of how the school works. Other parents are immigrants who work long hours so it makes it hard to make these relations with the teacher (Ministry, 2012). The lack of time and self-consciousness about language barriers seem to be the two main problems that parent-teacher relations have.

Many research findings are similar when it comes racial and ethnic differences in parental involvement. Kristin Turney who is an assistant professor at University of California and Grace Kao who is a professor at University of Pennsylvania, both found that immigrant parents are less likely to talk to their children about school, but they are more likely to talk about college with them when compared to native born students (2009). The current research on this view, and in 1999 has not changed, it is “consistent with Nord and Griffins working that found Hispanic and Asian immigrant parents are less likely than native-born white parents to have high levels of involvement in their children’s schools” (Turney & Kao, 2009, p. 258). This shows that there are many different ways of interacting and participating with schools. However, there is research by Crosnoe who is professor at the University of Texas and Dr. Desimone who is a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, that contradicts with a lot of the research found. Most research suggests parent involvement increases academic performance, but Cosnoe and Desimone found that involvement is based on student’s achievement. If the student has to stay after school for remedial help there is more parent-teacher involvement (Turney & Kawo, 2009). It also found that involvement of parents varies by age, white parents are more involved in
college preparations and Asian students’ parents are more involved during remedial courses (Turney & Kao, 2009). There is a limitation in research because there is not much said about involvement of immigrant parents.

Parents can be involved in many things including: volunteering for trips, communicating with the teacher, attending school functions, and assisting with any homework. By working together, the student and the parents will build “trust, mutuality, affiliation, support, shared values, and shared expectations, and beliefs about each other, and the child” (Hughes & Kwok, 2007, p. 41). Teachers should be reaching out to parents through events, or providing supports like an interpreter or school ambassadors which can make this an easier process (Ministry, 2012).

2.4 Resources Available for Teachers to Provide Inclusive Classrooms

Jong and Harper (2005) found that many teachers are in classrooms where the students are more diverse with many different cultural backgrounds. They reported that 42 percent of teachers that were surveyed indicated that they had ELLs in the class, but only 12.5 percent of these received more then eight hours of professional development that solely focus on English language learners (Jong & Harper, 2005). The failure to include classes about ELLs as an integrated part of teacher preparation can be because it is seen as a pedagogical adaptation that can easily be incorporated by mainstream teachers in their instructional strategies (Jong & Harper, 2005). “Teaching ELLs is considered a matter of applying “good teaching” practices developed for a diverse group of native English speakers, such as activating prior knowledge, using cooperating learning, process writing, and graphic organized or hands-on activities” (Jong & Harper, 2005, p. 102). Yet many of the teachers feel unprepared to teach ELLs in the mainstream classrooms.
Schools play a large role in the settlement of refugees, but research outlines the problems and limitations of educational support (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Teachers need to know about the resources available to them which can help provide more effective instruction for ELLs (Ministry, 1999). Other research from the Ministry of Education states that there are resources available which can include: “instructional materials for use with students, the expertise of ELL specialist teacher, and the numerous publications providing research updates, methodological suggestions, curriculum outlines, or other information related to the teaching of English Language Learner students” (Ministry, 1999, p. 30). Experienced teachers recommend that having resources at hand in the classroom, which can include: dictionaries designed for the learner, bilingual, and picture dictionaries, alphabet letters on display, illustrated reading material, manipulatives, games, and art supplies (Ministry, 1999).

The issue is that there is lots of research done on the resources needed within classrooms, but there is limited resources of where to get the information from. Teachers could use ELL specialists or other staff members for tips on how to teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms. There are many volunteers and peers which can also be helpful in supporting English Language learners in the language (Ministry, 2006). Lucas, Villegas and Freedson wrote an article that discussed the different resources that could prepare teachers in the future. It consisted program descriptions teachers could take, qualitative studied they could look over, highlighted approaches being used by other effective ELL teachers, incorporating field placements with an ELL focus, additional certificate for ELL teachers, collaboration among ESL teachers, and professional development for teacher education (Lucas, Villegas & Freedson, 2008).
2.5 Conclusion

The literature review outlines the ways in which teachers support English Language Learners in the classroom and how they use parents as resources to make it possible. The research showed that many teachers face challenges when working with ELLs and as a result have negative attitudes towards teaching these students within the class (Brown & Howley, 2014). The more negative the attitude is the less likely the teachers are to use new instructional strategies (Brown & Howley, 2014). These negative attitudes need to be put aside because schools are moving towards integration models, which have their strengths and limitations. Like everything in life it is important to have a balance in order to provide the best learning opportunities for the student (Yorke-Barr, Ghere, Sommerness, 2007). Teachers need to understand that they are not alone and should be aware of the resources available to them.

This research study will make a great contribution in supporting teachers and English Language Learners within the classroom. When teachers face challenges in classroom it is hard to know what is available for support. This research article offers insight into primary teacher’s experiences that effectively use various strategies in the classroom and use parents as their number one resource to support learners. This research lets teachers know that building connections can be the first step to providing that inclusive classroom that many strive towards. In Chapter Three I will discuss the methodology used in this research study.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the research methodology used in my study. I begin this chapter by reviewing the approach, procedures, and data collection of this research study. I further discuss the overview of the participants, sampling criteria used to select the participants, the procedures, and participant bios. I further explain the data analysis and some of the ethical considerations taken into account. I then identify the limitations and strengths of the method being used. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of key decisions and my overall rationale for these decisions given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

The qualitative research I put together is showcased using a literature review and semi-structured interviews with teachers. Qualitative research is valuable because it allows the researcher to collect information and in this case from direct in-depth interviews. This research method engages “in naturalistic inquiry, studying real-world settings inductively to generate rich narrative descriptions, and construct case studies” (Patton, 2005, p. 1). It allows the researcher to get a better understanding about the topic in great detail.

When focusing particularly on the topic of providing inclusive classrooms for English Language Learners, I find that qualitative research is the best approach to take. It is considered the best method when it comes to topics about inclusivity in education because this benefits many people including teachers, parents, and students. It benefits teachers because more information is given on how to provide an inclusive classroom, both parents and students will benefit knowing the best approaches are being taken in order to help the student understand the content. Education is one of the few topics that would seem appropriate to trace its history
because it allows us to discover what is really going on and it is a way to see how to take an active role in responding to certain situations which gives us our basis of meaning (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Engaging in more than one interview allows researchers to analyze the data and conclude with overlapping descriptions collected. Getting detailed information will allow the researcher to conclude the topic with a more meaningful analysis and have solutions that will help support teachers.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The Principal instrument of data collection used in this study is a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative method of inquiry which consists of having face to face interactions with questions that are planned ahead of time. This method is suited for any topic that involves perceptions or opinions because sensitive issues are often probing for more information (Barriball & While, 1994). These interviews also allow the researcher to get various opinions from professional, educational, and personal histories of the selected interviewees (Barriball & While, 1994). This information collected can allow the researcher to gain more information in areas that were overlooked and can allow for in-depth conversations about the topics brought up. These semi-structured interviews enabled me to ask question that were specific to the participants’ teaching experiences. The participants were able to give examples that they drew from their own experience, and I was able to follow that up with other questions which allowed us to have a more insightful and in-depth interview. The data that was collected from these semi-structured interviews focused on background information of the participant, teacher perspectives/beliefs, teacher practices, supports and challenges, and as well as next steps. This categorical data that was collected will be further analyzed.
3.3 Participants

In this section I go over the sampling criteria needed to choose participants for the interviews and I review the different ways to recruit teachers. I also included a subsection where I give a little description about the participants I selected.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

I identified the following criteria for my participants:

1. **Primary/Junior school teacher**

   Finding a teacher within my subdivision allows me to gain more information that is directly relevant. I also did not specify which setting the teacher had to be in because it opens my options to public, private, and ESL classrooms. This allows me to gain more insight on how these settings may effect the teaching in the classroom.

2. **At least 3 years of experience working with ELLs**

   The experience lets the teacher recall on how it felt being a new teacher and how it is different after having a few years of experience. I wanted the teacher to have some stories or experiences to refer back to when answering my interview questions.

3. **Has taken the ESL additional qualification course to become an ESL Specialist**

   This requirement will permit the teacher to explain if the course helped in providing inclusive classrooms. It also allows the teacher to have more information based on research from the course. This makes the interview richer in content and experience.

4. **Has organized at least one parent-teacher event**

   A teacher that has created at least one event that included parents will be able to talk about their intention behind this organization. This experience allows the teacher to explain the importance of collaboration and communication with parents.
3.3.2 Sampling procedures

To recruit participants for my interviews I took a number of different routes. I mainly relied on purposeful sampling which is often the most common type of sampling (Marshall, 1996). In this type of sampling the researcher has a certain criterion that the participant has to meet and asks certain questions (Marshall, 1996). The individual that is being interviewed is often chosen based on practical knowledge in a certain area (Marshall, 1996). I decided not to do random sampling because participants would not be able the same type of insight into the research area to get in-depth qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). I wanted to choose individuals that maximize understanding of this area.

In order to choose my participants, I started off by attending the year two major research paper presentations related to English Language Learners. These presentations were very insightful and gave me an understanding of where I may be able to find ESL specialists. Many of the presenters discussed how they were able to find participants for their study so I followed their advice. I then further searched online to find teachers that may have written articles on the topic of English Language Learners. My third method was asking my associate teachers if they may know anyone that would match up with my criteria and from their I got a few recommendations. The associate teachers described the recommended individuals as being information rich which is exactly what purposeful sampling is about (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). I also made sure to introduce my topic in the staff room to see if anyone may be interested. I further asked teacher candidates for information about their own associate teachers in order to see if any of them fit my sampling criteria. It took a lot of searching to find three participants that met the criteria I was looking for.
3.3.3 Participant bios

My first participant is Lisa who is a Grade Three classroom teacher. She has been teaching for thirteen years in the Peel District School Board. She has been qualified as an ESL specialist for six years and has worked in the support role for five years in which three of the years were strictly ESL. The other two years was a combined model working with an Individual Support Services Plan (ISSP) teacher. Lisa speaks a bit of French but not enough that would benefit the job. The participant has done a lot of travelling in the past which has allowed her to understand what it is like to be in a foreign place where there is a language barrier. She has held a number of programs in order to connect with parents some of which included open houses, interviews, and Chat and Chai sessions. She has worked in both the segregated and mainstream classroom which fit in really well with my topic.

The second participant is Meera who is a 1.0 ESL teacher who supports students from Grades One to Eight. She has been a qualified ESL specialist since 2010, and has been working with a combined model which means ISSP and ESL teachers are working together. Meera has been teaching for five years. This participant can communicate in Punjabi and can understand Hindi, Urdu, and Gujarati. Her interest in teaching ESL is grew from her experience working at “We Welcome the World” program which deepened her interest in cultures around the world as well as learning how hard it is for families to settle into a new country. That background experience is what made her so passionate about connecting with parents to support students within the classroom. Her passion is what made her a really good participant for this research study.

The third participant is Berry who is a Grade Four teacher who has been teaching since 1997. She has had a lot of experience working with English Language Learners. She has had
experience teaching Grade Two, Three, Four, worked as a Vice Principle for over a year and also took part in a teaching exchange in Denmark. Berry has been qualified as an ESL specialist since 2005. She can speak in French, German, and as well as Danish. She found that these languages really help her teaching and growing up in a family where her mom was also an English Language support teacher really connected her more to this area of study. She has travelled a lot and she knows how it feels to be that student within the class that does not understand the language and has trouble understanding what is being taught because of the language barrier. This participant has had a lot of teaching experience so she was really excited to share it.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data that was collected in this research study was done by interviewing three primary/junior ESL specialists. The interviews were around forty-five to sixty minutes each. During the interview process I wrote notes which could not be collected using audio-recording, which include the body language of the interviewee, the work samples of students, the classroom setting, or any other additional sources the participants presented. The data analysis process included conducting an audio recorded semi-structured interview. Then followed by the interview transcriptions and decoding the information from the interview for a depth analysis. The transcription had to be read several times to get an overall good understanding of what was actually meant by it. Then I slowly went over each transcript to look for common themes amongst the three transcripts. The analysis involves identifying common themes, patterns, and concepts (Hossein, 2015). The data collected was able to highlight certain ideas but also provided strategies to teachers about how parent-teacher connections can be made within the classroom.
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

The Appendix A consent form goes over all of the ethical procedures that have been taken into account for the semi-structured interviews. By signing the consent form the participant agreed to be interviewed for forty-five to sixty minutes and gave consent to be audio-recoded during the interview. I have included a list of ethical procedures that were followed. All participants were given a pseudonym so that the identities remained confidential. All the information about school or students were not be included in this paper. In this study there are no known risks, but the participant was allowed to move on to the next question if he or she felt uncomfortable answering. Participants had the right to withdraw from participation at any stage. After the interview process I created transcripts, that the participants could look over in order to clarify or take away any statements before I move onto conducting the data analysis. All of the data that was collected is stored on my password protected laptop and it will be destroyed after five years. Refer to Appendix A for the consent letter.

3.6 Methodological Limitation and Strengths

There are limitations when it comes to semi-structured interviews. Given that my MTRP is about providing inclusive classrooms for ELLs and how teachers use parents as resources, I feel that it would have been beneficial to interview teachers, parents, and students. This would have given a better insight on how others feel about this area and not just the teacher’s view. It would have been interesting to see how parents felt about their communication or relationship with the teachers, and their views on how to connect with each other. With the limited number of teachers that can be interviewed the findings are not generalizable. One of the main limitations according to research is the risk of running out of time before being able to get to the real core of the topic, and as well as not being able to ask the right questions in order to focus on the issue
(Gugiu & Rodriguez, 2007). I really liked the idea of semi-structured interviews, but if it was followed up with an observation it would have been more insightful. Being able to see the strategies talked about in interview would have allowed me to see how students reacted to them. It would have also helped my own teaching practice.

The semi-structured interview has many strengths as well. Being able to interview teachers, the researcher can learn from the teachers’ experiences and allows for a more in-depth conversation. This gives a lot more details opposed to just a close questioned survey. Many professions use this protocol, such as psychiatric intervention decisions, physician assessments, and even law enforcement personnel’s (Gugiu & Rodriguez, 2007). One of the main reason this protocol is used so often is that it helps focus the data collection, reduce the tendencies of closing data before it is complete, focuses on general information with opportunity to go into specific data, and allows opportunity to search for information (Gugiu & Rodriguez, 2007). The interviews allow to dig deeper into matters that are most significant to the teacher. The researcher can be opened up to new areas of study through the conversation because their may be areas that were overlooked in the research. Allowing an interview allows the teacher to speak about his or her expertise and it allows the teacher to reflect on the topic. I find that this semi-structured interview is a great way to gain information and it is the most effective way to get a better understanding of how to prepare new teachers to provide inclusive classrooms.

3.7 Conclusion

The methodology for this research study is a qualitative approach which is the most suitable for gathering information about connecting with parents and supporting English Language Learners. Using purposeful sampling for the semi-structured interviews allowed to find participants that were able to share detailed information about the research topic. The three
participants were all primary/junior teachers, have taught ELLs for over three years, all qualified as ESL specialists, and have hosted at least one parent-teacher event. All of these criteria made for a good interview with great insight into the area of study. I transcribed the interviews and analyzed them. Next, in Chapter Four, I will report the research findings.
Chapter Four: Findings

4.0 Introduction to Findings

Chapter Four gives an overview of the important findings from the three interviews that were conducted. The three interviews were transcribed and then analyzed to find overlapping themes between the participants. All of the findings help answer the primary question which is, how are teachers providing inclusive classrooms for English Language Learners, and how they draw on parents as resources for supporting ELLs in mainstream classrooms? ELLs are a growing population within schools so understanding how to support these students, and resources available can help provide better teacher practice. The main emerging themes that were extracted from the transcriptions include:

1. Participants support ELLs through collaboration and specific teaching strategies that are informed by an understanding of how children acquire language.

2. Homeroom teachers have resource documents and experiences that factor in when integrating ELLs into the class.

3. Teachers indicated there are both strengths and limitations to the amount of support available when implementing the integration model for ELLs.

4. Teachers indicated communication and involvement with parents can enhance ELLs’ opportunities for academic success.

This chapter will dig deeper into these themes by dividing them into subthemes which will allow the research to be more focused. For each of the subthemes it starts off with a description of the participants’ views, these positions are compared to the other two participants and the finding are further analyzed to connect to literature from Chapter Two. All of these findings help answer the primary research question which will further be discussed in Chapter Five.
4.1 Participants Support ELLs Through Collaboration and Specific Teaching Strategies That Are Informed by an Understanding of How Children Acquire Language.

The teachers in this study acknowledged that allowing students to work together with peers and direct instructions by the teacher have an impact on how ELLs learn language. These findings allow new teachers to see different ways of proving inclusive classrooms for ELLs and can be a great starting point which can allow readers to form their own strategies. Within these themes, participants’ responses were further divided into the importance of instruction in vocabulary, opportunities for ELL collaboration and own understanding of language acquisition.

4.1.1 Teachers recognize that dedicated instruction in vocabulary that connects with students’ background knowledge plays a key role in supporting ELLs.

Pre-teaching vocabulary is important to the three participants and they found ways to make it a meaningful experience. Lisa shared that the biggest goal in teaching is the vocabulary and she is always finding ways to build on it. She stated that she finds that the best way to do modifications is doing what every kid needs anyways, which may look like having word walls instead of worksheets, and labelling diagrams. Meera and Berry’s thoughts on this topic were similar. Meera used simplified vocabulary, word banks and visuals to support reading passages, and found that these small modifications made a huge difference in supporting ELLs. She made sure she had resources available for students, such as visual prompts, sentence starters, and picture/bilingual dictionaries. Berry took a different route when explaining the importance of pre-teaching vocabulary. She narrowed down the importance of pre-teaching vocabulary to subjects like science, and social studies. She emphasized on the importance of connecting home language to the classroom. All of her supports of teaching vocabulary re-connected to families so sending vocabulary lists home with pictures, and providing videos in which students could share
with their families. Her pre-teaching vocabulary had a huge family aspect where she would provide the words needed, and then they would do “vocabulary work with their family so that it is supporting their first language development in addition to the academic language that they need in class.” Lisa and Meera’s focus was more on providing resources at home to help parents teach vocabulary. They both reasoned using simple materials like decks of word cards, and labelling in the house can get students thinking about words. All the participants talked about the importance of family connections by bringing in home language. Lisa found that although communication was key, “educators can’t just be teaching the vocabulary, and grammatical structure without the context because that’s not what the kids need.” There is much more to it and that is just one of the many things that provide support for students.

When integrating students in the classroom the Ministry documents state that pre-teaching vocabulary is essential for learning (Ministry, 2006). According to the documents teachers should start off with teaching vocabulary through visuals and slowly move to language based instructions (Ministry, 2006). Students learn best when they are exposed to vocabulary while at the same time making connections to between concepts in their first language (Ministry, 2006). By using these strategies, all the participants encouraged the use of first language within the classroom in a manner consistent with best practices.

4.1.2 *Teachers recognize that collaborating at school and at home can help maximize ELLs’ learning within the classroom.*

Providing students with collaborating opportunities with peers was one of the reoccurring themes by the participants. Meera stated that
ELLs bring a wealth of background knowledge, cultural experiences, linguistic abilities, and this can all be valued and honored, it should be in the classrooms. We can definitely learn from them and they bring so much, they add so much to our classroom.

Berry added onto this point, and stated that giving students lots of focused talk time in partners and in small groups can benefit everyone. She also mentioned that before selecting students’ groups it’s important to get to know the students individually to see who they work well with and making sure to cluster groups differently. Having the same groups was seen as detracting from students’ learning experiences. Lisa appeared to agree because she provided several opportunities with group work and discussion within her class. Meera brought up the discussion of getting parents involved, and letting them know the importance of collaborating and talking with ELLs. If teachers are using strategies at school that work, it’s important to let parents know so they could reinforce some of these strategies. Both Lisa and Berry had discussed about the notion of reinforcement as well. They indicated students would not progress if different strategies were emphasized within the school and home environment, so it’s important to keep these consistent.

In Reeves’ (2004) research, she mentioned that ESL classrooms provide more cultural diversity where as mainstream classrooms idealized norms. The participants in this study appear to disagree, and believe that having different cultures in the classroom are recognized and provides many different benefits. Diversity in the classroom is an asset. By giving students that exposure to dialogue it is noted that students will often develop oral fluency quicker (Ministry, 2006). Working in group settings is shown to have many benefits for the ELL and other classmates as well.
4.1.3 Teachers recognize that understanding principles of language acquisition can support teachers devise instructional strategies that can benefit ELLs.

The three teachers found that their understanding of language acquisition is what made them feel prepared to teach ELLs. Lisa mentioned that she always had a great interest in understanding language acquisition and how it worked to support students. She stated that if educators don’t have a background in understanding language acquisition, some teachers can see a child as lacking in skill or knowledge when really it’s just how they demonstrate it could be different. So I think that’s a barrier for a lot of people because teachers do need to modify how things are shown, and how the student can demonstrate their learning especially for ELLs because otherwise ELLs are going to be underestimated.

Meera and Berry both felt that they a good background in language acquisition and their courses prepared them for understanding how students developmentally think. Meera brought up an issue on this topic about how sharing this understanding of language acquisition is important because many people have this stigma about being an ELL. Parents often don’t want their child to be labelled as an ELL because it makes them different. Berry mentioned that once a person is an ELL they are an ELL for life but that’s nothing to be ashamed of, and that is an asset which can help in the long run. For example, knowing multiple languages can help in so many ways, and as an adult many want to learn other languages. Thus, Berry emphasized environment is not the only thing that’s important but sharing language acquisition with parents, and the students can really help support ELLs academic language development.

Reeves’ (2006) research speaks to exactly what the participants believe about the importance of understanding language acquisition. She suggests that professional development
and academic experience helps teachers build background knowledge about understanding ELLs at a deeper level (Reeves, 2006). Since many teachers lack this development they feel unprepared to teach and find it hard modifying tasks (Reeves, 2006). However, the teachers in this study felt quite prepared because of their specialty within this area.

4.2 Homeroom Teachers Have Resource Documents and Experiences That Factor in When Integrating ELLs into the Class.

When teaching a class with diverse learners a teacher’s prior experience and availability of resources can play a large role in the inclusivity of the classroom. This section depicts that not everyone has the same experiences or resources yet they are able to use what they have to make a difference to the students. The factors that helped support ELLs within the participants’ classrooms were their experiences, ministry documents, and their position on prioritizing ELLs.

4.2.1 Teachers’ academic and personal experiences heighten their awareness of how they can integrate ELLs in the classroom.

Teachers bring a wealth of experiences that effect why and how they teach. The three interviewees know at least one other language in addition to English, and that experience of attaining that language is what helped them understand some of the struggles when teaching ELLs. Lisa and Berry had mentioned the reason they felt so strongly about supporting ELLs was due to their own experience of being in a position where they didn’t know the language. In this case both teachers had a hard time travelling to different countries because knowing only English made every task difficult. Berry had taught in another country and the experience was different. The participant stated that “there was a lot of difficult times when I was in Denmark by myself. I was teaching in a class, where the kids did not understand me, and I had to learn the language in order to teach them.” Berry learned French, German, and Danish through travelling experiences.
Meera had a different story about learning a language but then losing it, and her regret of forgetting her language makes her understand how important it is to include it in her instruction. She stated,

I kind of regret losing it because I was fluent when I was younger, and through the years I lost it because it switched. Punjabi didn’t belong at school, why would a student speak Punjabi at school? But now I try to embrace it as much as possible, use any opportunity as a learning opportunity when we have our special cultural days where we dress up.

According to research, personal experiences are what forms beliefs which in turn effect learning how to teach and teaching itself (Richardson, 1996). The importance of being able to stay intact with language and culture was a belief brought up by all the participants. Their personal beliefs, and experiences showed how much they prioritized ELLs within the classroom.

The participants’ academic experience was another key area which was mentioned. The three members are ESL specialists, and have taken similar academic formal/informal courses on ELLs, and engaged in professional development. The three interviewees started off as ESL support teachers. Their experiences through school and the support roles they held helped them develop their understanding of supporting ELLs. Lisa believes that it is her “interest in actually understanding language acquisition, and how it all works that helps best support these students.” Whereas Meera and Berry’s experiences were different and emphasized on their interest in countries around the world, and that’s what made them move forward to taking courses on ELLs. They both teach in areas that were diverse which deepened their understanding. Meera and Berry mentioned the We Welcome the World Centre, which is a place where new immigrants and refugees go to get information about the country. Meera mentioned that she used to work there as a teacher assessor and became aware of all the resources that help support students and parents
that come from all around the world. She still uses these multilingual booklets to support students, and families. Berry became aware of these resources from the centre on her own and uses them to help support her classroom as well.

According to research, engaging in ELL specialized courses and workshops is important because they help build background knowledge that prepares teachers (Reeves, 2006). Many teachers do not feel prepared when coming in to teach a class where majority of the students are ELLs but these additional experiences can help build that confidence (Jong & Harper, 2005). Research suggests that teachers will have students of diverse backgrounds, and having less than eight hours focused on how to support ELLs makes teachers feel unprepared (Jong & Harper, 2005). The teacher interviewees all have different personal and academic experiences, and those are what help build passion and knowledge to continue moving forward with an open mind.

4.2.2 Ministry documents and well-known authors support teachers when planning different ways to integrate ELLs.

There were certain documents that stood out to the teachers throughout their academic experiences because of how helpful and informative they were. All three of the participants mentioned “The Step Document,” which is an Ontario curriculum specifically constructed for English Language Learners. Berry mentioned how during meetings it is the “Step Document” that was left out came off the table even though the majority many schools in that area have ELLs. Although the “Step Document” is necessary for integration there seems to be issues with how teachers use it or to what extent. Lisa mentioned that

[The] Step Document is great but what we tend to find is that there are a lot of students where they are progressing along the Step program so they may get to Step Three or so, and then they sort of stagnate there. They get stuck, and it tends to be those Canadian
born ELLs and its like they don’t have the foundation to be able to show their deep thinking and that’s a group of kids that seem to be missed because they are doing well enough that they are kind of just scraping by but they aren’t actually thriving.

This quote revealed a need for further research and investigation. The participants all seemed to suggest that they had many great documents but at the same time found that even with supports some students still missed out. Research focuses mainly on ELLs students who know very little English, but not those students who know English but not enough to excel.

Some other ministry documents mentioned by the participants included documents that were age or level specific such as: The Prior School Document, the Kindergarten curriculum expectations? and Supporting ELLs in Gr 1-8. Other documents were catered towards certain subjects like Supporting Your Children in Language, and Math documents. Some examples of formal documents mentioned were Ministry multilingual resources like pamphlets and Many Roots Many Voices. Overall, the three participants were aware that the Ministry provided useful resources that were accessible.

Other similarities between the participants were their use of articles and books from well known authors. The first, and third participants both mentioned work from Elizabeth Coelho, Jim Cummins, and Pauline Gibbons. Meera did not mention any authors but discussed online websites and blogs. She stated that her resources are “based on what’s needed at that moment” and they change for individual students.

Scholarly research indicates the importance of teachers knowing the resources available to them which will help the provide effective instruction for ELLs (Ministry, 1999). There are a number of resources mentioned in the Ministry document, and this curriculum mentions a few which include the “expertise of ELL specialist teacher and numerous publications providing
research updates” (Ministry, 1999, p. 3). The participants are using a number of the resources mentioned in research to stay up to date.

4.2.3 The educators’ own views and priorities shape the way they ELLs are integrated into classroom.

All three of the participants have a passion for teaching ELLs, and their interest was formed by their own personal experiences which lead to prioritizing ELLs. The three participants mentioned that the number one thing to remember is that the student’s first language should be used in the classroom. All the participants found that the use of a student’s first language made for a richer learning environment. Berry emphasized that her program prioritizes “how we can integrate students’ understanding of academic English in the classroom with the community of learners, so that students feel that the strength of their first language is acknowledged in their classroom.” She mentioned that we teachers are too focused on academic English in the classroom. Students should feel like they are valued, and that’s going to make them want to learn. Meera noted that encouraging first language “build[s] a student’s confidence.” Berry explained that teachers do not always allow the first language because they worry that students will be off task or the teacher feels uncomfortable not knowing the language of the student. The fear should not be there because ELLs just want to express themselves. According to Berry,

If the teachers sets the stage right, and the content of what they’re doing is really engaging…give them the opportunity to speak in their first language so at least they can think about it. They are talking about the activity because they want to be with the rest of the group.

These participants’ positions connect well to Brown and Howley’s (2014) research, which discusses how a teacher’s perceptions impacts the strategies implemented within the classroom.
A negative attitude means that a teacher is less likely to support those students and a positive attitude entails the opposite (Brown & Howley, 2014). All three of the participants have a strong belief that students in the classroom should be considered a privilege. Having that type of mindset is also mentioned within the ministry document. Students should feel like they are a “cultural asset in the classroom community” (Ministry, 2006, p. 26). All three participants encourage students to have those opportunities because they prioritize ELLs and value their strengths.

4.3 Teachers Indicated There Are Both Strengths and Limitations to the Amount of Support Available When Implementing the Integration Model for ELLs.

Being aware of these strengths and limitations can allow teachers to understand what benefits they get from ELLs within the classroom, and areas they may need to work around to try to make the most of what they have available to them. Often it can be challenging to cater the needs of all students so learning about what other experienced teachers have to share can help support own teaching practice. The participants in this study made it clear that group work and certain strategies are strengths that support all learners. It was also evident that the most common limitation the teachers faced was the time constraint and the amount of funding provided.

4.3.1 Teachers indicated that the integration model allows accessibility to group work.

When talking about the integration model it was evident that one of the benefits was students being able to work with peers and learning from them. All three of the participants agreed that group work played a role in learning. Out of the three participants, Berry was the one that went into the most detail about this benefit, whereas Meera and Lisa stated it was important but didn’t really explain how it benefited students. Berry stated that there was a need to have small and large group discussions in order to provide that talking and thinking time. When in a
class room setting “ELLs meet other people, and it helps them see things beyond their own frame of reference in their daily routines.” They need to be apart of the rest the group, and they don’t want to be by themselves and not understand content. Allowing group work and encouraging their first language in the class gives them that avenue to interact. Lisa and Meera emphasized on the importance of encouraging students bring their first language into the classroom. Lisa and Berry did mention pairing students up with students who spoke the language could be an option but that wasn’t always an option.

The participants’ statements on group work was quite similar to those of York-Barr, Ghere and Sommerness (2007), who mentioned that pulling students of the classroom often caused linguistic and racial isolation because they did not have that collaboration piece with other peers. Putting students into mainstream classrooms can help them learn to speak English faster and it can allow other students to learn from them (York-Barr, Ghere & Sommerness, 2007). The participants had the same explanation about why collaboration was necessary.

4.3.2 Teachers indicated that most of the strategies that support ELL support all learners.

When teaching students in the class, the three participants found that all students had unique needs no matter who they were. ELLs were no different than other students in the class who had needs that had to be met. Lisa found that “the best way to support is to do modifications that every kid needs anyways.” She mentioned differentiated strategies like having word walls, labelling, providing vocabulary lists, and anchor charts. Meera mentioned a few of the same strategies. The participants all emphasized on the fact that it was about differentiating but keeping the content the same. Meera believed greatly in assistive technology, such as Kurzweil, which is a text to speech software which reads out loud everything that is written. This simple accommodation is used in EQAO settings so she does not understand why it can’t be brought in
to support students in the class. She believes although it had high costs it was worth bringing in those resources to support students. Berry stated that it is all about instructional strategies given. Students can engage in the same discussions as everyone else, but the guiding questions and the groupings could be strategic. Whatever the teacher brings forward should be modeled so the students know what to expect and not just assuming everyone knows. Other strategies like simplifying instructions and providing visuals is not only important to ELL but many visual learners within the classroom as well. It’s the simple things like reading a book and even picking a book to read. Berry believes that books to teach students about celebration can be done in so many ways, instead of just reading *Curious George Celebrates Christmas*, teachers should also read *Curious George Celebrates Ramadan*. She emphasized talking about everything so everyone stays connected.

There are researchers like Carrasquillo and Rodrigues (2002) that have divergent views on this topic of providing instructions that support all learners. These scholars find that differentiated instruction is needed, and segregated English as a Second Language classrooms provide more one to one support that helps students’ language, although these researchers do believe that this is due to the academic knowledge these specialized teachers have in these segregated classrooms (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002). The three participants in this study are specialized, and have all had experiences within an ESL class and in a mainstream classroom. The participants practice shows how important ELLs are to them and this practice allows them to refer back to strategies they used in different settings.

4.3.3 *Time restrictions create a challenge in providing enough ELL support in a day.*

The three teachers agreed that there is a limited amount of time available to be able to support all the needs of an ELL within a day. Lisa stated “you are one teacher so even though I
can identify what a lot of my students need the challenge is giving them what they need all the time.” She said that she would probably have to teach a lesson six or seven different times to really reach everyone, but that’s impossible to do. Meera found that assistive technology can save so much time from a teacher, and provide students functions that a teacher wouldn’t be able to do. She believes that technology is great for all students. She also thinks being prepared by reading reports and OSRs can save a lot of that time teachers take trying to figure out what the student needs. Although this is Meera’s belief on helping with time, she did not specify that time is not a restriction. Berry recognized it is all about trying to manage the limited amount of time. She indicates that a teacher needs to prioritize time because is there is so much to be done, such as differentiating instruction, connecting to students, meeting parents, and so on. She stated that co-planning can often be a huge time saver. She addressed that getting lessons from others, and asking questions can save time to mark, call, or meet families. She does believe that, for the time frame given, the curriculum is far too dense and the Ministry doesn’t realize what the classroom experience is like. Teaching the curriculum with different students with special needs and others who do not speak English as a first language can be a challenge.

The participants’ concern about the lack of time brings out great concern because many of the documents, including the Ministry documents, provide many suggestions on supporting ELLs, and the main accommodation it reiterates is providing students with extra time on tests, and tasks (Ontario, 2006). It also mentions that the lack of time is one of the key barriers to having that bonding parent-teacher relation (2006). There thus seems to be a contradiction between how much needs to be done, how it should be done, and the amount of time a teacher is balancing with the students. All three of the participants concluded that this all comes with experience and it is a challenge all new teachers will face.
4.3.4 *Funding limitations create a challenge in providing resources like books and technology to ELLs.*

The three teachers found funding to be a great drawback when providing ELL students with resources. Lisa found that there are many resources to support students on the Step Program up until Step Three, but after that many of the students seem to stagnate and not move forward. She believes that the funding may be providing enough money just to support students who need immediate support, and not the ones who are doing well enough to move forward but are not actually thriving. Meera and Berry both agree with Lisa, and have found it is those students who are born in Canada who speak another language that get left behind. Meera found that technology is key to helping students but many programs, like the Reading Recovering program, can cost up to over six thousand dollars. She also finds that skills need to be reinforced at home to make progress, and these take home resources cost money which they don’t necessarily have. Berry argued that

[funding] for ELLs keeps getting smaller, even though ironically the population gets larger. If a person gets more funding they are going to get bigger status, which is what happens with special ed because there are students who need all of that extra support in special education. It’s connected to the law. Special education has a legal component to and ESL doesn’t have one. But in my opinion it’s a human rights issue. Its access to education.

She suggests that if parents of ELL were aware of the disparity within classrooms about the supports provided for ELLs the board of education would have a problem because not enough money is going towards these students. Berry believes that the mobilization of parents of special education is strong but when it comes to ELL its very difficult to have the mobilization of parent
support. Many of the parents are working two jobs or trying to make ends meet, and they don’t have the ability to connect with others because they are just learning what life is like in another country. The limitation of funding goes beyond just providing resources for these three teachers, and they do believe that more attention needs to be brought to this area.

Carrasquillo and Rodriguez (2002) have stated that separate ESL classrooms are federally funded so they can provide enough support needed to provide that bridge for students to learn language. The teachers in, Carrasquillo and Rodriguez’s study found that even when they were in separate ESL classroom they found the resources to be expensive. They found funding to be insufficient to cater the needs of all students within the classroom. The participants all found that there are a number of resources needed and these materials are very expensive. Participants believe there needs to be more money spent on this area due to the growing number of ELL students.

4.4 Teachers Indicated Communication and Involvement with Parents Can Enhance ELLs’ Opportunities for Academic Success.

There are a number of ways teachers can reach out to caregivers going beyond just sending home messages about students’ areas of improvement. Building connections beyond the classroom walls can have extraordinary outcomes which can allow teachers to better support ELLs within the mainstream classroom. This section goes over some of the different mediums teachers can use to communicate with parents, different kinds of home supports, and the academic achievement this collaboration can have on the student.
4.4.1 Teachers’ communication with parents can be adjusted to different mediums and circumstances.

When reaching out to parents, the three participants mentioned that it’s important to know that parents are a source of information and have experience with their child. Meera stated that as a teacher the job it to support the entire family and not just the student. The three teachers mentioned the struggle of connecting with all guardians because of the diverse backgrounds and beliefs they had when it came to the schooling system. There were many overlapping parent involvement strategies the teachers used, including sending messages or talking through phone calls, emails, and face to face interactions. They all agreed that face to face interactions worked best with ELL student’s parents because it helped ease the language barrier. They stated that the easiest methods to connect were interviews, volunteering, open houses, and parent-teacher meetings. The teachers all had a huge belief that this involvement so they included several other methods of interacting. Meera and Lisa both mentioned themselves hosting a Chat and Chai event. In this event parents came in and connected with others, and they had a chance to talk to educators where they could ask any questions they had. Both Meera and Lisa provided resources to families which would help support their children at home. Berry had also added on by talking about the special multicultural events hosted at her school. In this event parents would take initiative and teach students how to apply henna, play cricket, write Arabic calligraphy, and even engage in drumming circles. Although there are many mediums to connect Meera did mention an issue where she stated that “several family members say ‘I’m not educated’ and ‘you know, my husband drives a truck, and I work in a factory. How can I help him if I don’t know anything myself’”? The parents felt disconnected, and felt as if their experience was not valid enough to support the students learning. Meera and Berry had similar cases, and they all discussed how
guiding families through situations and going through step by step expectations is important. Just allowing them to understand that teachers are all there to support the child, and we can work on barriers together is key.

According to research parents could get involved in volunteering, attending functions, and assisting with homework (Hughes & Kwok, 2007), but the participants mentioned several other ways to connect. The importance of reaching out to families that was stated by participants, was also communicated in the Ministry document (Ontario, 2012). When parents start having that disconnect with student’s education because of their own comfort level is what many teachers believe not just these participants (Ontario, 2012). ELL families have experience with hostile unwelcoming environment which is often the cause of this discomfort (Duff, 2001). There are other barriers as well like the lack of time due to working long hours and self-consciousness of their own English speaking abilities (Ontario, 2012). Despite these challenges, the participants have mentioned many ways of providing settings where parents’ stress levels and discomfort are lower, where families can connect to not only the teacher but also other families within informal settings.

4.4.2 Communication with parents can result in different kinds of home support where parents work one on one with their child.

The members of this study were engaged in home involvement in several different ways. Lisa started off by explaining that “a huge part of my job is educating the parents in how our school system works, how the curriculum works, and ways they can support their children at home.” Meera and Berry would both agree with Lisa’s statement, and they all find that supporting students at home can make a huge difference on students’ learning. All three of the participants involve parents in their teaching, but in different ways. Lisa talked about how
caregivers often get overwhelmed when they see students’ homework that they may not necessarily understand or they were taught the subject in an entirely different way. She said she often “provides homework that either the kids can teach the parents what their supposed to do or its more rote based so the parents are more comfortable with that. There’s nothing wrong with that as homework.” She finds that providing this type of work takes the stress out that would really worry the families. Meera on the other hand focused on providing parents with resources to support their children at home which were mainly technology-based. She discussed caregivers’ engagement in using apps like I Excel, Kurzweil and Raz Kids was a lot higher than other types of activities that were sent home. Raz Kids, which is a site with books students can access online, was something parents enjoyed and she often provided parents questions in their home language that focused on the main events of the book. This allowed students to understand the book and allowed parents to connect with content in a language they were more comfortable interacting in. Berry used a strategy that connected to both Lisa and Meera’s strategies. She used Google classrooms to share class content with parents. Everything that was being taught in school was posted on the online platform. This allowed family members to talk to their children about it in their home language. Berry found that posting this information on the site allowed for a deeper and richer conversation the following day. She had instances where children were teaching each other in their home languages because that’s how they were taught by their parents which helped other students understand. All three of the participants involved family in their everyday school life but in their own ways which fit their own teaching styles. The three participants agreed that parents don’t know what to do or how to help unless the teacher asks for their support and provides resources.
The participants found that parents’ comfort level of supporting children at home varied. Prior research also mentioned that involvement of parents varied depending on the parents’ age, and ethnicity (Turney & Kao, 2009). None of the participants described the types of parents that were involved. The main correlation was that many ELL parents worked multiple jobs so they had a limited amount of time to get involved. In those cases, the participants found other ways to communicate. This may be a gap in this research study because of the lack of information about the types of parents that got involved. This may be an area that can be further studied.

**4.4.3 Teachers’ communication with parents can result in higher ELL success in school.**

The three teachers all found ways of connecting to parents in their own ways because they all found that this involvement lead to the student’s success in the classroom. The three participants found themselves telling most ELL caregivers that speaking their home language at home is essential to allowing students to understand English. Similar to what Lisa quoted, “literacy is literacy no matter what language it’s in.” The three participants found it a part of their job to go above and beyond just academics, and letting parents know about all the resources that can help support their children. Whether it was about activities that were present in the recreational center, outside school programs, and even interacting about summer plans. They all found it a part of the job. Meera emphasized on the importance of early parental connections, she stated the need for “more supports earlier on so that when the student’s in higher grades they are not struggling as much.” The parent partnerships are key to students’ success, and she found that a teacher can empower parents, give students the tools to learn and the rest is up to the family. Berry describes this involvement as “connected community of learners where, in order for kids to be successful, their parents need to know what is expected of them. Many of the families in this community have different learning skills at home.” Ensuring that parents are making sure
they are thinking of kids being responsible for themselves and have the same goals in mind as the teachers is important. Many parents think of school and the home environment as separate pieces because that’s how they grew up, but Berry explained that it’s important to tell parents that in an Ontario school system we expect parents to support students in the class. Working together can make the process easier for teachers, parents, and can have the best results for the student.

According to researchers, parent involvement results in student achievement, more student motivation, higher emotional, social, and behavioural improvements (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). The participants in this study saw great achievements in their students which is why they all continue to get parents involved. Similar to research they found that connecting with parents built trust, mutuality, and support which helped in the school environment (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). Those connections allowed for more learning opportunities.

4.5 Conclusion Based on Findings

In conclusion, the findings in this study show that teachers are able to provide inclusive settings for English Language Learners through their instructional teaching strategies, resources, and prior experiences. One of the key elements that was found is that it is up to the teacher how they may want to involve parents into the education realm, but it is evident that this collaboration has positive outcome on students’ school success. One significant finding of this study is that there is a gap in available teacher support for Canadian-born English Language Learners beyond Step Three on the Step Document. Canadian-born ELL students were often not getting the support they needed after they succeeded to Step Three because they were seen to do well enough to not have that one on one support, but did not excel enough to get high grades. They are seen to stagnate in their progress from that point forward. A lot of the literature from Chapter Two resonates with the findings from these interviews, although there were some contradictions
on how to provide ELL students with teacher support that required more time, and materials, when both time, and funding were lacking. Looking forward, there needs to be more research done on Canadian-born ELL students who do not get the support needed, and how the limitations within the integration model could allow for this support.

Next in Chapter Five, there will a discussion about the implications of these findings, a few recommendations and what the possible next steps could be for future research.
Chapter Five: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

Chapter Five, first highlights the key findings from the previous chapter. These key findings assisted in answering my main research question: “How are teachers using parents as resources to support ELLs?” In this chapter, I then discuss the implications of the educational research community, and my professional identity and practice. These implications are taken into consideration and utilized to provide recommendations to support ELLs to ensure that the best learning outcomes are in place. Finally, the chapter identifies areas requiring further research and ends with my concluding comments.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

Four themes emerge from my research findings. What follows is a statement of each theme, and a description of how these results are relevant and meaningful to my primary research question.

Participants support ELLs through collaboration and specific teaching strategies that are informed by an understanding of how children acquire language. All of the participants noted that ELL students learn a lot more when they connect vocabulary to their first language. Encouraging the use of first language and allowing students to work in group settings can help build student confidence. The participants’ observations were parallel to those findings noted in literature, which emphasized that taking the time to teach vocabulary through visuals and not solely relying on verbal instruction, can be helpful to ELLs (Ministry, 2006). The participants stated that teachers need to understand the psychology of language acquisition and development. This knowledge can effectively assist teachers in coming up with strategies to support ELLs in the classroom.
Homeroom teachers have resource documents and experiences that factor in when integrating ELLs into the class. The participants’ personal and academic experiences lead them to prioritize, and value ELL students. These educators found that their additional qualifications and development sessions made them aware of all the ministry documents that are available to support them. Once again, research agrees with the participants’ views and acknowledges that extra courses build the background knowledge necessary to inform teacher practice (Reeves, 2006). There are so many resources available that provide strategies for educators and that can be used in the classroom to support ELLs. One great example is the Step Continuum document which provides many different strategies to support ELLs at different stages.

Teachers indicated there are both strengths and limitations to the amount of support available when implementing the integration model for ELLs. The teachers that were interviewed have a lot of experience working with ELLs and are in professional teaching positions that support ELL students. As a result, they were well informed about the differences between mainstream and segregated classrooms. They found that the integration model (i.e., mainstream classrooms) can be greatly beneficial to both ELLs and other learners. For example, this model provides opportunities for group work, which allows all students to learn from their peers diverse backgrounds and experiences. Many scholarly research studies found that this integration model allows students to learn English faster and build on skills that would be impossible in the withdrawal model (i.e., segregated classrooms) (York-Barr, Ghere & Sommerness, 2007). Nonetheless, despite the many benefits of the integration model, some limitations include the lack of time available to educators and the lack of funding for ELL specific materials.

Teachers indicated communication and involvement with parents can enhance ELLs’ opportunities for academic success. Parents often visit teachers only after report cards are
distributed or through phone calls *after* a classroom incident. However, participants found that this retrospective communication is ineffective. Participants stated that it is important to have ongoing interactions with parents. One way of facilitating this interaction is providing different settings and mediums in which parents can engage in. The literature mentions challenges that ELL parents and teachers face when attempting to connect, including conflicting schedules, the lack of a common language or simply an unwillingness from one party to meet. However, this research also stated the overwhelming importance of and need for this communication (Ministry, 2012). Support from an ELL student’s home can provide many academic benefits for the ELL students, including a seamless learning transition from school to home.

5.2 Implications

This section discusses the implications from my research finding. I have divided this section into two parts: (1) overview of the problems with the educational research community, and (2) findings for my personal identity, and practice.

5.2.1 The educational research community

The research findings have many implications for ELL students, classroom teachers, parents, and even school boards which are all looking to support ELL students’ learning.

The first implication is that not all teachers understand the psychology of language acquisition and development. Without this knowledge it is very difficult to come up with strategies to support ELLs within the classroom. This difficulty is amplified when that same educator is placed in a busy classroom with many students at different levels on the “Step continuum” (Ministry, 2012). As a result, ELLs can be overlooked and given work that is not tailored to their specified needs. It is important to recognize that ELLs learn faster if they are given opportunities to connect the information they are *trying* to learn to knowledge that they
have already mastered (Ministry, 2006). Nonetheless, segregating ELL students is not necessarily the solution. ELL designated classrooms do not allow students with the opportunity to talk to other students, and often involve an exercise in memorization and repetition.

All three participants mentioned the importance of setting aside enough time to integrate ELL specific teaching strategies and develop ELL specific lesson plans. The participants informed me of the difficulty faced by new teachers attempting to come up with lessons for the entire class and then also accommodating ELL learners. This time constraint can take away from an educator’s ability to support ELLs. It can also limit the educator’s ability to build connections with others in the school and effectively communicate with parents. In fact, parents are often unincorporated until report card interviews or when the child is involved in an incident. Parents need to be informed of the child’s learning so that they can facilitate and implement this learning at home (Ministry, 2006). Unfortunately, their awareness of their child’s progression is often dependent on the teacher’s discretion to reach out and inform them (Ministry, 2006). According to the participants, an important thing to note, is that ELLs often come from a family unit in which their parents are also ELLs. As a result, they may not necessarily reach out to a teacher because they don’t understand the Ontario education system. There are a number of barriers that teachers and parents may face when trying to build connections with each other. For example, a teacher may reach out to a parent but the parent does not want to, or is unable to connect with student’s education.

The last implication is that school boards provide teachers with limited funding to purchase ELL specific resources. No matter how hard a teacher tries to help students it can be very difficult to do this without the necessary tools and materials (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002). According to participants there is an interesting dynamic between the funding offered to
classrooms utilizing an integrated verse withdrawal classroom model. Integrated classrooms often lack materials needed for ELL students. This is because their funding needs to be stretched amongst a larger group of students with diverse learning needs. Participants says that ESL classrooms, which are ELL specific, are able to offer a well-funded infrastructure focused on ELLs. This is because ESL educators are often able to accumulate materials over duration of time in anticipation of a smaller class size with students who have similar learning needs.

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice

This study is very important to me because, as a teacher candidate, I want to go into the field knowing I am capable of supporting all students in the classroom. ELLs are a growing demographic within classroom settings and I want to ensure that I am able to cater to their needs. This study helped me understand the significant implications that parent-teacher connections have for ELLs. Its important for me to acknowledge that as a teacher I am not an isolated agent of education. In order to support an individual child, I must facilitate their teaching strategy within an infrastructure that works with the child’s entire family. I have always had an interest in how teachers communicate with parents. It is my belief that this parent-teacher relationship is a partnership between two parties that should have a common interest—the educational success of the child. I have learned a lot about different ways of connecting, communicating, and reaching out to parents so that they understand how essential this partnership is to student success in the classroom.
5.3 Recommendations

There are a number of challenges teachers face when trying to support ELLs in the classroom. The following list of recommendations can assist teachers in feeling comfortable and confident:

1. *New Teachers are encouraged to undertake professional and academic experience that focuses on the science of language acquisition.* For example, new teachers often do not have enough experience with working with ELLs so a professional workshops and courses can provide them with the knowledge necessary to facilitate strategies that can benefit ELLs.

2. *Educators should encourage the use of a student’s first language and reinforce group work in the classroom.* When students are able to connect concepts to a language they already understand they are able to learn faster. For example, students can be taught vocabulary through the use of pictures with labels both in English and the student’s first language as a reference point. In addition, educators should allow both ELLs and other students the opportunity to work in groups so that they are able to learn from each other. It is important to remember that, many of the strategies that support ELLs can support *all* learners.

3. *New Teachers should co-plan with experienced teachers.* Time limitations can be an issue for new teachers. As a result, one strategy to save time is to co-plan lesson plans with experienced teachers. Innovative and creative learning strategies need not always involve reinventing the wheel. Often, fellow educators are happy to assist new teachers with great lesson plans to help them save time. This saved time can then be reinvested in connecting with parents.

4. *Educators and parents should build strong connections.* The importance of parent teacher-connections cannot be emphasized enough. This communication can facilitate seamless
learning for the student from school to home. Parents may disconnect from student education for various reasons. They may not feel comfortable, have time constraints or, like their children, are also ELLs. Whatever the reason may be, it is recommended that the teacher provides different opportunities, and mediums to connect with parents in both formal and informal settings.

5. *School boards should increase funding for ELLs.* There are many resources that teachers can use to support ELLs. However, access to these resources are dependent on a school boards willingness to invest in them. An important thing to keep in mind is that because such material can be expensive, a teacher in an integrated model classroom may not have the means to prioritize ELL specific materials over other resources. As a result, school boards should allocate a budget that is responsive to the diverse needs of their students.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Despite this study, it is evident that there is still not enough research undertaken on the importance of parent-teacher connections, specifically in the context of ELLs. Much of the research in this area focuses on broad brush communication strategies. There is little, if any, emphasis on an educator’s duty to tailor communication to the diverse needs of their students and their students’ parents. The opportunity to focus on ELLs allowed me to dig deeper into how parent-teacher connections can assist in language acquisition. My research provides a different perspective on communication; however, there are many areas that need to be further investigated.

In the course of this research paper, studies mentioned that there have been a few research studies undertaken on the importance of parent involvement within schools for ELLs.
However, this research is limited and lacks comparisons between ELL families from different cultural backgrounds. Does parent involvement differ because of cultural beliefs, or do similar experiences have a bigger impact on this participation? Statistics comparing different cultural groups can help understand the reasons behind parents’ motives on connecting or detaching from the school environment. These parents may have limited time due to employment obligations or they may not feel comfortable conversing in English; however, until such a study is undertaken, one cannot say why one ELL parent is more or less engaged than another. Such a study would necessarily involve interviewing ELL parents in order to allow a glimpse into the life of an ELL parent.

Participants in my interviews also outlined another area of research that is often neglected. They mentioned that many ELL students that are recognized as requiring support are those students that have immigrated to Canada. Students that were born in Canada and have parents that do not speak English are often overlooked as ELL’s because of their residency in the country. As a result, there is gap in the amount of support available and the amount of research done on the area of Canadian-born ELLs. According to participants, Canadian-born ELLs are often not low enough on the Step continuum to flag to teachers that they are in need of support. However, as a consequence, participants felt that these students “scraped by” and never reach their full potential. I feel that further research would help address this issue and help understand why this may be the case.

5.5 Concluding Comments

This research study has informed my knowledge about different ways to support ELLs. Building connections with families can have a positive influence on the overall achievement of the student. Through doing this research I found that many ELL educator and research scholars
believe that integrating ELLs into a mainstream classroom can be a challenge for inexperienced teachers. New educators will inevitably be faced with the daunting task of assisting a diverse set of students through their educational journey. However, taking that extra step as an educator to inform your own learning practice, and equip yourself with the tools necessary to support this diverse classroom can make all the difference to the students’ overall success. This is an area that can only be improved if students, teachers, parents, and school boards work together to prioritize ELLs. Participants observed that many ELLs are “scraping by” without being able to showcase their full potential. This research study was my first step into a long-term teaching strategy that does not allow ELLs to be an after thought. It was meaningful to me in that it gave me insight into an area that is inevitably important in our quintessentially diverse Canadian landscape. This area needs to be further researched, in order to inform others about the significance of supporting learners who are often overlooked in the crowd.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

Date: _______________________________

Dear ________________________________,

My Name is Tarndeep Sodhi, 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 how teachers use parents as resources to support English Language Learners. I am interested in interviewing teachers who are currently working in a primary school setting, have worked with ELLs for more than three years, qualified as an ESL specialist, and have hosted at least one parent-teacher organization. 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 Dr. Angela MacDonald. 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,

Tarndeep Sodhi
Researcher
Tarndeep.sodhi@mail.utoronto.ca

Dr. Angela MacDonald
Course Instructor
Angela.MacDonald@utoronto.ca

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 Tarndeep Sodhi, 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: Teacher Interview Questions

**Introductory Script**
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This study aims to learn more about how teachers use parents as resources to support English Language Learners. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and will ask you a series of questions focused on your own experience with 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 anytime. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Background Questions**
1. What is your current teaching position?
   a. What grades / subjects do you teach?
   b. Can you tell me about the school where you work? (e.g. size, demographics, program priorities)
   c. Approximately what percentage of the students in your school are ELLs?
2. How long have you been teaching for?
3. Do you speak any other languages other than English?
4. For approximately how many years have you been teaching English Language Learners?
5. Currently how many English Language Learners are in your classroom?
6. What experiences have contributed to developing your commitment to supporting ELLs, and preparing you for this work?
   a. Personal experiences?
   b. Educational experiences? (e.g. studies, teachers college, additional qualifications, professional development)
   c. Professional experiences? (e.g. experience working with high numbers of ELLs or in schools with a high percentage of ELLs)

**Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs**
1. What do you believe are the strengths, and limitations of integrating ELLs in the mainstream classroom?
2. What do you believe are the strengths, and limitations of pull-out models of ELL support?
3. In your view, what are the key needs of ELLs, and what barriers are they facing in schools?
4. From your perspective, how well is the school system addressing these needs, and barriers? Please elaborate.
5. In your view, how could the school system further address these needs, and barriers?
6. From your perspective, what are some of the key considerations that teachers need to make in order to support ELLs?
7. As a criteria of participation, you indicated that you draw on parents as resources for supporting ELLs. Can you please tell me more about why you do this? What do you believe are the benefits of connecting with parents to support ELLs?

Teacher Practices
1. Can you describe for me how you generally work to support English Language Learners within your classroom?
   a. What instructional strategies do you use to support ELLs in your classroom, and why?
   b. Can you describe some examples of how you have differentiated your instruction to meet the needs of your ELL students?
   c. What outcomes do you observe from your ELL students?
   d. How, if at all, do you differentiate your assessment for ELLs?
2. Have you ever felt in a position where you felt unprepared to teach the ELLs in your care? If yes, please elaborate.
3. You indicated that you draw on parents as resources for supporting ELLs. Can you please tell me more about how you do this? *listen, and probe for specific details (e.g. communicate in person or by email, phone? What do they communicate with them about – student interests? Books or digital media they like? Etc.)
4. Can you describe a few examples for me of how you have worked with parents to support your ELLs?
5. What have you experienced as some of the benefits of this collaboration? What outcomes have you observed from your ELLs?
6. Does your experience connecting with parents of ELL students differ from your relationships with other parents? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?

Supports, and Challenges
1. What resources help support you in the work you do with your ELL students? (e.g. books, websites, videos, songs, ELL support workers, guest speakers, volunteers)
2. How did you become aware of the resources available to you for supporting ELLs?
3. What factors enable you to connect with parents the way you do? (e.g. school climate, admin support, languages spoken etc.)
4. What challenges do you encounter in your work supporting ELLs? How do you respond to the challenges you face?
5. What challenges, if any, do you encounter drawing on parents as a resource for supporting ELLs? How do you respond to these challenges?

Next Steps
1. Is there any other information you would like to share about your experience working with English Language Learners, or your parent-teacher connections with their parents?
2. What advice, if any, do you have for new teachers who are committed to supporting their English Language Learners, and drawing on parents as a resource.

Thank you for your participation in this research study.