Culturally Relevant Pedagogy with English Language Learners: 
Incorporating Identity in the Classroom

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Abstract

Toronto prides itself on its cultural and linguistic diversity. In spite of this perceived strength, many English language learners’ (ELL) voices are being silenced in monolingual classrooms because their home language(s) are not viewed as an asset. They are only seen for what they lack: the English language. Research has shown that in order to support these students, the way forward is with culturally relevant teaching (CRT). Despite the fact that this teaching strategy is widely discussed, it has become a cliché with a diluted meaning. Researchers have not settled on one single term for this pedagogy, let alone a meaning. My primary research question is: How does a small sample of general elementary teachers design their classroom experience to support English language learners in ways that validate their first language identity and what outcomes do they observe? Through three semi-structured qualitative interviews, my findings reveal the importance of building strong relationships with students’ family and their home language, creating learning communities with educators’ peers, being aware of the socio-emotional needs of students and challenging teacher bias. These are some of the ways that teachers can support ELL students in inclusive and meaningful ways.

Key Words: English Language Learner, ELL, English as a Second Language, ESL, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, CRP, Identity
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1.0 Introduction - Research Context

Out of the 1.1 million newcomers to Canada during the 2001-2006 period, Ontario was the province of choice for more than half (52.3%); more than half of these newcomers will settle into the areas outside Toronto (Statistics Canada, 2005). With a population over two and a half million people, Toronto is considered to be one of the world's most culturally and linguistically diverse cities (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). In fact, Toronto’s motto is “Diversity: Our Strength” (City of Toronto, n.d.). In 2004, Toronto placed second on the “List of World Cities with the Largest Percentage of Foreign-Born Population”, created by the United Nations Development Programme (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012).^1^ As a result, classrooms are becoming more diverse as the number of English language learners (ELLs) increases. More and more teachers are faced with the task of meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Purdy, 2008). In Ontario, there are more than 200 languages that are listed as one’s maternal language (Statistics Canada, 2005). Specifically, in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), more than 50% of their students speak a language other than English at home (n.d.). Given that this figure cannot be ignored, we are now faced with our research problem: how to support students with diverse cultural and linguistic identities.

1.1 Research Problem

Despite Toronto’s celebrated diversity, it can also be a linguistic graveyard for the home languages of countless children (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). Students’ home languages can be undermined with both intentional and/or inadvertent messages. “Education is supposed to make

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^1^ Miami was the city who placed first, but Toronto’s foreign-born populations is significantly more diverse, as Miami’s foreign-born population is mostly Hispanic and Haitian.
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children more than they were, but, in the case of bilingual children, it was often making them less than they were” (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012, p. xiii). When a classroom is monolingual, it silences the voices of immigrant children. They are demoted to the position of a novice language learner with primitive forms of communication. They are often discouraged and quickly understand that their home language does not matter in the classroom.

If we look at the language and literacy needs of immigrant children, as outlined in policy documents and curriculum guidelines, they are often characterized as superficial with many professionals unsure of what will work best in their context (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). When the institution fails students, they check out mentally and emotionally. Eventually they are pushed out and some even become “drop outs” (Hollie, 2012, p. 24).

Gloria Ladson-Billings coined the term Culturally-Relevant Teaching (CRT) which Ladson-Billings (2009) defines as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 20). Given this definition, how does that actually translate into the day-to-day classroom? What does CRT look like in the Toronto District School Board with a heterogenous group of students?

Moreover, how does language play into identity? “Language, then, is not merely representational (though it is that), it is also constitutive. It actually creates realities and invites identities” (Johnston, 2004, p. 9). As students learn new content and new literacies, how does that shape one’s identity in positive and meaningful ways?
1.2 Purpose of the Study

In view of this issue, the goal of my research is to learn how general elementary classroom teachers implement CRT through the design of their classroom experiences, that include language learners in what they consider to be meaningful and inclusive ways. I want to examine how teachers support their students to become confident in their cultural and linguistic identities, and to help them find their own voice in both the classroom and the world. I aim to share these findings with the educational research community in order to further inform instructional support for ELLs.

1.3 Research Questions

My principal research question is: How does a small sample of general elementary teachers design their classroom experience to support English language learners in ways that validate their first language identity and what outcomes do they observe for students? Following this, my subsequent research questions are:

• What range of resources do these teachers draw on to support this work and how do they access these?

• What instructional strategies do they consider to be most effective and why?

• What challenges do teachers face and how do they overcome them?

1.4 Background of the Researcher

I am someone who has had the privilege of being educated in my first language. The Language Arts was a subject area where I succeeded in school, as well as enjoyed. I spoke English at home and spoke English at school. It was easy for me to transfer my knowledge from one social sphere to another. However, my grandmother’s maternal language was French. She
had several children, became a widow and then remarried, to my grandfather. They continued to
grow their family, of which my mother is the second youngest. Since my grandfather was Irish,
his family did not like my grandmother speaking French in the home. Therefore, my mother
never learned French, despite the fact that some of her older siblings did. Growing up, I was
always confident in my English abilities, but I always questioned how my life would be different
if I was confidently bilingual.

I studied French in school, like most Canadian children. I was placed in the “Core
French” stream, which in my humble opinion, was a joke. All I remember was completing
grammar sheets and very basic vocabulary. I was not forced to speak and as a result my
confidence in speaking the language was greatly diminished. At the time, I did not realize the
impact it would have on me, but now as an adult, I realize the loss that I experienced by not
being immersed in this second language.

When I was 24 years old, I moved to Montreal, QC to live and work on my own.
Montreal is a very unique city in which there truly is a sense of bilingualism. Depending on the
area that you are exploring, the language can change and the culture with it. I found it a
fascinating place to live because there was a unique blend of comfort to speak English when
necessary, but also a push to make the experience what you want - meaning if you want to learn
or improve your French, you can do that too.

In the year prior to starting the Master’s of Teaching program, I worked one-on-one with
a Grade 7 Korean student who was learning English. I put myself in her shoes and I developed a
strong interest in learning how I can better support my future ELL students through inclusive
instructional practices. I recognized that she did not fit the homogeneous groupings in the private
school and therefore appeared to be on the peripheral often. It is my goal to create a culturally relevant and responsive classroom so that students can feel welcome, safe and therefore included in the group so that they can learn and grow and experience success.

1.5 Overview/Preview of the Whole MTRP

This qualitative research project is organized into five chapters. In Chapter 2, I review the existing literature looking through these lenses: what is culturally relevant pedagogy? Who are the English Language Leaders in our classes? Finally, how does an identity form, especially in light of family, culture and language? In Chapter 3, I describe the research methodology and include information about the participants, the data collection, and limitations. In Chapter 4, I report and discuss the research findings. Finally, in Chapter 5, I review the implications of the findings and make recommendations for future directions. References and a list of appendixes are found at the end.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature in the areas of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), English Language Learners (ELLs), identity, and instructional strategies for ELLs. I start by defining CRP, as well as reviewing the existing literature surrounding the topic. Next, I explore who ELLs are, and I consider why they are an important part of the Canadian classroom. Finally, I discuss identity and how it shapes students’ lives through the lenses of family, culture and language.

2.1 Defining Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)

The first step on the road to understanding is defining the salient terms, so that everyone can start on the same page. There are a lot of terms that are connected to culturally-relevant pedagogy. Here are a few examples: culturally-relevant teaching, culturally-responsive pedagogy, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, culturally compatible teaching, culturally connected teaching, culturally appropriate teaching (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). The list goes on. I will begin with the most common definitions and then I will settle on the definition I will be using for the purposes of this study.

It is difficult to go very far on the topic of culturally-relevant teaching (CRT) without encountering the name of Gloria Ladson-Billings. She coined the term in her foundational text *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (1994). In her ethnographic study, Ladson-Billings explores the teaching practices and philosophies of eight exceptional teachers who work with African American students. Ladson-Billings (2009) defines culturally relevant teaching as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially,
emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 20). Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (1995) explains CRT in terms of three central criteria: *academic success, cultural competence,* and *critical consciousness*. First of all, academic success requires that teachers hold high expectations of their students and help them in fulfilling their full potential (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Secondly, in order to achieve cultural competence, teachers must encourage their students to engage with their own social, cultural and political knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Finally, for critical consciousness, teachers must help their students to think critically by questioning and challenging dominant systems of power (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The next prominent author on CRT was Geneva Gay (2010), who defined culturally responsive teaching “as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 31). In both Ladson-Billings and Gay’s definitions, there is an emphasis placed on the students’ abilities and needs from diverse backgrounds in order to make learning more accessible, engaging and challenging.

Due to the multiple definitions and multiple labels, CRP has become a cliché with a diluted meaning (Hollie, 2012). Without a firm foundation, there have been obscure attempts at its implementation. For example, at the district level, focused on professional learning; at the school level, focused on curriculum initiatives; at the classroom level, focused on instructional strategies (Hollie, 2012). These attempts can come across as superficial, especially when they are done in isolation and approached as a single-tiered method, instead of a multi-tiered approach.
For the purposes of my research, I will be focusing on culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (CLR). I want to emphasize the language aspect of culture, as language is a representation of our heritage (Hollie, 2012). Additionally, I am interested in pedagogy as to the how and why of teaching, and the rationale behind one’s instructional decisions (Hollie, 2012). Through the approach of CLR, the educator is able to validate and affirm the home, or indigenous, language of the student so as to build a bridge for the student to success (Hollie, 2012). The approach allows the teacher to jump into the pool with the learner, guide them with appropriate instruction and allow them independence when they’re ready; it is the opposite of the “sink-or-swim” approach (Hollie, 2012). “Affirmation is the intentional and purposeful effort to reverse the negative stereotypes of nonmainstream cultures and languages portrayed in historical perspective” (Hollie, 2012, p. 23).

It is important to note that CRT can be implemented across various disciplines, not simply the subject area of language arts. For example, Ukpokodu (2011) discusses how CRT can and must be woven into mathematics. One of the examples used in their article is the topic of social justice in the classroom, such as the issues of prison and incarceration rates.

2.1.1 Challenges of implementing CRP

The reality facing most of the ELL students is that, “Instruction that is not tailored to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds brings about negative academic outcomes” (Faez, 2012, p. 69). Both the content and instructional practices in North American classrooms promote a Eurocentric world view, which is only responsive to white middle-class students (Banks, 2006; Coelho, 2004). Many scholars and educational institutions have called for instruction that is
sensitive to the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of ELLs (Banks, 2006; Coelho, 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 2007, 2008).

Furthermore, many educators hold beliefs, attitudes and mindsets that are deficit oriented (Hollie, 2012). This means that students are often blamed as the problem. Some examples a deficit mindset include, “If we had better students, then we would have better schools”; “Our schools were good until they started coming here”; “Everyone seems to be doing well except for those kids” (Hollie, 2012, p. 31). Instead of seeing students and what they bring culturally and linguistically as an asset, they are often seen as a liability. If this is the current reality, it is evident that a shift in thinking needs to take place. But the question is: how does this take place? How do you lead people to change their way of thinking?

If the idea of CRT seems ideal, why would it not be implemented across all boards in Canada? Despite the fact that CRT has many benefits, it remains difficult to determine exactly what culturally relevant teaching looks like in the day-to-day classroom. Shared backgrounds and empathy are insufficient for equipping teachers to provide support and targeted instruction for ELLs (Faez, 2012).

2.2 Determining Who English Language Learners (ELLs) Are

Understanding who is in the class is a first step to understanding how to support them. Who is in the classroom? Who are the English language learners (ELLs)? As noted in the previous chapter, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) recognizes that more than 50% of their students speak a language other than English at home (TDSB, n.d.). The Ontario Ministry of Education defines ELLs as:
students in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario’s schools, and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English (2007, p. 8).

Adding onto this definition, the Ontario MOE (2007) states that an ELL can be born in Canada or recently arrived from another country. Students who do not have English as their maternal language, who are born in Canada may include Aboriginal students, students in communities with distinct cultural and linguistic heritages, and students born into communities with distinct immigrant communities (Ministry of Education, 2007).

According to research, 20.6% of Canadians are immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2011). Researchers have found that beyond the two official Canadian languages, English and French, the most popular ones to follow are Chinese dialects, Tagalog, Spanish and Punjabi (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Given our diverse and multicultural society, this is a reality that is reflected in our classrooms. Canadian classrooms are filled with unique, heterogenous and divergent students who bring their own backgrounds and experiences with them. Teachers need to adapt to the changes taking place in the world and in the classroom, and adopt teaching strategies and curriculum that engages their students in dynamic and imaginative ways.

Within the TDSB, they offer several options for students, depending on their age and ability. First of all, they distinguish the difference between English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Language Development (ELD). ESL programs are available for students who are able to read and write in their own language, but have limited English language skills. ELD
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programs are for students who have had limited prior schooling and don’t have age-appropriate skills in any language (Toronto District School Board, n.d.). The objective is to ensure that students do not fall behind academically because of a poor command of English, therefore there is a need for content-based knowledge as well as an ability to communicate in the second language (Gandara, 1999).

One of the programs that the Ontario Ministry of Education has implemented is a program called STEP (Steps to English Proficiency). It is a framework used by educators to assess and monitor the language acquisition and literacy development of ELLs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). The aim of this program was to allow students to learn English while also learn the Ontario curriculum simultaneously. Students are given an initial assessment and then they would have ongoing assessment, to continue to monitor their progress.

Another ELL program available for newcomers is called LEAP. The acronym stands for Literacy Enrichment Academic Program. It is available for newcomer students starting in Grade 4, but its intention is to “help students make significant gains (equivalent to at least two grade levels in one academic year) in second-language development, literacy and numeracy skills, and academic skills and knowledge, so that they can eventually be successfully integrated into the regular program” (TDSB, n.d., p. 5). This program is only available to students who are significantly behind their peers and are not meeting grade-level expectations.

Research tells us that ELL students benefit from a social environment where they can interact with proficient English speakers so that they can learn to communicate and be understood in meaningful and authentic ways (Cummins, 2001; Fassler, 1998; Genesee, 1994; Olmedo, 2003; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). In other words, separation for an ELL into their own
classroom is not ideal. Integration into the classroom and society requires that they learn to interact in meaningful ways. “ELLs learn a word best by trying it out for themselves, explaining its meaning in their own words and connecting it to their own background knowledge” (Purdy, 2008, p. 5).

The type of environment a teacher creates in their classroom greatly affects their students. Allowing for inquiry and dialogue, it challenges and allows students to take their place as leaders in creative and dynamic ways, demonstrating beautifully the human spirit (Wells, 2001). Therefore, it is imperative that teachers allow time for talk in meaningful ways, in a respectful learning environment, so that all learners can benefit, but expressly ELLs (Purdy, 2008).

2.2.1 Challenges for ELL students

One of major challenges for ELLs is academic achievement. This is especially true for the subject area of literacy. Literacy involves the basic language competencies of speaking, listening, reading and writing, all of which are essential to one’s success at school (Thompson, 2004). If a student is struggling in literacy, it will affect how successful they will be. In addition to this, other subject areas such as science and math, include subject-specific vocabulary, which add another level of difficulty to understand and apply.

Furthermore, when researchers and educators point to an achievement gap, others might point to as a deficit mindset. What one might call an achievement gap, another might call an opportunity gap (Roy-Campbell, 2012). Every student is not provided with the same opportunities for success and therefore will not perform at the same level. Additionally, when educators hold low expectations of students, it affects their ability to perform on tests and
therefore validate their original suspicions (Roy-Campbell, 2012). When this takes place, students become frustrated and can lead to a high dropout rate for ELLs (Roy-Campbell, 2012).

Beyond the frustrations of the student, parents and guardians can also face difficulties also. Some of these barriers include: an inability to understand English, unfamiliarity with the school system and differences in cultural norms and cultural capital (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). These factors can greatly limit communication with parents, as well as school participation. Students observe their families and will notice the limited interaction their parents have with their school, demonstrating to them a lower value of education.

2.3 Identity Formation

One of the fundamental questions a human being asks themselves is, “Who am I?” As individuals, we seek for an answer to this question on a personal level. Marcia (1994) proposed the idea that identity is defined by two stages: exploration and commitment. In other words, seeking understanding as to who we are is essential to reaching a settled sense of identity.

Based out of one study, identity is defined as: “generated in social interaction, mediated by cultural instruments and is contextually situated” (Gómez-Estern et al, 2010, p. 232). To say this another way, individuals need to define themselves against an another (individual, group or culture) (Gómez-Estern et al, 2010). Individuals are forced to define themselves in relation to others by recognizing sameness or difference (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). This raises an interesting dichotomy because there is a split between the group and the individual, meaning that there are two forces at play - group dynamics and individual psychological processes (Daniels, 2006). Therefore, Gómez-Estern et al (2010) suggest four principles that give way to an anti-essentialist and constructivist cultural identity:
1. Identity is created through social interactions […]

2. Identity is mediated by cultural tools […]

3. Identity is situated […]

4. Identity must be studied through genetic analysis (p. 233)

If we move forward based on a constructivist view of development, we would view identity as conceptualized as a process of continual emerging and becoming (Miller, 1999). This is contrasted with a shift from unified or essentialist notions of identity.

When discussing socio-cultural theories, there is a name often associated with this topic - Lev Vygotsky. He believed that higher mental processes are co-constructed with the child and another person. Then, these processes are internalized and become part of the child’s cognitive development. In other words, social interaction is so much more than an adult’s influence over a child; rather, it is the origin of higher mental processes, such as problem solving (Woolfolk et al, 2016, p. 30).

Given this constructivist view of development, “What seems inescapable is the understanding that our identities are shaped by and through our use of language” (Miller, 1999, p. 4). This is true for all students, especially ELLs. They are being asked to conceive of a whole new world with an additional language. Lippi-Green (1997) extends this point to add that, “Language is 'most salient way we have of establishing and advertising our social identities” (p. 5).

It should be noted that teachers play a key role in helping students in developing their sense of identity (Chen, 2010). They do this through their everyday teaching practices and social relations, therefore they need to be critical their institutional, instructive and discursive practices.
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Teachers should recognize their position of power and help students to negotiate their identities in positive and affirming ways (Chen, 2010). When educators affirm their students’ identities, they are able to have a sense of competence that allows them to develop academically (Cummins, 2015).

2.3.1 The role of family in a student’s life

Family is exceedingly influential in the life of a child. When an infant first enters the world, they are wholly dependent on their parents, guardians, relatives or whomever is there to fill the gap as caregiver. As children begin to grow, they still rely on their family for guidance and protection. Therefore, research shows us that “school learning is most likely to occur when family values reinforce school expectations” (Bowman, 1990, p. 3). Parents and other community members must hold a high view of school achievement so that the goal is built into a child’s sense of self (Bowman, 1990, p. 4).

Parents and guardians bring their own experiences, beliefs and perceptions and imprint them on their children - this includes their experiences in school. In other words, if a parent had a positive educational experience, they are more likely to influence their child’s perception of school and success. Indeed, the opposite is true as well. If a parent had a negative experience in school, this will color their beliefs about the educational system (Panferov, 2010, p. 107). Therefore, parents are extremely influential in shaping their children’s perceptions about education, as an institution and as a tool to build character and knowledge.

Students are building literacy skills before they even enter the classroom. In most cases, children have numerous language partners, including siblings, grandparents, relatives and friends (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). Immigrant children usually also have contact with their family’s
country of origin, including visits, letter writing, telephone and or internet calls (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). Immigrant children also have books, newspapers, magazines, calendars and brochures in their home language, as well as music and possibly even instruments (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). Often, these students also have religious practices that would include reading and reciting texts or prayers (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012).

While conducting my research for this topic, I came across an article called *Stories of the Heart*. It was a school project where teachers, parents and students partnered together to create a safe space to empower families to share their stories and cultivate their voices. It was intentionally bilingual so that families could work together, in partnership with teachers to help students succeed as writers (Early & Flores, 2015, p. 5). It was a great success and could be used as a model for rethinking the relationship between parents and teachers. This is simply one suggested strategy to involve parents in the learning process. Parents must be able to advocate for their children (Panferov, 2010, p. 111), so allowing them various opportunities strengthens the relationship between teacher and parent, therefore giving students an advantage when collaboration and communication takes place between the class and the home.

Childhood bilingualism teaches us that the home language affects the child’s personal, social, linguistic and cognitive development (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). Through the use of the home language, a family’s cultural values are transmitted to the child (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). It also the child to communicate with their close and extended family, allowing them to grow in close relationship. Furthermore, “numerous studies have consistently shown that the child who is strong in the home language will eventually be strong in the classroom language
[...] the home language builds up a linguistic foundation and sets the child up for success” (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012, p. 27).

2.3.2 The role of culture in a student’s life

Children are sometimes viewed as *tabula rasa*, a blank slate to fill with knowledge. However, the reality is, “before going to school, children have already had a wide range of lived experiences with spoken, written and visual communication and have used language in familiar contexts” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 68). They are not a blank slate. They have histories and experiences that go beyond what we may think or even understand. Psychologists today recognize that the child’s culture shapes cognitive development (Woolfook et al., 2016, p. 29).

How do we define culture? It is food, holidays, art, language, architecture, history, religion, or politics? It cannot be reduce to any one single thing.

Differences in cultures are more substantial than whether members of a community eat white bread, corn pone, or tortillas. The behavior of people varies, and the beliefs, values, and assumptions that underlie behavior differ as well. Culture influences both behavior and the psychological processes on which it rests. Culture forms a prism through which members of a group see the world and create shared meanings. And a group's culture is reflected by the group's language (Bowman, 1990, p. 1).

In other words, culture is not simply one’s food, or its customs; it is so much more than that. It shapes our world and how we engage with our world and others. In saying “this is my culture, this is me” also creates differences with others. Someone’s family, food, ways or language can come across as strange. Phillips makes the suggestion that, “If schools could foster an
appreciation of culture, the children of diverse cultural and racial groups could learn to be proud of their heritage and begin to feel good about themselves” (Phillips, 1988, p. 43-44).

2.3.3 The role of language in a student’s life

Arguably, language is inextricably a part of culture. One author wrote, “The relationship between language and culture is like the relationship between the body and the soul; one is inseparable from the other” (Raja, 2013, p. 715). If language is such an important part of culture, it seems only natural to discuss it in this context.

Research tells us that when a child learns their first language, it is a developmental milestone (Bowman, 1990, p. 2). However, depending on which language is first learnt, this is determined by culture. Therefore, the thoughts and ideas exchanged within the group are guided by the older members of the community, so that children can share meanings with their elders (Bowman, 1990, p. 2). “Language, then, is not merely representational (though it is that), it is also constitutive. It actually creates realities and invites identities” (Johnston, 2004, p. 9).

It has been demonstrated that there are two types of language development in the classroom. The first is social language, or everyday face-to-face communication, which is usually mastered within about two years of initial exposure (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). It also goes by the name BICS, which stands for Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (Cummins, 1999). Conversely, there is academic language, or school language. This second form is impersonal, more technical and abstract and takes between 5 to 7 years to master (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). This second form is also know as CALP, which stands for Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (Cummins, 1999).
Over the years, there are been quite a few theories about bilingualism. In 1975, Lambert proposed two versions of bilingualism: subtractive and additive. In subtractive bilingualism, it is displayed as $L_1 + L_2 - L_1 = L_2$. $L$ stands for language. In other words, when a student learns a new language, they lose their first language and become a monolingual speaker (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). In additive bilingualism, it is displayed as $L_1 + L_2 = L_1 + L_2$. When a student learns a second language, it means they are masters of two separate languages, meaning that they are double monolinguals (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012).

However, research has revealed new results. Garcia proposes a new theory of dynamic bilingualism, which “focuses on languages that speakers *use* rather than on separate languages they *have*” (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012, p. 53). The traditional models that were proposed by Lambert are insufficient and inadequate in the twenty-first century. Communication is more complex and how people use language is changing thanks to electronic instant messaging and chatting (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). Garcia even refers to dynamic bilingualism as a necessity in our ever-evolving world (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012).

Another important term for learning new languages is “translanguaging.” It was first used by Cen Williams to describe a teaching methodology. It is described as the “natural movement between languages” (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012, p. 29). It is understood to be more complex than code-switching. One example of how a student might “translanguage” would be to read a text in one language and then discuss it in another (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). By using this form of communication, it helps bilingual students to manage their language worlds (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). Moreover, this valuable practice allows students the opportunity to use their home language in the classroom and give them a voice. It allows them to capitalize on their home
language practices, meaning that they can take ownership of their learning and formulate their personal identities (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012).

2.5 Conclusion

In this literature review, I looked at research on culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), English language learners (ELLs) and identity. This review elucidates the extent that attention has been paid to providing educators with definitions of CRP and goals with which to aspire. It also demonstrates the importance of home languages in students’ formation of their identity and how they learn in a classroom setting. In light of this, the purpose of my research is to learn how general elementary teachers design classroom environments that support ELLs, while validating their first language identity, so that the information collected in this research paper can be disseminated in the educational community and therefore inform teacher practices in Ontario.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the research methodology. I begin by reviewing the general approach, procedures, and data collection instruments, before elaborating more specifically on participant sampling and recruitment. I explain data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations pertinent to my study. Relatedly, I identify a range of methodological limitations, but I also speak to the strengths of the methodology. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of key methodological decisions and my rationale for these decisions given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This research study will be conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review and semi-structured interviews with teachers. One of the reasons why a qualitative approach is necessary is because this type of research is fundamentally interpretive (Creswell, 2003). In other words, the researcher makes an interpretation of the data, meaning that they make descriptions, analyze data for categories and themes, draw conclusions as well as make suggestions for further questions (Creswell, 2003). Given my research purpose and questions, I want to find meaning in knowledgeable teachers’ experiences so that I can support ELL students in the future.

Moreover, it is imperative that the researcher is self-reflexive in qualitative research, as all inquiry is laden with values (Creswell, 2003). The role of the researcher is to observe, but each individual observes from particular lenses. It is impossible to eliminate our biases, however,
we need to be aware of them so that we do not interpret meaning and misshape the findings of the research.

The lens with which I will be examining my research will be a phenomenological one. According to Langdridge (2007), phenomenology is a discipline that “aims to focus on people’s perceptions of the world in which they live in and what it means to them; a focus on people’s lived experience” (p. 4). In a couple sections later, I will be introducing my participants. Each of them have had long and illustrious careers. I am hoping to learn from their lived experiences, as they have all attempted different strategies and have learned a thing or two in the process, to say the least.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection used in this study is the semi-structured interview protocol. Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to hear about participants’ lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). The semi-structured format allows for the interviewer to design and plan an interview that attends to their research focus and questions, while leaving room for participants to elaborate and even re-direct attention to areas previously unforeseen by the interviewer.

The opposing style of interview format would be a structured interview. There are several reasons why this approach is not appropriate for this study. First of all, the emphasis in a structured interview is usually quantifiable information (King, 1994). This is not the case for my study. I am comparing people’s experiences, which are difficult to quantify. Moreover, I am not testing a formal hypothesis (King, 1994). I have questions that I am seeking answers for. I want to understand how my participants make meaning, their perceptions and
opinions about my given topic, which is ideal for semi-structured interviews. Finally, structured interviews are inflexible, closed ended and rigid (King, 1994). For the purposes of my study, I want to understand things from my participants’ perspectives and a semi-structured interview allows me to expand, revisit and re-articulate their responses.

3.3 Participants

Here I review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment, and I review a range of possible avenues for teacher recruitment. I have also included a section wherein I introduce each of the participants.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

In order to participate in this study, each participant needed to meet the following criteria:

- Experience as a mainstream classroom teacher for a minimum of five years
- Demonstrates a commitment to CRP
- Demonstrates a commitment to ELLs

It is important to me to interview mainstream classroom teachers who address the needs of the ELLs in their classroom because they are the ones at the ground floor. They are the ones who are responsible for their class as a whole, and are looking at how the ELL students are being integrated into the greater community. Also, I am looking for teachers with a minimum five years teaching experience because it is important to me to have knowledgeable teachers with experience in the field. Furthermore, I am looking for teachers who have a demonstrated commitment to ELLs, because these are the specific students that I am focusing on. Moreover, I would like teachers who have demonstrated leadership and/or expertise in the area of CRP because this strategy is one that helps shape students’ development and sense of identity. Their
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leadership and/or expertise may be in the form of providing professional learning for colleagues, having completed a graduate degree with this focus or having written curriculum support materials.

Establishing this criteria is crucial because validity is an important standard in qualitative research. When I was choosing the criteria, I chose inclusive specifications in order to allow a boundary to be drawn around who could be included in the study (Robinson, 2014).

3.3.2 Sampling procedures

As a qualitative researcher, it is important to understand why and how to approach my research. For this purposes of this study, I am not trying generalize to a group of people or population. Rather, it is my intention to purposefully select individuals who will help me to gain insight into a particular phenomenon (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

Given the choice between convenience and purposive sampling, I chose purposive. The reason is because that convenience sampling is exactly that, convenient. It aims to choose the most easily accessible participants (Marshall, 1996). Purposive sampling is much more appropriate for this study because it involves actively selecting the participants who will be most productive to respond to the research question (Marshall, 1996).

To recruit participants, I attended professional development conferences hosted by school boards, teacher education programs, and subject-area specialization organizations. For example, there was an event being hosted at OISE called, “Celebrating Linguistic Diversity” and I attended the conference. I networked with the speakers and attendees by sharing the topic of my MTRP.
I also met with one of the OISE faculty to share about my MTRP. Based on that meeting, I was able to get connected to other teachers who are passionate about supporting ELLs through the use of CRP.

For both methods, I provided my information rather than asking these individuals/organizations to provide me with the names and contact information of people they thought would be suitable. This helped to ensure that teachers were volunteering to participate, rather than feeling pressure or obligation to participate.

**3.3.3 Participant bios**

My first participant, Sara, has been an educator for 35 years. She began teaching core French and then moved to French immersion. Afterwards, she opened her repertoire and taught a gamut of other subjects, including family studies and physical education. She eventually moved to administration as a Vice-Principal and then Principal. During her career, she worked in Scarborough in inner-city schools. For the past three years, she has worked in higher education in a teacher education program.

My second participant, Geninne, was trained and taught in Quebec. She began her career as a language teacher for both French and English across the K-12 curriculum for 10 years. She began in elementary as a specialist teacher and then moved around different age groups over the years. Eventually she made the move to teacher education in Toronto. One of the courses she teaches is about supporting ELLs, and another about language and literacy education. During her time in higher education, she has helped to develop materials to support students learning English, as well as developing courses to support teacher candidates learn how to best support ELLs.
My third and final participant, Christine, is a retired teacher with 42 years experience. She began her career in Dublin where she taught in a high school for 17 years. It was during this time that she taught English, Spanish and special education. After nearly twenty years working on subject-centred curriculum, she decided to return to school and completed a second undergraduate degree. Next, she moved to Toronto with her family and began teaching in an elementary school in 1991. It was there, in an inner-city school that she led a behavioural program in the school. She was also a part of administration and was a teacher librarian. During her time as a teacher librarian, she worked with English language learners.

3.4 Data Analysis

My first step was to transcribe my interviews. I listened to the interviews and typed out the conversation in order to analyze the data from the three semi-structured interviews. From there, I began coding each of my transcripts using my research questions as an interpretive tool. “Coding is not a precise science; it’s primarily an interpretive act” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 4). For the most part, I implemented descriptive coding, which is using codes to summarize the text as well as the occasional in vivo code, which is using the words stated by the participant themselves (Saldaña, 2009). When I read through each transcript a second time, I added in more detail and synthesized themes where appropriate. Additionally, I looked for “null data” - that is, what participating teachers did not speak to, and why this matters.

The process of coding is an important one. “Coding is a heuristic (from the Greek, meaning “to discover”) – an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas to follow” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 8). Through this process, the researcher is able to discover the data that is most relevant, the most salient and therefore reap a great harvest from the raw data.
After the codes were created, I was able to create categories. Using a catalogue of all the themes across the three interviews, I compared and contrasted in order to identify the most notable themes between the three participants. I was able to note the similarities, differences and interesting observations between what the three participants stated. It was there that my themes began to emerge.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

There are several concerns that need to be identified when it comes to the ethical aspects of my research. First of all, I received full consent from my participants and ensured to give them full confidentiality in return. They also had a right to withdraw and were aware of the risks of participation and data storage.

As part of their confidentiality, all participants were assigned a pseudonym and were notified of their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage of the research study. Moreover, participants’ identities remained confidential and any identifying markers related to their schools or students have been excluded.

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study. Given the research topic, I re-assured them throughout the interview and in the consent letter that they had the right to refrain from answering any question that they do not feel comfortable with, as well as re-stating their right to withdraw from participation.

As for data collection, participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts and to clarify or retract any statements before I conducted my data analysis. All audio recordings were stored on my password protected computer and will be destroyed after 5 years.
Participants were asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A) giving their permission to be interviewed as well as audio-recorded. This consent letter provides an overview of the study, addresses ethical implications and specifies expectations of participation (one 45-60 minute semi-structured interview).

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

My research method involved the use of semi-structured interviews, and by doing so, the scope of my research was limited. For example, I was only able to interview three teachers. While my findings can help inform the topic at hand, I cannot generalize the experiences of these teachers to those of all or most teachers.

Furthermore, I was only able to interview educators. Consequently, I was not able to interview students, nor was I able to conduct surveys. It has been found that there is a difference between the adult-adult research relationship and adult-child research relationship; the difference relates to power (Greene & Hogan, 2005, p. 10). Typically, adults hold authority over children and as a result, children struggle when they disagree or want to say something that might be unacceptable (Greene & Hogan, 2005). Therefore, students will not be able to speak to the formation or understanding of their own linguistic and/or cultural identities.

An alternative option would be the use of observation instead of, or in conjunction with, my interviews. Observations are common in many forms of qualitative research, including case studies, ethnographies and qualitative action research studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Observation is described as “the best technique to use when an activity, event, or situation can be observed firsthand, when a fresh perspective is desired, or when participants are not willing to discuss the topic under study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 139). However, observation is not
always ideal, as it can be highly subjective due to the unreliability of human perception (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The benefit of using semi-structured interviews is that it will allow me to hear from teachers from a more in-depth approach than a survey could allow for, and it also creates space for teachers to speak to what matters to them when it comes to the topic at hand (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 94). In this way, interviews validate teacher voice and lived experience, and are an opportunity for them to make meaning from their lived experiences. It is also an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their own practices and to articulate how they conceptualize particular topics in theory and in practice.

3.7 Conclusion

For my MTRP, I conducted qualitative research through the use of three semi-structured interviews. I sought out mainstream classroom teachers who have a minimum of five years teaching experience, have demonstrated leadership and/or expertise in CRP, as well as have a demonstrated interest in ELLs. Although I am limited in scope due to the fact that I am only sampling a few teachers, I am able to go more in depth to allow them to speak to their lived experiences and therefore create meaning. Next, in Chapter 4, I report the research findings.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

This chapter will present and discuss the findings that emerged through the data analysis of my research interviews. I met with three educators, all with over 30 years’ experience each. I wanted to learn from their individual experiences to discover the lessons that they have learned from working with English language learners (ELLs). My research question remained the guiding force behind my investigation, which was: How does a small sample of general elementary teachers design lessons to support English language learners in ways that validate their first language identity and what outcomes do they observe for students?

Over the course of this chapter, I will present my findings in three sections, each with subsequent three subheadings each. My findings are:

1) Teachers draw on personal and community relationships in order to ascertain and actualize student success.

2) In order for students to be successful, teachers need to make positive connections with students’ home lives, home languages and amongst their peers.

3) Teachers are challenged by preconceived biases and the needs they and their students bring into the classroom.

As I detail my findings, I will outline my participants’ experiences and then make connections to the existing literature that was explored in Chapter 2. At the end of this chapter, I will summarize my findings and then make recommendations for next steps.
4.1 Teachers Draw On Personal And Community Relationships In Order To Ascertain And Actualize Student Success.

Education does not occur in a void. In other words, we need relationships in order to push us forward to improve. This section explores these various relationships and how they help students to succeed. The first subsection reveals that teachers rely on networking with their peers in order to maximize their planning and resources. Learning how others have succeeded can help us to improve our own work. Secondly, teachers recognize the importance of involving the parents in the learning process because of their role in motivating and modelling for children. Thirdly, my participants drew on their own personal and professional experiences to empathize and relate to students who are in the position of learning a new language.

I believe this section is crucial to my findings because education is not a venture done alone. It involves people. Lots of people. Therefore, we need to validate the relationships we have in order to help us in whatever capacities possible.

4.1.1 Teachers collaborate with other professionals in order to build learning communities and share resources.

At different points within the interviews, all three participants highlighted the importance of collaboration with their peers. For some, that meant the in-school team that includes English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, Child & Youth Worker or the school/board psychologist. For others, it means a team approach to teaching, working with their peers who share resources, abilities and affinities. Geninne’s shared a story of her sister-in-law, Salome, who is a fellow classroom teacher. After 15 years of teaching, she was asked to join two other Grade 1 teachers in one large classroom. At first, she was hesitant because she had no idea how to approach the
situation. However, the three teachers spent time over the summer co-planning and Salome felt that it revitalized her and renewed her passion for teaching. Geninne shared this story because she felt it emphasized the importance of working with a team as a source of support for a teacher at any stage of their career.

Geninne claimed that, “I’ve been in schools where there are various kinds of learning communities around lunch time or a core planning time where teachers do sharing. I really think that not reinventing the wheel and collaborating is so important.” Both Sara and Christine also acknowledged the importance of teacher planning teams, because it provides additional necessary support to educators.

Moreover, Geninne interpreted collaboration more broadly than just teaching teams, to include anyone involved in education! Geninne believes in teacher planning teams and learning communities, including virtual communities. She herself is a part of a critical action research community that meets once a month with educators from 12 different countries who share their learnings with the group. Geninne’s practice is founded on research, as “learning communities provide opportunities for reflection and problem-solving that allow teachers to construct knowledge” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 5).

4.1.2 Teachers involve parents in the learning process to highlight the importance of students’ first language to their success.

Geninne acknowledged that research recognizes that parental input of the home language is an important part of students’ learning process. However, when at home, parents may desire to speak English with their children, even if they do not have a strong command of the language.
This often emanates from the perception that the family is in an English-dominant society.

Geninne argued that:

If you create an English environment with two parents who are just learning and let’s say they’ve got three kids who are at different stages, they’re creating a weak and wobbly environment. It is much better if things are happening in Bulgarian and at the dinner table everybody is talking about what they've learned during the day through Bulgarian…

Geninne indicated that when parents use their home language in the home, it allows for rich conversations to take place and extend what students are learning at school.

Christine was also a strong advocate for students to continue the use of their home language in the classroom. She argued the student’s first language (L1) should be used in tandem with the second language, in this case English. Christine became aware of this after hearing a lecture from a principal in Regent Park. The lecturer discussed the importance of continuing with one’s first language because it allows the student to achieve the highest level of Piaget’s stages of cognitive development, which is abstract thinking. Christine noted that there can be some difficulty in selling the L1 as an asset to parents, as they are usually focused on their children learning English. However, research shows that using a student’s L1 as a scaffold is an important part of the learning process (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). The student can build from what they already know in order to learn the second language. More details will be shared in section 4.2.2.

4.1.3 Teachers’ own backgrounds and experiences help them to empathize with students and enable them to support diverse learning needs.

When asked about their own personal backgrounds, all three teachers identified that their personal linguistic experiences played a role in their professional paths. All three of them speak
at least one other language fluently, while some can speak three or more languages. Learning these additional languages have had a profound impact on their lives. Christine shared:

And for me, it was so liberating to go into a second language where the grammar wasn’t as rigid as either French or as English and that the emphasis you could put the verb at the beginning of the sentence, you could put the adjective before the noun, put the adjective after the noun, depending on what you were trying to communicate. And, as a result, I loved being in Spain and I loved speaking Spanish for that whole emotional connection with a language that was far more powerful. I loved the Spanish poets. I loved - I just loved the way of being… I just loved that freedom of just how you could be in a different language.

Geninne acknowledged that, “Being in the French school system in Quebec with lots of peers who only could speak French, I, at a very young stage, went, ‘Wow… I have access to twice more people, twice more everything’.” Geninne continued and added that due to the fact that she had a French parent and an English parent, she often felt “like an outsider a lot of the time… combined with feeling always like I was having to be on the fence and being ‘othered’.” As a young girl, her parents sent her to attend a convent, where she was separated from her family, didn’t speak the language (at the time) and she was forced to observe several obscure puritanical rules. It placed many hardships on Geninne as a child. She cites the fact that she was a resilient child, which is why she was able to bounce back and move forward with her life. Her siblings weren’t quite as fortunate, which is why she believes resiliency is an important quality to instill in young hearts and minds. This story is an important one because many ELL students are faced with difficult circumstances, often having to learn how to navigate a whole new world.
Having gone through a difficult experience herself, Geninne is better equipped to support students’ concerns and empathize with their situations.

For Sara, she viewed herself as an outsider. She was born in Italy and came to Canada when she was in kindergarten. In her own words, she explained,

I so well remember that feeling of being excluded and you know, by overt and also introverted methods, implicit messages of you look funny, your clothes are funny, your lunch is funny, everything. So I felt like an outsider when I started school.

This is another story of how a teacher can take their own experiences and connect it with their students’ experiences. Their experiences may not be identical, but Sarah can understand what it means to be different, or excluded - feelings that English language learners can often identified with.

Research shows that teacher-student relationships are at the core of any quality learning experience (Farrell, 2015). When in a relationship, people share different parts of their lives. Despite the fact that my participants’ experiences have helped them to connect to students, there is no clear-cut way to measure or manage student-teacher rapport (Farrell, 2015). In other words, my participants’ personal life experiences may have helped them to connect to ELL students, but it is not a prerequisite in order to be able to connect with ELLs.

4.2 In Order for Students To Be Successful, Teachers Need To Make Positive Connections With Students’ Home Lives, Home Languages And Amongst Their Peers.

This section addresses the instructional strategies educators consider to be most effective and the reason why. My participants recognized that consistent and positive communication is an essential practice in order to support students in their academic pursuits. Secondly, the use of
one’s first language was identified as a significant scaffold to students learning a second language. Thirdly, students need to be able to make connections on several different levels in order to bring meaning to the content and process of their education.

4.2.1 Teachers indicated that consistent and positive communication with parents within a collaborative approach with families is a significant factor to supporting student achievement.

Sara coined a term that she called “the magic triangle.” The magic triangle is when parents, teachers and students work together in tandem towards a common goal: the student’s success. She cites that when all of the parts are working together, the triangle is the strongest structure. Being in an administrative role for part of her career as a principal, she often would echo this message to whoever would listen. She wants parents to understand that they have a real role to play, and that the more they can get involved in their child’s life, the better their child is going to do.

Sara also emphasized the importance of family in school-wide events. There were two approaches she took in participation. The first is in the creation of a network of parents. In one of the schools that Sara worked in, they created a network of mainly moms, who would reach out to the newly arrived parents and then bring them into the school. By implementing this approach, it broke down barriers between families and the schools because it felt more like a community. Sara also pointed out that bringing parents in isn't about bringing in the extra money. Sometimes parents don’t have that, especially in inner-city schools:

Parents don’t have extra dollars, but they have man-power, they have ideas… I remember one event where the moms took it over and they did a multicultural potluck
and I’ve never seen so much different food and I have never seen so much diversity in who came as well. You know, there were storytellers from Africa, there were belly dancers, it was wonderful and these moms took it over and everyone else just marveled at them and they felt very competent and you know, really part of the school in ways they didn’t always feel because they couldn’t buy the hundred dollar magazine subscription. They couldn’t afford that, but they could certainly bring a bowl of rice, or something like that. And slowly, slowly we really became a school, that particular one, where it was more about participation than making money. Even though we would have loved to have the dollars, we found other ways to get the money in the end.

Both Sara and Christine echoed the old adage that it takes a village to raise a child. It isn’t about a separation, where “I do the home stuff and you do the school stuff.”

The ideas expressed by my participants are in accordance with existing research. Research recognizes that parents’ experiences with the educational system influence how their children perceive the school system, perpetuating either positive or negative assumptions (Panferov, 2010, p. 107). In other words, we need to be aware of parental bias and work towards maintaining a positive relationship with the family in order to support the student’s needs. Sara was a strong believer that a school has a culture and that culture should be one of a welcoming and safe place. By creating this type of environment, it helps to create a positive relationship and minimize parental biases.
4.2.2 Teachers highlighted the importance of using students’ first language as a scaffold in the classroom because it contributes to student success.

One of the participants, Geninne, is actually in the process of learning a third language - Spanish. She said that if she wasn't able to draw on what she already knew in English and French, this learning endeavour would be significantly more difficult. Additionally, she herself recognized that this is in alignment with the existing research done in the past 30 years, that it is natural to build on a language(s) that one already knows as a way to learn a new language. “That’s how the mind works.”

Geninne mentioned the idea of ‘translanguaging’ as an important part of the learning process. Translanguaging was also a valuable finding of the literature review. Using more than one language to articulate oneself is a skill, as it is more than just code-switching (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). It is a skill that can be developed over time, that allows students to manage their different language worlds. It allows them to move between the languages, as well as build on what they know and create meaning from the integration of the seemingly different worlds (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012). Geninne acknowledged the importance of allowing students to translanguage in the class so that they feel, “This is good. We’re adding.”

Geninne also explored the idea of a pressure/support dichotomy in the classroom. She gave the example of a teacher supporting a student who is a brand new arrival to Canada. The teacher needs to be supportive, but as time progresses, also needs to apply a bit of pressure to learn. It is a delicate balance of trying to determine how much of which to apply at what time. She went on to add:
So the teacher has to have huge knowledge base and understanding about language as an important scaffold, like the mother tongue as a scaffold to learning other languages, but has to know when to withdraw some supports. And it should never be fully withdrawn even when you reach a high stage.

Research supports this view of scaffolding, as a student’s first language is a helpful tool to learn a second language (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2012). In other words, the student’s first language may provide learners with additional cognitive support that allows them to analyze language and work at a higher level than if they could only use the second language, or in this case, English (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2012).

4.2.3 Teachers identified that making connections between home and school, as well as self and others, is a key aspect of students’ learning experience.

The image of a bridge was woven throughout all three interviews. Christine, for example, used the image to explain her understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy. To her, the relationship between teacher and student is a significant one and therefore a bridge is necessary in order to gain perspective. If the teacher crosses the bridge, then they can see through the student’s eyes, learning what it is like to see the world through the eyes of someone from Hungary or Syria, for example. In doing so, the hope is that by modelling this behaviour, the student will be encouraged to cross that bridge as well.

Furthermore, Christine would take what the students were learning in class and would try to make connections with a student’s home culture. For example, if she was doing a unit on poetry, she would say to a Hungarian student, “Go home and ask your dad and mom who their favourite poets were when they were growing up.” The purpose of the activity was to learn about
the format and function of poetry, but it didn't mean the poem had to be in English. In this way, the student is able to bring personal artefacts into the classroom and use them as a tool for learning.

During Sara’s interview, she emphasized the crucial nature of creating a class and school culture of “welcome.” In her opinion, that is the most important issue.

Making them feel that you’re happy they’re there, rather than see them as a burden, they see them as an asset… welcoming them and learning about their country and asking them to have agency, as much as they can… not take over their voice but give them voice. All of these things make them feel comfortable, make them feel like people are glad to see them. And that is the most important thing. And when that happens, when they actually do start to feel comfortable, of course the language acquisition just rushes in place as a result of that.

Sara also added the dimension of making connections, especially in diverse schools. For example, with holidays, “So yes, I would talk about today is Diwali, today is Christmas, today is Kwanza, but connect them as to how they were similar.” Sara would continue by adding that even though our celebrations have different expressions, the reasons why we celebrate are very similar - family, friends, renewal, etc. Her reasoning behind taking this approach was to demonstrate a welcoming attitude, as well as teach students that, as a class, they’re stronger together.

Existing literature argues that culture is not simply one’s food or festivals; it shapes our world and how we engage with it (Bowman, 1990). Perhaps more in-depth questioning with my participants could have shed more light on how exactly cultures are shared within a school
community in order to understand the various representations of culture. This would lend to the both the second and third tenet of Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (1995) definition of CRP - cultural competence and critical consciousness. Cultural competence allows student to learn from and build upon their own social, cultural and political knowledge, as it acknowledges their lived experiences. Critical consciousness is when teachers guide their students towards viewing the world through a critical lens by questioning and challenging dominant systems of power. All three of my participants placed emphasis on the importance of cultural competence, as they all believe that every student is rich in cultural capital. However, to take it a step further, none of them mentioned critical consciousness, which would be a possible next step.

4.3 Teachers Are Challenged By Preconceived Biases And The Needs They And Their Students Bring Into The Classroom.

This section of my addresses some of the challenges teachers face and how they overcome them. The participants identified teacher bias as a key barrier that can be overcome when people share stories to combat prejudice. Secondly, teachers must recognize that students’ socio-emotional needs should be met before they can excel academically. Thirdly, my participants recognized that assessment of ELLs’ demonstration of knowledge can be a challenge. They suggest that educators need to allow a variety of demonstrations of knowledge, as well as the accommodations students need to succeed.

4.3.1 Teachers acknowledged that the biases of staff can negatively affect the learning outcomes of students, regardless if they are aware of them or not.

Sara identified biases as a significant challenge when working with English language learners. She argued that individual attitudes are a barrier, but on a deeper level, the bigger issue
is not admitting to them. The reality is that everyone has cultural baggage that needs to be identified so that it doesn’t impede the environment or learning experiences teachers create for their students.

During another interview, Christine compared racism to “not liking spiders.” Each person has things they do not like and/or are afraid of - spiders, snakes, jellyfish, the dark, etc. Christine went on to explain, “You don’t know you don’t like spiders until one kind of creeps up on top of you maybe. So there are so many things that I’m unaware of.” In other words, she is implying that everyone has biases about other people, whether or not they are aware of it. Teachers need to be able to confront their biases so that it does not hinder their relationships with their students or their families, as relationships are key to student success, as noted in the first finding.

Geninne listed resistance from colleagues as a challenge when enacting culturally relevant pedagogy with English language learners. She continued by adding that the resistance is usually founded on misunderstanding of the efforts involved. Since teachers are already juggling many things at once, adding “one more thing” is commonly seen as making a teacher’s job more difficult. If someone doesn’t understand why to implement this type of pedagogy, it will just be seen as making life more complicated and more work. When people open themselves up to hear someone else’s story, they are open to new possibilities. “Stories over time lead us to imagine something beyond ourselves” (Joiner, 2013). Geninne added in order to combat the challenge of working with resistant teachers, educators need to share stories for their ability to point to new possibilities:

The most effective strategy is by having teachers exposed to learners’ stories, real stories, and ideally, I mean we’ve got many stories that we can find online of learners
speaking about their issues, English language learners in particular, speaking about what
it’s like to be at school. But if it’s at all possible to actually have direct experience in a
staff meeting or some in-service where teachers actually hear those voices *directly*
(emphasis added). So I think stories and narratives are of the most powerful educating
tools for both teachers and the learners.

There are many stories available, as Geninne noted, educators just need to be persistent in
sharing them. It is through sharing stories that educators are able to find hope, healing and
transformation (Feuerverger, 2007).

**4.3.2 According to educators, addressing the socio-emotional needs of English Language
Learners is a critical prerequisite to students’ academic success.**

At different points within the interviews, all three participants acknowledged the
importance of addressing the affective needs of English Language Learners. Geninne noted that,

The affective side is the most important thing because if you have somebody, a child or
an adolescent, who isn’t feeling good about who they are and what’s happening to them
and that they know who to reach out to for support, academic learning is probably not
going to be happening that well.

Christine furthered the argument by comparing the needs of students to Maslow’s Hierarchy of
Needs. She maintained that a student’s safety is the first need that should be addressed. After
safety, then the need for acceptance and love can be addressed. Once the foundation has been
laid and the basic needs have been met, then the student can move up the ladder and eventually
achieve self-actualization.
Sara admitted that feeling like an outsider was a formative experience in her childhood because she herself was an ELL. However, because of the experience, it now allows her to empathize with students who have similar feelings. When someone feels like an outsider, it is crucial that they are given a circle of support so that they can feel a part of the community. Therefore, Sara emphasized the importance of creating community in a classroom so as to minimize the feelings of being an outsider or “the other.”

On another level, Geninne identified that students can experience a crisis of identity, especially amongst younger ELLs. At some point, students begin to establish themselves as autonomous individuals, while attempting to answer the question, “Who am I?” ELLs can feel torn between respecting their home culture, while trying to develop their Canadian identity. Geninne shared a story about one of her students who came from Pakistan. Every morning she would leave her house wearing her salwar kameez, her dupatta, since that is what her strict parents expected her to wear. She would arrive at school and change in the bathroom into the adolescent uniform of jeans and t-shirt. At the end of the day, she would have to do the reverse of the process. She did that everyday. By wearing both sets of clothing, she was trying to fit into both cultures simultaneously, without the other knowing.

Geninne also added that ELLs also struggle with issues of confidence. They often feel unintelligent and inadequate, despite the fact that they may be incredibly intelligent and able. Geninne compared this reality to her own experiences. She shared that she struggled with confidence in her second language. Even though she sounded fine, she didn't feel like she had the same foundation, and it was a challenge for her.
The validation of students’ needs is in accordance with existing literature, despite that the fact that there is usually more of a focus on students’ academic success than their interpersonal and social success. Some of the needs that research highlights are ELL students isolation, possible trauma, potential economic strain, family responsibilities and fitting in to their new environment (Thornburg, 2015). Although my participants recognized each of these needs, they focused on isolation, fitting in and possible traumas.

4.3.3 Teachers recognized that effective assessment is a struggle when evaluating English language learners’ demonstrations of knowledge.

Christine is a huge supporter of effective assessment. She was born and raised in an Irish system, teaching there for almost half of her career. The two systems are vastly different, with one of the major differences being that in Ireland, the onus is on the student to know and memorize the information. The teacher is not responsible to open students’ heads and fill it with information. When she came to Canada, she was exposed to new forms of assessment to genuinely understand students’ levels of understanding. She believes in using manipulatives and having alternative ways to assess the concepts that students have ascertained. She does this because she believes that a student’s oral and written expressions may not accurately communicate the student’s understanding of the concept. Even if a student does understand a concept, it does not mean that they will be able to fully explain it in sentences and paragraphs.

Sara also recognizes the difficulty in assessing students’ learning. It is tough when students do not speak the same language and therefore cannot communicate the ideas that are in their minds. Sara suggests that students should be able to use technology and one’s peers to help students in the learning process. Teachers shouldn't be afraid of them, she argues, just because
they are part of the “unknown” and can be abused. Educators need to wrestle with uncertainty and provide the tools that will serve the students in the best possible ways.

During my research, I came across a study that highlighted the importance of working with multimodal literacy. They want to broaden students’ conceptions of literacy beyond linear print-based reading and writing skills in the dominant language (Cummins et al., 2015). When students are participating in creative writing and other forms of cultural production or performance (e.g. art, drama, video creation, etc.) that are identity-affirming, there is an increase in students’ literacy engagement (Cummins et al., 2015).

Of the challenges listed by my participants, not much attention was given to additional challenges mentioned by existing research. Examples of these challenges include: discipline, motivation, differentiation, grammar and class size (Copland et al, 2014, p. 746-747). In fact, none of these issues were even mentioned. These are also considerable challenges when working with ELL students in the mainstream classroom.

Being a part of the mainstream classroom, ELL students are faced with the difficulty of standardized testing, which Christine acknowledged as a challenge for educators. When students are expected to complete the same test in the same way, it means that everybody is the same. The reality is that everyone is not the same. People do not learn identically nor do they have the same set of experiences to propel them forward to success. Christine argued that it is difficult to support ELLs since they are under specific regulations on how all students must observe the examination.

One of the gaps in research that I observed was that there are not many supports for how to assist ELL students during standardized testing. As a teacher, one has more control over the
types of assessment that are done in the classroom. However, standardized testing is a reality that many ELL students face and often do not achieve success.

4.3.4 Educators had mixed opinions on the availability of resources.

One interesting observation that I made during the course of my interviews was the surprising range of perspectives on availability of resources for teaching ELL students. Sara, a former principal, identified a lack of resources as an obstacle to overcome when meeting the needs of ELLs. This is consistent with research that states a lack of resources, preparation and time lead to difficulties for mainstream educators including ELL students into the classroom successfully (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). However, Geninne, a classroom teacher, argued that there are so many resources available! She took into account a lot of technology and internet based options, and indicated that she believes we are probably at the best time to be supportive of learners. In fact, according to her, we’ve never had the amount of resources that we do now to support them. From one perspective, both participants are correct. Teachers have a plethora of resources available to them thanks to the internet, but at the same time, there is a great need to learn how to navigate towards and through the information available in order to best serve their needs and the needs of their students.

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that relationships are very important in teaching English Language Learners. Relationships between students, teachers, families, peers, colleagues, and learning communities all work together to make a difference in the lives of little ones. In addition to building positive relationships, educators need to make connections to students’ home lives
and home languages. Finally, being aware of student’s socio-affective needs contributes to their academic success.

Near the end of my interview with Christine, she shared some final words with me that I thought were quite beautiful and inspirational. After her many years of service to the field of education, her words of wisdom to beginning teachers committed to supporting English language learners were:

I think the first thing is get to know them. And build a bridge. And then just see what you see from their point of view. Because then, at least, you will indicate to them that you have tried for some empathy and that is deeper than language, if they feel you have made an effort to understand where they are coming from. Then, if at all possible, give them the tools to use whatever language they have, as a bridge to other kids.

As a beginning teacher, this idea resonates with me because, as she said, “it is deeper than language.” I think trying to build bridges with students connects us to our own humanity and to each other in a profound and meaningful way.

These findings make a significant contribution to the existing literature by highlighting available resources such as learning communities, identifying salient strategies such as connecting with families, and exploring the challenges of working with English language learners such as authentic assessment. I believe that my research will be a practical tool to understand how to engage with and support ELLs in the everyday classroom. I hope that educators will benefit from what I have learned, as I aim to share my findings with the educational community. I will be providing more details on that topic in the following chapter.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the implications of my research. I will begin by briefly outlining my findings, as detailed in the previous chapter. I will then begin to unpack the implications from my findings, as well as my recommendations. Next, I will list lingering questions to cite as areas for further research. Finally, I will provide my concluding comments.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

My research provided me with three main findings, each with three subsequent findings. The three main themes were:

1) Teachers draw on personal and community relationships in order to ascertain and actualize student success.

2) In order for students to be successful, teachers need to make positive connections with students’ home lives, home languages and amongst their peers.

3) Teachers are challenged by preconceived biases and needs they and their students bring into the classroom.

The first theme dealt with the importance of relationships. Relationships are vital with other professionals and parents in enabling them to relate with English language learners. Teaching is not done in isolation. In order to actualize student success, teachers need to build the bridge between different groups. One way to do this suggested by participants is through getting involved in professional learning communities to spark new ideas. Another way is through cultivating relationships with parents so that they feel like a part of the process.
My second theme revealed that positive connections are necessary to the learning process. One of the ways for teachers to connect is through students’ home lives and family. Participants indicated that when students, parents, and teachers work together, they create something like a “magic triangle.” Participants emphasized that in order to build these connections, educators should highlight our similarities, not our differences. By building bridges, schools and families can connect different worlds and welcome students to learn and grow to new heights. Additionally, teachers were advised to make positive connections with students’ first language, as it is an asset. Students who do not know English have a bank of other experiences and therefore we need to empower them to build on what they already know.

My third theme uncovered the challenges of working with English language learners (ELLs). One of the challenges my participants identified is the socio-emotional needs of ELLs. If educators do not address the affective/emotional needs of students, they will not be able to achieve academically. Therefore, fostering emotional support by creating a safe and welcoming place is a crucial starting point. Furthermore, assessment is also a challenge to educators because the traditional form of pencil and paper testing are not able to showcase what ELLs know. Most of ELLs lack the language skills to be successful in this format. For this reason, teachers need to provide alternative ways of assessing knowledge - beyond pen and paper. Finally, teachers need to be aware of their biases, because everything they do reflects their preconceived notions and attitudes. Bias is reflected in one’s choice of resources, books and environment. From the second students first step into the classrooms, they are sent both implicit messages about themselves and the world. This means teachers need to take intentional measures to support student confidence, while also helping them develop their critical literacy skills.
5.2 Implications

This section will outline the implications of my research for both the educational community and for myself, as a teacher researcher.

5.2.1 Educational community

Education of a child is really a community of people. It involves many different individuals coming together with each of them having a role to play. Teachers, you’re an obvious place to start. You’re like the ground zero. The front lines. You get in the dirt and fight to win with and for these kids. I am not offering you a lesson plan or an activity page to do with your students. What I am proposing is moving towards “transforming instructional practices to make the difference for improving relationships between students and educators and increasing student achievement” (Hollie, 2012). I am proposing a lens with how to approach teaching, your students and the classroom environment. It is not easy, but it will be worth it.

Also, remember it is an educational *community*. As Geninne mentioned in her interview, teachers are an altruistic group of people, so work with them. Ask them questions. Learn from them. Do not be proud and do this work alone. Work together, because you will find strength in numbers.

Next, for administrators and principals, I hope that you lead with intention and purpose. Having a clear vision of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is important to help guide your school community to a desirable end. By creating a warm and welcoming school culture, everyone will feel invited to participate in the success of both the student and the school.

Finally, for school boards, you guide the overall leadership of many different and unique school communities. Given the statistics regarding immigration and cultural diversity in Toronto,
continue to point the community towards practical ways to implement CRP. Where you lead, others follow.

5.2.2 Myself as a teacher researcher

Over the course of the past two years of this work, I have been able to participate in three placements in local schools in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). Each placement was a great experience to get into the classroom and work with a variety of students. However, for each of the schools, the demographics were fairly homogenous, with limited numbers of English language learners. I am very grateful for my experiences. My only wish would have been to have worked with more ELL students, or an ESL program.

Regardless of my experiences while at UT/OISE, I feel that my work that I began as a teacher researcher will translate into my career as an educator. First of all, my love of languages will translate into one of the ways I can connect with my students. Secondly, I aspire to be an reflexive practitioner, meaning that I hope to reflect on what I do and how I do it. Third of all, I hope to build upon the knowledge that I have acquired in these two years by continuing this work by putting it into action. I hope that I would be able to add to my research each year by adding a new focus of this topic. In other words, I intend to be a lifelong learner.

My research has taught me a thing or two. Well, it has taught me a lot, but my major learnings I will reduce to the next five paragraphs. First of all, I intend to connect to the family immediately and continuously. I want to have a positive, open and honest relationship with students’ families so that together we can help the child to succeed.

Secondly, based on my research, the socio-emotional needs of students are paramount and cannot be ignored. I cannot look at a chart of grades or a worksheet and be able to know how
well a student is doing. I need to talk to them, observe them, interact with them to help them beyond just their academic needs.

Thirdly, I need to be aware of my own biases, preconceived notions and attitudes that I bring into the classroom. One of my participants compared having biases to not liking spiders, and not knowing you don't like them until one is crawling on you. I don’t know what all my “spiders” are, but I hope that I become self-aware so that my biases do not affect my students, my community or families in a negative way.

Fourthly, I hope to foster communities of learning wherever I go. This may mean seeking these communities out, or even beginning one if there is need for it. I know I am not always the smartest person in the room, so I want to surround myself with people who will challenge and inspire me to become a better educator and a better human being.

Finally, I hope to continue my own linguistic journey. I aim to continue to develop my knowledge of the French language, to one day be considered bilingual by my own standards. I would also like to explore additional languages such as Spanish and Italian. Moreover, I like to learn expressions and phrases from different places I’ve travelled or people that I have met. Therefore, learning new languages is an important value for two reasons - my growth as an individual, as well as my ability to put myself in the position of the student.

5.3 Recommendations

This section focuses on what next steps should be taken. Below is a list of my suggestions, including my recommendations for teachers and school communities.
5.3.1 Teachers

Teachers are the front lines of the fight for students’ achievement. They get in the trenches with and for students everyday and try to make a way for students to succeed. In order to maximize student success, here are a few recommendations based on my research.

- It may seem like an obvious place to start, but still needs stating. Teachers, get to know your students. Learn about their stories, their families and who they are and what they bring into the classroom. View your students as people who have strength, dignity and a wealth of experiences to draw upon. You can begin right at the beginning of the year. Incorporate some form of an autobiography or survey of interests so that you can implement your knowledge of the students right away into your teaching practices.

- Be self-reflexive in your practice. No one is always perfectly self-aware, but we can be constantly evaluating and re-evaluating what we do and how we do it. Reflexive practice is an important tool to engage in a process of continuous learning. Teachers cannot expect students to learn if they are not willing to do the same in return.

- Do not limit culture to holidays and celebrations. Culture goes beyond the food served at the table. It is also the utensils used, the chairs or pillows you sit on, the time of day that you eat, the flavours used to make those dishes. Culture embodies everything we do and is a part of who we are. Do not just get to know a culture’s dishes; dive in and get to know about all aspects of a culture.

- When planning your classroom, your unit plans and your assignments, be cognizant of who is in your classroom. Find ways to incorporate and reflect student identities. For example, asking
for (poetry, math problems, music, etc.) examples from their home language or their home country.

- Have high expectations of all students. Students become what we believe. If we just see what the student lacks (language), we will be blind to the richness of experiences they bring into the classroom. When we expect great things from students, they will rise to the occasion.

- Seek professional learning on engagement in culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). This may look like taking additional qualifications, or engaging with a network of peers. These peers can be found either locally or digitally. Regardless of how you find your network, engage with them on a continual bases to discover new realities and possibilities.

- Finally, learning goes beyond the classroom. Getting to know parents/families is a key part of the learning process. We need to work in tandem with students’ families. One of my participants identified something called the “magic triangle.” The expression refers to when students, families and teachers work in partnership to actualize student success. We need to ensure that parents/caregivers understand that they have a real role to play. The more they get involved, in the ways that they can, the better their child will do. There are a variety of ways to engage with parents. There are phone calls, meetings, creating networks of parents, school events, etc. There are a variety of ways to connect; we just need to make the time to connect.

### 5.3.2 School communities

- One of my findings demonstrated the difference in opinion regarding the perception of available resources. One participant argued that there were no resources available, while the other argued that they were a plethora of resources available. If there are a plethora of
resources, where do we find them? How do we access them? We need to make the relevant resources available and accessible for all.

- If teachers are going to pursue professional learning regarding CRP, boards need to create opportunities for that to take place. Create moments of professional learning. Furthermore, help support teachers in creating networks for fellow teachers to share ideas and to learn from each other. Learning is not done in isolation.

- Create opportunities for teachers to observe successful teachers enacting CRP with ELL students, or share stories with teachers to hear about students’ successes. These stories help to diminish and/or remove teacher bias against enacting CRP.

- Leadership needs to be open to listening to what front-line teachers are saying on the challenges they face in implementing CRP and be willing to support educators in whatever ways they need. Furthermore, they need to model for educators strategies and methods for how to support ELLs well in the mainstream classroom.

- The messages of welcome, family involvement, viewing students’ experiences as asset, being self-reflexive - all of these messages should be a school-wide approach. It cannot be one or two teachers preaching from a soap box. It is not an add-on or more work; it is a lens with which to approach teaching.

### 5.4 Areas for Further Research

Below is a list of lingering questions from my research:

- As mentioned earlier, there is disagreement about the availability and accessibility around specific lessons and strategies to implement with ELLs and CRP. It would be interesting to
explore why there is a disparity in this perception, as well as how to disseminate these resources to a wide variety of an audience.

- A further area of research is regarding how to support ELL students during standardized testing, as well as determining how effective this form of testing is for ELLs. If it is ineffective, what assessment strategies are best suited to support this demographic of students?

- Based on Ladson-Billings’ three tenets of CRT - academic success, cultural competence and critical consciousness - I would find it interesting to continue my research by learning how educators move from validating students’ cultural capital to being critical and challenge ideas about power and culture. The movement towards social justice and action is a pivotal one, so how can teachers aid students in making this jump?

- Another question I have is in regards to what constitutes an effective learning community? How does a teacher find, foster and perpetuate it? Is its success based on the individuals, or is it based on several principles of best practice?

- Moreover, I would like to investigate further parents’/caregivers’ perceptions of teachers and school communities in working with their children. What is the best way to engage with them? What strategies work best with parent engagement?

**5.5 Concluding Comments**

This chapter has outlined the findings from my three interviews with educators committed to supporting ELL students through the use of CRP. It has also recorded the implications and recommendations based on my research. Finally, I cited several areas for further research.
One of my “take-aways” from the course of my research is the importance of being a reflexive practitioner. I hope that this message was woven throughout my writing, but I really believe this is just the beginning. I am at the beginning of hopefully a long career in education, and I am to be a lifelong learner as I support students whose first language is not English.

Moreover, another one of the most influential ideas that impacted me was the idea of the “magic triangle.” Teaching is not done in isolation. When I become a certified teacher, I want to partner with parents so that we can all see students succeed.

In conclusion, over the course of my research, I have learned the kind of teacher I want to become. I want to be a teacher who builds bridges, not tears them down. I want to bring students’ identities into the classroom, celebrate them and support them in any way possible to help them make connections. I want to practice what I preach and learn new things too. I want to see students build whole new worlds and realities, ones that are based on a strong sense of self, family, culture and identity.
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Incorporating Identity into the Classroom


Appendix A - Consent Letter

Date:

Dear ______________________________,

My Name is Lindsay Thompson 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 elementary teachers implement culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (CLR) with English language learners (ELLs) to help them form and understand their cultural and linguistic identities. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have a minimum of 5 years experience and who have a demonstrated commitment to supporting English language learners and to culturally relevant pedagogy. 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-Vemic. 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,

Lindsay Thompson

Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic

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 Lindsay Thompson and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name: (printed) _______________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________
Appendix B - Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn how elementary teachers implement culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (CLR) with English language learners (ELLs) in order to help them form and understand their cultural and linguistic identities. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on what you have observed in the classroom and what strategies you implement as a result, as well as challenges you face and how you communicate with parents and your peers. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Personal Background
2. How long have you been a teacher?
3. What is your current position and how long you have been in this role?
4. Can you tell me more about your school?
   1. Size?
   2. Demographics? Approximately what percentage of the students in your school are ELLs?
   3. Program priorities? What type of support programming does your school provide to ELLs?
5. What experiences contributed to developing your interest in supporting ELLs?
   1. Personal experiences? (e.g. When you were a student, were you an English Language Learner? If so, how does that affect you as a teacher?)
   2. Educational experiences? (e.g. university course work, teachers college, additional qualifications, professional development)
   3. Professional experiences? (e.g. employment positions, teaching experience)
6. What experiences have contributed to developing your preparation for enacting cultural relevant pedagogy?
   1. Personal experiences? (e.g. When you were a student, were you an English Language Learner? If so, how does that affect you as a teacher?)
   2. Educational experiences? (e.g. university course work, teachers college, additional qualifications, professional development)
   3. Professional experiences? (e.g. employment positions, teaching experience)

Teacher Perspectives / Beliefs
7. What would you say are the primary needs of ELL students?
   1. How, if at all, do you think the socio-emotional needs of your ELL students compare to native English speaking students and why?
8. What are some obstacles to meeting the primary needs of ELL students?
9. Overall, how well would you say schools do in meeting the needs of ELLs?
10. In your experience, how do students’ diverse cultural and linguistic identities affect their learning in the classroom?
11. From your perspective, what is the role of students’ first language identity in learning?
12. What does the term ‘culturally relevant pedagogy’ mean to you? How do you understand this?
13. In your view, what are some key characteristics of CLR?
14. Why do you believe the enactment of CLR is important in schools? What are some of the benefits of this approach to teaching and learning?
15. In your experience, is CLR common in schools? What do you think are some of the barriers that prevent CLR from being understood and implemented in schools?
16. Why, in your view, is CLR an effective approach for supporting ELLs?
17. What is the most important goal you have in mind when working with ELLs?

Teaching Strategies
18. What does CLR look like in your classroom?
   1. If I were to spend a day in your classroom, what evidence would I see and hear that you are committed to enacting culturally relevant pedagogy?
   2. Can you provide me with some examples of how you enact CLR in practice?
   3. Would you say that you enact CLR for all students, or only in response to the cultural and linguistic identities of particular students? Why?
19. What are some specific examples of how you have enacted CLR for your ELLs?
20. How do you draw on students’ first language identity as a resource for learning? Can you provide me with some examples?
21. What resources do you use in order to draw on students’ first language as a resource?
22. What role, if any, do parents play in your approach to CLR for ELLs?
23. And colleagues? How, if at all, do you collaborate with colleagues to enact CLR and support ELLs?
24. What outcomes do you observe from your ELLs?
25. What outcomes of CLR do you observe from your non-ELLs?
26. How, if at all, do students’ first languages factor into your assessment and why?

Challenges
27. What challenges do you encounter supporting ELLs?
   1. How do you respond to these challenges?
28. What challenges do you face enacting CLR to support ELLs?
   1. How do you respond to these challenges?
   2. How could the education system further support you in meeting these challenges?
Closing Comments
29. Is there anything else that you would like to add to this interview about your experience supporting ELLs?
30. What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to supporting ELLS through the use of CLR?

Thank you for your time and input!