Exploring the Methods of Differentiation to Support English Language Learners by
Elementary Teachers in the Mainstream Classroom

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Abstract

The aim of this qualitative research study was to investigate strategies, outcomes, challenges, and resources of mainstreaming English language learners in elementary classrooms. The main research question that guided this study was: How is a small sample of Ontario elementary school teachers supporting the development of English proficiency and academic achievement for English language learners across subject areas? Semi-structured interviews with two elementary teachers were utilized to collect data. Findings suggest that differentiation in teaching and assessment is an effective strategy for supporting ELLs, which results in their increased achievement of classroom tasks as well as voluntary peer support from the English-speaking students. As well, teachers encounter challenges related to limited interaction between schools and families and the slow student learning process. Findings also suggest that a supportive school environment and professional resources are important in assisting teachers in supporting ELLs in a mainstream classroom. The implications of these findings suggest that an inclusive environment is conducive to improvement in ELLs’ learning outcome and social integration. Also, the research findings indicate that ELLs might demonstrate slow learning processes or low academic achievement initially because of their limited and developing English skills; such limitations may be misdiagnosed as learning disabilities due to educators’ insufficient knowledge of second language acquisition. This can result in ELLs with limited English skills being misplaced in special education programs.

Key Words: English as a second language, English language learners, differentiation, mainstream education, elementary education, inclusion
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Canada is a highly multicultural country; thousands of immigrant students come into the public schools every year. Ontario witnesses a rapid growth through immigration due to the trend of globalization; thus, the number of English language learners (ELLs) constantly increases across the province (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). The term ELL refers to an individual whose first language is a language other than English, or a type of English different from the English instructed in schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). These students may be Canadian-born generations of immigrants, newcomers from other countries, or Aboriginal children. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013), more than one quarter of students are identified as ELLs in Ontario schools. 72% of Ontario’s English elementary schools have ELLs; the ratio of elementary ELL students to ESL teachers is 73:1; 23% of elementary schools with over 10 ELLs do not have specialist ESL teacher (Gallagher-Mackay, Kidder, Methot, Proulx, & Zafari, 2013).

There is a dramatic discrepancy between the need of ELL population and the ELL service. One principal in an elementary school of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) said, “Our ELL population is underserved. Students who qualify for ESL assistance are not receiving it. Despite their best efforts, classroom teachers are not able to address the language needs of these students” (Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2013, p. 25). None or limited English proficiency of the ELLs hinders them from learning subject-specific content in the curriculum. Usually, it takes a year or two for ELL students to develop conversational fluency, whereas it takes more than five years to become reasonably fluent in academic English (Cummins, 1981; Cummins, Mirza, & Stille, 2012). Although it is important for young ELLs to acquire second-language skills, yet acquisition of a second language is not the ultimate task ELLs face; their academic success is of greater importance (Handscombe,
According to the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) (2014), from 2010 to 2014, the proportions of Grade 3 ELLs performing at or above the provincial standard grew to 65% in reading, to 75% in writing and to 64% in mathematics. The proportions of Grade 6 ELLs performing at or above the provincial standard grew to 70% in reading, to 75% in writing (EQAO, 2014). Over the past 2 years, it witnessed a decrease by 2 percent to 51% in mathematics (EQAO, 2014). Although the percentage of elementary ELL students achieving at or above the provincial standard, the proportion of those performing below the standard and its negative impact should not be ignored. Pupils who failed to reach the provincial standard early in school years had higher possibilities to fail to meet the standard in later grades (Shulman, Hinton, Zhang, & Kozlow, 2014).

All educational stakeholders are responsible for supporting the academic success of all students including ELLs. Ontario Ministry of Education is devoted to equity education and aims to facilitate greater student success. The provincial Ministry of Education has policies and guidebooks related to English learning and teaching. However, the academic achievement gap between ELLs and their English-speaking counterparts remains significant. The achievement gap may result from the disconnection to the content being taught in English due to low English proficiency of ELL students. Another factor that affects academic achievement of ELLs is “the quality of instruction they receive” (Short & Echevarria, 2004, p. 10). For many educators who work with ELL students, they lack sufficient preparation through pre-service education or on-site training to “teach effectively in contexts where linguistic and cultural diversity is the norm” (Cummins et al., 2012, p. 27). Also, the disproportionate ratio of elementary ELL students to ESL teachers might contribute to the achievement gap.
1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how elementary teachers support the development of English language and academic proficiency of ELLs across a range of curriculum subject areas. Over the past five years, Ontario has experienced an increase in the percentage of Grade 3 and 6 ELL students who performed at or above the provincial standard in reading and writing (EQAO, 2014). In order to promote literacy success in ELLs, a large number of teaching resources that provide valuable and practical literacy instruction strategies are accessible to classroom teachers. Some of the effective strategies include sheltered instruction and differentiated instruction. However, statistic from EQAO (2014) showed that the percentage of Grade 6 ELLs performing at or above the provincial standard has decreased to 51% in mathematics from 2013 to 2014, which meant outside literacy curriculum, ELL students may struggle with mastering content in other subject areas. For this reason, it is imperative that ELL students be taught content knowledge across curriculum areas in an effective way, and that they meet the provincial standard and catch up with their English-speaking peers.

A further purpose of this research is to report and share practices Canada’s elementary teachers use to develop ELL students’ English language proficiency as well as the academic success across subject areas, so that these practices may be disseminated and thereby inform more teachers working with ELLs. Improving ELL students' academic achievement is important. Given that Canada is attracting greater number of immigrants and their offspring in recent years, the investigation into the best practices of instruction to ELLs in all curriculum areas helps prepare classroom teachers and their students for a highly competitive era.
1.2 Research Questions

The main question guiding this study is: How is a small sample of Ontario elementary teachers supporting the development of English language and academic proficiency for ELLs across the curricular subject areas? Sub-questions to further guide this inquiry include:

a) What key factors do these teachers take into consideration when designing their lessons and assessments for ELLs?

b) What instructional strategies do these teachers consider to be most effective for supporting ELLs, and why? What indicators of learning do these teachers observe?

c) What challenges do these teachers encounter supporting the development of English language and academic proficiency for ELLs across the curricular subject areas?

   How do they respond to these challenges?

d) What resources and factors support these teachers in this work?

1.3 Background of the Researcher

The topic of bridging the academic achievement gap of ELL students is particularly interesting to me, while I am doing my Master of Teaching in Canada. As a newcomer from a foreign country, I did not only lack fluency in communicating in English when I newly arriving in Canada, but I also saw a well-marked academic achievement gap between me and my English-speaking colleagues. Before I came to Canada, as an ELL, I have learned English for over fourteen years from Grade 3 to university. However, I still experience challenges in using English in academic settings, which causes me to put enormously greater efforts to meet the success criteria of each course.

In my fourth practicum, I was assigned to a highly multicultural junior classroom in Toronto District School Board. I worked as a teacher candidate in 4th-grade class in which more than 50% of the classroom population was English langue learners. These students
showed various English proficiency and had different academic performances. I was impressed by the fluent oral English a Tibetan girl developed after she had been placed in a mainstream classroom upon her arrival in Canada one year ago. Despite her proficiency in oral English, she had poor achievements in some of the core subjects such as math, science, and social studies. I was concerned about students who are similar to this Tibetan girl. Although they can gradually pick up English as a second language in the speaking mode, it takes much longer time for them to acquire academic English in order to catch up with their English-speaking peers in academic achievement. This phenomenon brought up questions to me: how we, as educators, can do to support ELL students across subject areas and that what are some effective ways to include ELL students who have diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the mainstream western classroom. Moreover, as an ELL myself, I find the transition to an English-speaking environment challenging even though I have learned English for more than fourteen years in China. I wonder whether some changes could be brought to the education in English in China, so that students can be competent English language users and apply English skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing to daily life as well as academic settings.

1.4 Overview

To respond to the research questions, I conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview two teachers about their practices to support ELLs. In Chapter 2 I reviewed the literature of challenges faced by ELL students and teachers, and effective instruction strategies for ELLs. In Chapter 3 I described the research methodology and included information about the participants, the data collection, and limitations. In Chapter 4 I reported my research findings and discussed their significance in light of the existing research literature, and in Chapter 5 I identified the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice, and for the educational research
community more broadly. I also articulated a series of questions raised by the research findings, and pointed to areas for future research. References and a list of appendixes are found at the end.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter includes a review of literature in the areas pertaining to current practices of placement of English language learners (ELLs), challenges faced by ELLs in schools, the challenges teachers of ELLs encounter, and some effective strategies and approaches for supporting ELLs. Specifically, I review the definitions of English language learners, and describe withdrawn ESL support and mainstream practices in the Canadian context. Next I consider the challenges faced by ELLs as well as their needs in academic and social settings. I then review the challenges encountered by teachers of ELLs. These challenges include the necessity of meeting language and content objectives in their teaching, difficulties in distinguishing language differences from learning disabilities, and insufficient teacher education program. Finally, I overview some of the strategies that have been suggested to meet the unique needs of ELLs and improve their academic performance.

2.1 English Language Learners in Mainstream Classrooms

Supporting ELLs requires educators to understand who they are and what they need. James R. Squire Office of Policy Research (2008) defines ELLs as “active learner(s) of the English language who may benefit from various types of the language support programs (p. 2)”. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) specifically defines ELLs within the Canadian context as students who do not speak English as their first language, or who speak a type of English different from the English instructed in schools, and who are in need of focused educational support in developing English proficiency. These students could be Canadian born and raised in families that speak languages other than English, or they could be newcomers from countries around the world (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). The term ELLs defined by James R. Squire Office of Policy Research and the Ontario Ministry of
Education recognizes the need of specialized support in the English language acquisition for these students.

Initial assessment of English levels of newly arrived students and initial interviews with their families are usually conducted to collect information for further support for those students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). In Ontario, English learning students will receive English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Literacy Development (ELD) programs that help them fully access the grade-level curriculum or will be placed in a grade-level or subject-specific classroom for a proportion of each school day. There are two types of support models existing in Ontario publically funded schools: Integrated Classroom Support Model and Tutorial Support Model (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). In an Integrated Classroom Support Model, the classroom teacher not only works with experts such as ESL teacher or ELD teacher to plan, teach and assess student learning, but is also responsible for differentiating instruction, with individuals or in small groups, to meet the specific needs of English language learning students. Handscombe (1994) is against withdrawn ESL support and argues that inclusion in a mainstream classroom is beneficial for ELLs because it creates “an integrated learning environment consisting of a peer group with varied levels of concept development and language skills and from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds” (p.350).

2.2 The Challenges Faced by ELLs in Schools

In this section, I review the literature pertinent to the challenges faced by ELLs in schools. Specifically, I start with the cognitively and linguistically demanding nature of content learning and how this nature contributes to poor academic success in ELLs. Next, I go over the literature related to misplacing ELLs to special education because the assessment does not differentiate language differences and learning disabilities. Last, I discuss the problems ELLs may have in terms of social integration.
2.2.1 Content learning and academic success

Upon entry to schools, ELL students have varied levels of language proficiency. They are far less capable of communicating effectively in English than their English-speaking peers do (Zimmerman, 2014). It is necessary for children with little proficiency to learn this second language. But language minority students may hold different attitudes towards learning a new language. According to Coelho (1994), children who do not use Roman-alphabet script in their home language may be more reluctant to learn English than those whose first language is related to English through Germanic or Latin roots. Teachers expect English learning students to understand content knowledge taught in English as quickly as possible, which is demanding for ELLs (Zimmerman, 2014). In order to fulfill the academic tasks, language minority students have to develop “native-like proficiency” in speaking and writing across curriculum areas (Handscombe, 1994, p. 333). Researchers find that being fluent in both spoken and written modes takes time; the time ranges from five to nine years (Cummins, 1979; Collier 1989; Fillmore, 1983).

Specifically, Cummins (1979; 1981) introduced the concepts of basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) to highlight the challenges that language minority students face when they try to catch up with their peers in academic achievements. BICS refers to one’s fluency in conversational language and is less cognitively and academically demanding, whereas CALP refers to one’s ability to meet academic expectations by applying the language to understand abstract concepts and ideas in both speech and writing (Cummins, 1981). BICS can be developed more quickly than CALP. Generally speaking, it usually takes a year or two to develop BICS, because the vocabulary and language structures are frequently used, while it often takes five or more years to develop CALP whose complexity lies in the low frequent words as well as the increasingly complicated constructions of grammar (Cummins et al, 2012).
Compared to second language acquisition, the task of improving academic achievement is more important (Handscombe, 1994). One of the most obvious challenges faced by ELLs in schools is the significant gap of academic achievement between them and their English-speaking peers. Polat, Zarecky-Hodge and Schreiber (2016) conducted a study to examine how ELLs of grade four and grade eight performed in reading and mathematics on national assessment compared to their English-speaking peers. Analyzing the research data derived from the National Assessment of Educational Progress from 2003 to 2011, they concluded that “the achievement gap between non-ELLs and ELLs is either steady or slightly widening in both mathematics and reading” (p. 541). ELLs may be experiencing a hard time to bridge the gap between them and their peer in academic performance because their English-speaking peers are also making progress in academic language and literacy skills when the ELLs are catching up to them (Cummins et al, 2012).

### 2.2.2 Language differences and learning disabilities

ELLs should be given opportunities to develop academic language proficiency in the content areas in order to meet curriculum expectations. However, it is commonly practiced that ELLs are being asked to take reading and math tests in English before they develop language proficiency (NEA Education Policy and Practice Department, 2008; Zimmerman, 2014). This practice highlights ELLs’ inability to communicate in English and many learners may be punished for their limited English proficiency (Zimmerman, 2014). Many ELLs may be misdiagnosed with disabilities because the current assessments do not differentiate between disabilities and linguistic differences. ELL students who have been misdiagnosed with disabilities are often sent to special education (James R. Squire Office of Policy Research, 2008; Sullivan, 2011; Zimmerman, 2014). English learning students’ low cognitive functioning resulted from poor language skills may lead them to be mistakenly referred to
special education because “limited language proficiency is often confused with cognitive disability” (Zimmerman, 2014, p. 2).

When being misplaced in special education, the linguistic needs of English learning students cannot be addressed properly—they do not receive appropriate assessment accommodations nor adequately trained teachers to support their language needs (Zimmerman, 2014). Misidentification to special education programs can also cause problems in social aspects for language minority students. The inappropriate placement can negatively affect the growth of ELLs without disabilities (James R. Squire Office of Policy Research, 2008). An opportunity for observing peers modelling appropriate social behaviors has been taken away from the students who are misplaced and isolated in a special education classroom (Zimmerman, 2014).

2.2.3 Social integration

ELL students, especially immigrant children, may encounter challenges adjusting to new languages, environments and cultures. Linguistic minority students need to go through an adjustment time after they enter schools where the language of instruction is new to them; for some students, this time could be very stressful (Coelho, 1994). English learning students with little formal schooling in their home language may fail to adjust to an English-instructed program resulted from the lack of conceptual readiness regarding to schooling (McKeon, 1994). Likewise, Coelho (1994) points out that children without educational experience tend to be confused by the school requirements and fear the school environment. Prevalent withdrawn ESL support may prevent English learning students from socially and racially integrating with their English-speaking peers, contributing to more social isolation of ELLs. (Coelho, 1994). ELLs at a young adolescent age are sensitive to peer perception towards them, and often regarded as different because of language, race, dress, and cultural practices different from that of the mainstream. Language minority students may reject their home
culture and language due to a strong desire to fit into mainstream culture (C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, 1995), or they seek to “build an identity which resists assimilative forces bent on eradicating any vestiges of cultural and linguistic distinctiveness they may display vis-à-vis the dominant culture” (Handscombe, 1994, p. 335).

2.3 The Challenges That Teachers Face Supporting ELLs

In this section, I review the literature pertinent to the challenges encountering teachers working with ELLs in schools. Specifically, I start with the challenges surrounding meeting linguistic and content needs of ELLs in terms of teaching. Next, I go over the literature related to misplacing ELLs to special education resulted from teachers’ inadequate knowledge about second language acquisition and special educations. Last, I discuss the unpreparedness of teachers for supporting ELLs because of insufficient pre-service and in-service training.

2.3.1 Language teaching and content teaching

In the ELL support document, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) outlines the role of the school is to “assist these [ELL] students in acquiring both the English skills and content knowledge they need to participate in learning activities equally with their peers and to meet the expectations of the Ontario curriculum” (p. 10). As outlined in the provincial document, we can see that the needs of ELLs to develop both language skills and content knowledge have been recognized, so have the needs to perform as well as their English-speaking peers. Apart from Canada, many English-speaking countries with increased ELL population call for a quality education. But the reality is, schools in the United States are “challenged to provide a quality education to students who are not yet proficient in English” (Met, 1994, p. 159). Teachers of the English learning students cannot wait for the students to gain English proficiency before teaching the content knowledge to meet the curriculum expectations (Met, 1994).
2.3.2 Assessment, language differences and learning disabilities

A particular challenge for teachers of ELLs is that of distinguishing linguistic differences from learning disabilities (Cloud, 1994; James R. Squire Office of Policy Research, 2008). Usually, the difficulty displayed by language minority students in learning a second language is similar to learning disabilities of exceptional students, and educators who are not familiar with second language acquisition and learning disabilities might further contribute to ELLs’ academic struggles (Sanchez, Parker, Akbayin, & McTigue, 2010). Cloud (1994) stated that second language learning students would be misidentified with special learning needs if they are to evaluate with the problem behavior checklists designed for native speakers. Some observable behaviors related to language learning and special educational needs have been found similar. For example, being unable to retell a story in sequence or summarize a plot may be explained in a language learning context for the reason that an ELL is unfamiliar with too much of the vocabulary, or in a Special Education context for the reason that a student has organization or processing problems (Hamayan, Marler, Sanchez-Lopez, & Damico, 2007). “The same behaviours in one student may have a different cause than for another” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 44), which especially holds true in the case of ELLs. Teachers of ELLs could be easily misled by the strongly similar behaviours to make incorrect assumptions about their students.

2.3.3 Insufficient teacher preparation

A large number of educators who work with ELL or bilingual students are inexperienced in effectively teaching these students “in contexts where linguistic and cultural diversity is the norm”, due to the insufficient preparation in pre-service education or on-site professional training (Cummins et al, 2012, p. 27). De Jong, Harper and Coady (2013) have proposed that teacher education program should address three dimensions so that adequately trained teachers can be present in the mainstream classroom to support ELLs. They argue that
teachers should get to know English learning students “from a bilingual and bicultural perspective” (De Jong et al., 2013, p. 89), understand the impact of language and culture on ELL students’ school experiences and on teachers’ pedagogy for these students, and develop the ability to meet the needs of ELLs in a range of contexts (De Jong et al., 2013).

2.4 Effective Strategies and Approaches for Supporting ELLs

In this section, I review the literature on three strategies and approaches that are proven to be effective to support the learning of ELL students. These strategies and approaches include sheltered instruction, differentiated instruction, and culturally responsive teaching. Specifically, I review definitions of each approach, and synthesize the benefits of each approach to supporting ELL students.

2.4.1 Sheltered instruction

Sheltered instruction is a method used to linguistically support ELLs who learn subject-specific content in English; the term sheltered describes “the refuge the approach provides to students with diverse linguistic backgrounds from English-only mainstream instruction” (Macías, Fontes, Kephart, & Blume, 2013, p. 84). The aim of sheltered instruction is to make content of curriculum areas accessible to students with limited English proficiency by combining language acquisition instruction with content area instruction (Baecher, Artigliere, Patterson, & Spatzer, 2012; Macías et al, 2013). Teachers who are using sheltered instruction try to present academic subject knowledge, vocabulary and principles in an understandable way to students, while acquiring language of instruction is of second importance (Faltis, 1993; Faltis & Arias, 1993; Lundien, 2009). Sheltered instruction is characterized by three main features that are “comprehensible input, a focus on academic content, and segregation”; in terms of segregation, only ELLs are obliged for “sheltered content classes” (Lundien, 2009, p. 48). But research indicated that a more ELL-responsive mainstream classroom could
be more responsive to learners who need further support as well (The James R. Squire Office for Policy Research, 2008).

The two most well-known sheltering techniques are the Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (SIOP) (Short & Echevarria, 1999) and the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). These techniques have been implemented for teachers in mainstream classroom to accommodate their ELL students in order to access subject-specific content (Baecher et al., 2012). A teacher will use sheltered instruction that sometimes may include differentiated instruction as part of his or her plan to address the needs of ELLs with varied levels of English proficiency (Baecher et al., 2012). These adaptations are proven to have a positive correlation between higher student achievements and academic language tasks (Echevarria & Short, 2010).

2.4.2 Differentiated instruction

Differentiated instruction can be a good way to meet the needs of ELLs in a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom. It is considered a strategy to narrow the achievement gap of ELLs and native English-speaking students (Wilson, 2015). Differentiated instruction is the best way to achieve that goal, by taking the English language proficiency of ELLs into consideration, as well as other factors that can influence learning (Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2010). Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) suggested that a balance between academic content and students’ specific needs can be achieved by changing four core elements related to learning curriculum subject areas: content, process, product and affect. Content is the knowledge and skills that students need to learn. Process is how students are making sense of the content being taught. Product is a demonstration or the evidence of what students have learned. Affect comes from emotions and attitudes that impact on students’ learning. There are several strengths of differentiated instruction for meeting individual student’s needs; it offers the chance for students to pay more attention to language development within the content lesson
(Baecher et al., 2012); it also encourages teachers to design personalized plans that may help with learning to students, as well as allotting more time for assignment completion (Tomlinson, 2014a).

To improve the academic achievement of ELLs, teachers need to know ELLs’ strengths and weaknesses in English from aspects of listening, reading, writing and speaking; sometimes, teachers might empirically misjudge a student’s English competence by his or her oral fluency, which “assumes a corresponding level of reading and writing proficiency (Baecher et al., 2012, p.16). It is differentiated instruction that encourages teachers to meet students’ needs more than the traditional teaching settings (Tomlinson, 2014b). Differentiating instruction to allow ELLs to learning content knowledge does not mean teachers have to design and implement a different lesson plan of the same topic, instead, they can make accommodations in content, as well as process. To make differentiation manageable, teachers can start with designing a “base” activity for English-speaking students who need little scaffolding, then design content, process and product adaptations to non-English speaking learners (Baecher et al., 2012).

2.4.3 Culturally responsive teaching

ELL students are “a highly heterogeneous and complex group of students, with diverse gifts, educational needs, backgrounds, languages, and goals” (James R. Squire Office of Policy Research, 2008, p. 1). Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is another way to teach ELLs, in terms of meeting the needs of people from diverse cultures. ELLs’ feelings about school are influenced by the cultural message received from the society (McKeon, 1994). CRT is closely related to culturally relevant pedagogy that many researchers have considered being effective in supporting the academic needs of culturally different leaners (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001). The teaching practice that takes into account every student within a
classroom and closely considers the academic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic difference of each student is regarded as the best practice (Santamaria, 2009).

There are six main characteristics of culturally responsive teaching: “validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory” (Santamaria, 2009, p.223). Teachers who use this approach understand how to make their teaching more effective to ELLs because “CRT is an approach to instruction that responds to the sociocultural context, and seeks to integrate the cultural content of the learner in shaping an effective learning environment” (Ooka Pang, 2005, p.336). ELLs are culturally and linguistically diverse learners to some extent. “The norm, social practices, ideologies, language, and behavior” (p.197) constitute cultural capital of a student; such cultural capital is most of the time greatly different from the norms and worldviews in mainstream society (Howard, 2003). A learners’ sociocultural background could serve as a facilitator if it is valued and properly integrated through the teaching process. Educational research regarding the increasingly diverse learner population suggests for classroom teachers to integrate students’ language and culture as teaching resources, rather than regard them as barriers to learning (Abrahams & Troike, 1972). Within culturally responsive teaching, teachers would critically reconsider their own understandings of diversity to better meet individual needs of their learners (Santamaria, 2009). To better support learners with diverse cultural backgrounds, it is suggested that teachers employ materials with respect with different cultures to build on students’ cultural capital, at the same time teach language through content and themes (James R. Squire Office of Policy Research, 2008).

2.5 Conclusion

In this literature review, I examined research related to the current situation of ELLs integrated into the mainstream classroom, challenges faced by ELLs, challenges encountered by teachers who work with mainstreamed ELLs, and effective strategies for supporting ELLs.
This review emphasized in what ways the three effective strategies—sheltered instruction, differentiated instruction, and culturally responsive teaching—are beneficial to meet the language and content learning needs of ELL students. It also highlighted the difficulty in distinguishing language differences from learning disorders among ELLs only with limited language proficiency and ELLs with special education needs.

By focusing on what challenges classroom teachers encounter and how they support the language learning as well as content learning in ELLs, I hope to contribute further to the instructional practices emphasized in existing research, while also provide more insights to the implication for mainstreaming ELLs for optimal learning outcomes. My research study approaches the issue of integrating ELLs into mainstream classrooms using semi-structured interviews with elementary teachers working with language minority students in Toronto, Canada. This study addresses how teachers support English learning students’ second language acquisition and academic success within their classrooms. By considering what instructional practices are used by ELL teachers, how teachers utilize these practices, and what outcomes they observe from the students, it is my hope to provide better understanding of the process of supporting mainstreamed ELL students.
3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain the research methodology, which informed my study. I begin with a review of the research approach and procedures, followed by a discussion of the main instruments of data collection. I then elaborate specifically on the participants of the study, including the sampling criteria, the sampling procedures, and participants’ biography. Next, I proceed to explain how I analyzed the data and review the ethical issues related to my study, and then write about some of the methodological strengths and limitations of my study. Finally, I conclude the chapter by summarizing the key methodological decisions and my rationale for these decisions, given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This research study explores how a sample of elementary school teachers meet the linguistic and academic needs of English learning students in mainstream classrooms. This study was conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review, as well as semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with two teachers. Qualitative research is used when researchers aim to “understand how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 21). The insight into the phenomenon that is being examined should be understood “from the participants’ perspectives, not the researcher’s” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p.29). Qualitative research features a natural setting where the study takes place, the use of interactive and humanistic methods, emerging data, and being fundamentally interpretive (Campbell, 2014). The purpose of my research is to explore the practices of elementary teachers supporting the development of academic English proficiency as well as the academic achievement of ELLs. Data collected by a quantitative research is not going to provide me with the type of data that I hope to collect. Therefore, I selected the
phenomenological research method that allows me to collect and focus on the lived experiences of the elementary school teachers with respect to the ELL teaching issue. Data is collected via a semi-structured open-ended interview format.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Qualitative research methods share a common core of characteristics. They are generally used in face-to-face situations in which the researcher is relating to the respondent or the setting or both. The researcher is the primary tool for data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), meaning that information is always filtered through the exchange between the individual, the research setting, and the respondents.

Observations and interviews are commonly used to collect data in qualitative research (Schensul, 2011; Williams, 2015). Interviews are often used in the field if education to collect data in qualitative studies when we cannot “observe behavior, feelings or how people interpret the world around them and when we are interested in the past events that are impossible to replicate” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 99). Interviewing is not necessarily the best method to conduct qualitative research; whether to use it or not depends on the research question one is working on (Forsey, 2012). Qualitative interviewing is chosen by those who want to understand and record others’ perspectives because it allows researchers to explore viewpoints of research subjects (Miller & Glassner, 1997). If the question is to explore what the meaning or significance of particular events, behaviors or phenomenon to individuals or groups of people, it is probably necessary to apply in-depth interviews to the research (Forsey, 2012).

Qualitative interviews have been categorized as unstructured, semi-structured, and structured according to the amount of structure desired (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Researchers who utilize structured interviews for data collection will predetermine questions and the order of questions ahead of time. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) have stated that even
though highly structured interview questions are useful to find out demographic information such as age, gender, education and so on, it is problematic in the way that researchers receive responses to their “preconceived notions of the world” (p. 100); there is little room for respondents to further share their perspectives and understandings of the world when they have to follow the predetermined questions and order. Semi-structured interviews are less structured and more open-ended. This type of interviewing provides for more flexibility with which participants are able to express specific information related to the particular events and phenomena. This interviewing also allows the researcher to “respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent and to new idea on the topic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p.101). In unstructured interviews, there is no predetermined questions because the researcher has not developed much understandings of a phenomenon and wants to utilize unstructured interview questions to explore and know more about this phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Since I have known much about and determined the phenomenon that I am interested in studying, which is to examine the practices of a small sample of elementary school teachers supporting ELLs in a mainstream classroom, I need not to use an unstructured interview to explore the entry level of knowledge pertinent to this field. Instead, I aim to obtain more specific and detailed information about each participant’s perspectives, experiences and practices with regards to supporting mainstreamed ELLs; therefore, I utilized the semi-structure interview in my research that allowed me to delve deeper into more personal matters and into emerging ideas related to the research topic from my participants.

3.3 Participants

Here I review the sampling criteria and reasoning for participant recruitment. I review a range of possible avenues for teacher recruitment as well. I also include a section wherein an introduction and background information of the participants are provided.
3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The following criteria were applied to the teacher participants:

1. Teachers have been working with a mixed population of ELL and English speaking students in a homeroom where English is the language of instruction for more than 5 years.

2. Teachers have demonstrated commitment to or expertise in the improvement of overall academic achievement of ELL students.

3. Teachers have been working in primary or junior divisions in the Greater Toronto Area.

Qualitative research requires smaller sample sizes than quantitative research (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). The reason lies in that the purpose of sampling in qualitative research is to collect useful and insightful information surrounding a phenomenon, rather than to speak for population in general as in quantitative research (Gentles et al., 2015). In order to address the main research question, the participants that I interviewed have had at least five years of working with ELL students in a mainstream classroom. This amount of time allows for a wide range of experiences in terms of teaching ELLs in a mainstreamed setting. In addition, I wanted to see how classroom teachers conduct planning, instruction and assessment for equity education for ELLs. Educating both English learning students and other English-speaking students is not easy in a mainstreamed setting. Teachers needed to address the unique linguistic and academic needs of ELLs with a variety of strategies and tools if they want ELLs to catch up with their peers academically. Additionally, participating teachers also needed to demonstrate commitment to or have expertise in improving student success of ELLs in all curriculum areas. This is because obtaining academic success is a far more challenging yet significant task than second language acquisition for an ELL student. Thus, a teacher who met this criterion was the ideal participant of my study. Last but not least, a
geographic focus was highlighted. This was because the Greater Toronto Area has the most multicultural student population in Ontario.

### 3.3.2 Sampling procedures/recruitment

When researchers are conducting qualitative research, they usually choose sampling methodology that allows them to further understand whatever phenomenon they are studying; qualitative researchers are most likely to use nonprobability sampling in their studies (Blackstone, 2012). Blackstone (2012) points out that nonprobability sampling does not feature generalization and that a person’s possibility to be recruited in the sample is unknown. Due to the fact that generalizability is not the key goal of this qualitative study, nonprobability sampling is applicable and has been used in this study.

The four types of nonprobability samples that researchers use include purposive samples, snowball samples, quota samples, and convenience samples. Regarding purposive sampling (Gentles et al, 2015), a researcher puts forward specific sampling criteria that he or she intends to examine beforehand, and then recruits research participants who meet all these criteria (Blackstone, 2012). A research that employs snowball sampling relies on initial participant to refer new participants (Blackstone, 2012). In quota sampling, a researcher needs to examine a phenomenon from several various subgroups (Blackstone, 2012). Finally, in terms of convenience sampling, a researcher simply collects data from participants that are most accessible (Blackstone, 2012). Given my goal of the research study, I was looking for participants who have had relevant experiences of supporting student success in ELLs, rather than seeking for those who have had irrelative experiences, thus I employed purposive sampling in my research study. Furthermore, as an international student in Ontario, I only have connections to OISE colleagues and professors, as well as staff in the placement schools. Thus I also applied convenience sampling to the participant recruitment procedures so that I was able to collect data from the existing connections that I have within the region.
3.3.3 Participant bios

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym for the purpose of protecting his/her anonymity.

Molly

Molly was my first participant. At the time of the research Molly was a first grade teacher working with a mixed population of ELL and non-ELL students in her classroom. She had had a background in child study and an experience of teaching English language learners overseas before she became a classroom teacher in Toronto. She had been teaching for more than seventeen years. Additionally, she possessed an experience working with children in special education programs. Molly’s first-hand experience in supporting a diverse student population, including language minority students as well as exceptional students, provided insights into the specific practices pertinent to my research area.

Belle

Belle was my second participant. Belle had an education background in multicultural education in teacher’s college. Particularly, Belle possessed an additional qualification of supporting ELL. She had been teaching for twenty-eight years and was working as an ESL resource teacher who supported language minority students in integrated classrooms by the time of the interview. In addition to being an ESL resource teacher, Belle also worked to support students with special needs at her school. Belle’s professional qualification and rich teaching experiences with ELLs provided in-depth knowledge on my research topic.

3.4 Data Analysis

Interviews in my research study were audio-recorded. I analyzed the data collected from the interviews with teacher participants. The first step was transcription. Transcribing was a challenging yet necessary process; it helps facilitate analysis (Sutton & Austin, 2015). I proofread the transcription once it was complete. Analyzing qualitative data involves...
categorizing the transcribed data so that it is related and helpful to the study topic, which means coding (Schensul, 2011). There are some means to help with coding. It can be done manually on a hard copy, for example, making notes in the margin, or be done utilizing qualitative research software, such as NVivo (Sutton & Austin, 2015). It is important for researchers to record their thoughts as they analyze their data because such information is so helpful when researchers “move between the emerging analysis and the raw data of interviews, field notes, and documents” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 170). Thus, after transcription, I coded the interviews by making notes in the margin and kept analytic memos alongside with the codes. I then synthesized similar codes to form the four themes that answered my research questions in a coherent and meaningful way. Implications for educational communities were provided in this section.

It is important to be true to the participants when a qualitative researcher comes to data analysis and management (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Theoretical standpoint taken by researcher has an impact on interpretation of data; thus awareness of standpoints is fundamental in qualitative research; “without such awareness, it is easy to slip into interpreting other people’s narratives from your own viewpoint, rather than that of the participants” (Sutton & Austin, 2015, Interpretation of Data, para. 1). Therefore, I was mindful of my standpoint while I analyzed the interview data: I was trying my best to understand how my participants’ practices of supporting mainstreamed ELLs from their perspectives and viewpoints instead of mine.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), some specific ethical issues need to be given consideration before, during and after qualitative research. These include worthiness of the project, competence boundaries, informed consent, benefits, cost, and reciprocity, harm and risk, honesty and trust, privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity, etc. Generally, a researcher
will conduct research in a shallow way with less devotion to research design and data collection, if the study does not have values important to the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994). There is larger significance and real meaning to me in my study as I stated in the purpose of the study in Chapter 1.

Poorer data usually result from weak consent, and the quality of the research as well as the interests of participants can be harmed, if there is vagueness about the later procedure of data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, I asked participants to sign a consent letter, obtaining their consent to be interviewed and audio-recorded. The consent letter provides an overview of the study, and addresses ethical implications as well as specific expectations of participation. Furthermore, participants were notified of their right of withdraw from participation in the study at any stage of the research study. Miles and Huberman (1994) believe that use of member checks to clarify or refine interpretations and conclusion can be beneficial to anonymity problems. Thus, participant identities remained confidential through the use of pseudonyms and any identifying markers related to their schools or students were excluded. I provided opportunities to participants to review the transcripts and to refine any statement before data analysis conducted by me. All data has been stored on my password-protected laptop and will be destroyed after 5 years. Lastly, there are no known risks to participation in this study.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Carr (1994) thinks that “a low population validity” (p.717) may result from the qualitative data. One of methodological limitations in my research study is the limited interviews that I conducted with two teacher participants. Thus, when I analyzed the data generated from the interviews with these teachers, I cannot generalize the experiences of teachers in a larger population.
It is undeniable that interviewees sometimes give familiar narratives rather than providing insightful response related to their subject-specific field during the interview (Miller & Glassner, 1997). Denzin notes that “it displaces the very thing it is supposed to represent, so that what is always given is a trace of other thing, not the thing – lived experience—itself” (as cited in Miller & Glassner, 1997, p.101). According to Charmaz, in the later stages of data analysis, such as coding, categorization and typologizing of interview response may lead to partially telling the stories, rather than complete stories (as cited in Miller & Glassner, 1997, p.101). Therefore, when I came to data collection and analysis, I left out the least important or irrelative data to the research topic, which might impact the wholeness of the stories told to the participants.

However, “qualitative methods can help researchers to understand how and why such behaviours take place” (Sutton & Austin, 2015, para. 1). Through in-depth semi-structured interviews, I dug deeper into participants’ lived experience so that I was able to draw conclusion on what kinds of teaching practices did the participants used and how they implement those practices to support ELLs’ student success.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I explained the research methodology I used in my research study. I started with conveying my decision to engage in qualitative research, citing that this approach allowed me to access the information that could answer my research question: how a small sample of elementary teachers is supporting ELLs in a mainstream classroom. Next, I outlined in what ways semi-structured interviews were useful to collect data. Semi-structured interviews provided for much flexibility with which I could elicit more specific information from participants’ personal lived experiences regarding my research interest. I then listed the sampling criteria that were followed by rationale for those criteria and described the basic information of participants. Also, I explained how I collected the data using nonprobability
sampling. I explained the ethical issues surrounding this study, including worthiness of the study, consent, member-checks, right to withdraw, and data storage. Finally, I discussed the methodological limitations and highlighted some strengths in my study. Next, in Chapter 4, I will report on the findings of the research.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter showcases and discusses the findings that originated from the data analysis of the research interviews. These interviews were conducted with two public elementary teachers in the Great Toronto Area for the purpose of answering my main research question: How is a small sample of Ontario elementary teachers supporting the English language and academic performance of ELLs across curricular subject areas? In this chapter, participants’ perspectives and experiences were organized into themes and discussed within the framework of Chapter 2 literature review in this research. The research findings were categorized into five main themes:

1. Participants identified student profiles as key factors when designing their lessons and assessments for ELLs;
2. Participants recognized differentiation in teaching and assessment as the most effective strategy for supporting ELLs;
3. Participants considered achievement of classroom tasks as an indicator of learning for ELLs and voluntary peer support as an outcome of learning for the English-speaking peers.
4. Participants overcame challenges related to limited interaction between schools and families and the slow student learning process by seeking help from others inside and outside the school;
5. Participants identified a supportive school environment and professional resources as important in assisting teachers with supporting ELLs.

These themes are followed by sub-themes to further explain participants’ beliefs and practices. In each theme a brief introduction will be provided, followed by the report on the data, and the discussion on the significance of each theme made within the framework of the
existing literature. Finally, a summarization of the findings and recommendations for next steps will be given in the conclusion section.

4.1 Participants Identified Student Profiles as Key Factors When Designing Their Lessons and Assessments for ELLs.

Both participants recognized the importance of supporting the learning of ELL students in a mainstream classroom, as well as the factors they considered when planning their lessons and assessments for ELLs. Specifically, participants highlighted student profiles in the planning procedure. They agreed that students’ existing vocabulary level was a crucial factor to consider in the planning of lessons and assessments. Furthermore, both participants spoke to the importance of having ELL students’ academic and emotional needs in mind while designing lessons and assessments. Last but not least, they emphasized that the opportunities for ELLs learning from peers should be provided in their learning process. These factors should be well considered while teachers design their lessons and assessments for ELLs because the learning outcomes in English learning and curriculum areas could be improved with these factors being addressed.

4.1.1 Participants identified existing student vocabulary as an important factor that affected the planning of lessons and assessments for ELLs.

Both participants noticed the influence of existing student vocabulary on the learning of ELLs; thus, they first considered student vocabulary when planning their lessons and assessments. Molly reported that when some of the ELL students first arrived in her class, “their writing is poor, their spelling is poor, and their reading is not good” due to their limited English skills. Therefore, when she designed her lessons and assessments she considered the existing vocabulary of ELLs. Similarly, Belle claimed that it was initially important to “build some basic vocabulary” in order for ELL students to communicate their needs. For those who were brand new to this country and knew no English, Belle would put the curriculum aside
and just focus on the English language acquisition. She believed that it may take up to a year for ELLs to learn to express themselves in English. What came next, according to Belle, was to “expand the vocabulary” so that the ELL students were able to access the content areas. As a current ESL resource teacher, Belle reiterated that the necessity of supporting the academic English acquisition of ELL students. Her job was “go in and support the class in Science and Social Studies. Those ELL students are on my radar, so I am making sure that they understand.”

The existing vocabulary plays an important role in ELL students’ learning. According to Cummins et al. (2012), in order to actively participate in the learning that meets the curriculum expectations, ELLs must master two distinct forms of English language proficiency: basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP). It usually takes a year or two to develop BICS because the vocabulary and language structures are frequently used; however, it often takes five or more years to develop CALP, whose complexity lies in the low frequent words as well as the increasingly complicated constructions of grammar (Cummins et al, 2012). It was proactive to think about the existing vocabulary the ELLs have when planning the lessons and assessments for them. By doing so, participants came up with specific strategies to teach ELLs either basic communicative words or academic English vocabulary according to what their needs were.

4.1.2 Participants identified students’ academic and emotional needs as an important factor that affects the planning of lessons and assessments for ELLs.

Both participants stated that they had the student academic and emotional needs in mind when designing lessons and assessments for ELLs. Molly stated that she planned her lessons and assessment by thinking about “what their need is? Do they need a lot of visuals for this? Is it a video that can help in this situation? Or a song or a picture book?” She also
noted that support offered to meet the needs of ELL students may help other students in the class as well, especially for the primary students. She explained, “The thing is that for Grade 1 that helps everybody [because] we’re learning how to read and write here. So it’s great to have to do all of that [support].”

Apart from academic needs, Belle also identified emotional needs as an important factor to think about when planning her lessons and assessments. She noticed that the first six and twelve months in a new class might be the emotionally hardest time for the ELL students. The emotional hardship might result from not knowing much English so that they could not express their needs and communicate their thoughts. The inability to communicate in a new language led to disconnection to people in the new environment; the result of such a disconnection might be that “nobody was really paying attention to them.” Belle stated that if she was a homeroom teacher, she would consider having an ESL teacher, if available, come in the class in the instruction period not only to build vocabulary but also offer the emotion support to the ELLs students as needed. Academic difficulties and emotional hardship were a common finding throughout the literature on the challenges ELL students faced. According to James R. Squire Office of Policy Research (2008), in addition to academic difficulties and the varied levels of second language proficiency, another additional challenge faced by ELL students might be getting accustomed to a culture. The teaching and learning style in Canada might be different from what ELLs have in their home country; thus, when being mindful of the academic and emotional needs of ELLs in their instruction and assessments, participants were actively assisting ELLs in getting used to a new culture, easing the tension in the process of acculturation.

4.1.3 Participants identified the provision of opportunities for learning from peers as an important factor that affects the planning of lessons and assessments for ELLs.
Both participants highlighted the benefits of integrating ELL students in a mainstream classroom. One of the benefits was that ELLs were able to learn from their English-speaking peers. They noticed the need to explicitly create opportunities for ELL students to observe and learn from peer interactions in their classrooms. Belle mentioned that it was advantageous to put ELL students in the integration classroom because “they learn a lot from their friends.” She used an example to demonstrate the effect of learning from peers. A newly-arrived boy with no English was asked to take a picture and write a sentence to describe each classmate with that person helping him. That person would work with him and record his/her speaking of that descriptive sentence, such as “This is Student A. He/she likes to play basketball.” The newly-arrived boy made a book of all those pictures and sentences, and kept the audio records of his classmates. This way, the new comer learned writing and speaking from his peers, meeting the specific expectations in Language Arts.

Similarly, Molly articulated that providing opportunities for learning from peers not only reflected her beliefs in inclusiveness for all students, but also was a means to support the academic learning of the ELLs. She explained,

> If it is a subject that has a high level of vocabulary like Science and Social Studies, being in the classroom and observing all of it, and watching students interact and listening to their interactions just at their desks is so important for them.

ELLs may be experiencing a hard time to catch up with their peers in academic performance because ELLs are essentially trying to follow a moving target as their English-speaking peers continue to make progress in academic language and literacy skills (Cummins et al, 2012). Both participants’ intention to create opportunities for learning from peers reflected their awareness of supporting ELLs to develop the academic language proficiency in the content areas.
4.2 Participants Recognized Differentiation in Teaching and Assessment as the Most Effective Strategy for Supporting ELLs.

Both participants were well aware of the significance of differentiation and advocated using it for ELLs in teaching and assessment. Specifically, participants utilized visual aids to assist student learning. Furthermore, both participants paired up an ELL with a partner to help him/her with the language and academic learning. However, participants had contradicting ideas on the necessity of modifying learning expectations for ELLs. One participant approved of modifications in instruction and assessment because of the low academic abilities of the ELL students, whereas the other participant believed that ELLs were able to achieve curriculum expectations as many as other students if their language needs were met in the process of learning.

4.2.1 Participants recognized providing visual aids as an effective strategy for supporting ELLs.

Molly considered whether the ELLs in her class needed visual aids as tools for comprehension for a lesson, such as videos, pictures and anchor charts put up in the classroom for the lesson review. She highlighted the significance of visual aids for both the ELLs and the English-speaking students in the primary grades. She reasoned, “the thing is that for grade ones, visual aids help everybody because they’re learning the same thing.” Likewise, Belle spoke to the use of visual aids to the ELLs as well. She differentiated her instruction by simplifying the language, giving step-by-step instruction and using visuals to support what she was saying. She explained the significance of visual aids for helping with ELLs’ comprehension, “you put pictures and words together, letting them (ELLs) have some access to their prior knowledge and their first language, and connecting what they have already known in their first language to the new language they’re learning.” ELLs may experience a hard time catching up with their peers in academic performance because what
ELLs are trying to follow is a moving target; their English-speaking peers continue to make progress in academic language and literacy skills (Cummins et al, 2012). Visual aids may be a useful strategy to assist ELLs in acquiring the academic English such as terminology related to a specific subject area. With the visual aids, ELLs may be able to activate their prior knowledge and connect what they know to the things they’re taught in English, enhancing the comprehension across subject areas.

4.2.2 Participants recognized pairing ELLs with a helping partner as an effective strategy for supporting ELLs.

Both participants valued peer support for ELLs. As it was mentioned in the previous section, they identified the provision of opportunities for learning from peers as an important factor that affected the planning of lessons and assessments for ELLs. Thus, in their teaching practices they paired up ELLs with helping partners. Molly expressed that one-on-one time with an ELL was limited in the classroom with a big student population and that a buddy system was a solution to this problem. Molly reiterated that in her classroom teaching she assured that an ELL had a kind and strong buddy to work with. Likewise, Belle also used a helping person to academically support ELLs. ELLs could learn from helping partners who had higher English skills in the interactions. One example of learning from a helping partner shared by Belle was that an ELL wrote a sentence to describe each classmate with that particular classmate helping him. According to Cummins et al. (2012), in order to actively participate in the learning that meets the curriculum expectations, ELLs must master two distinct forms of English language proficiency: basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP). Pairing ELLs with helping partners allowed for opportunities for ELLs to pick up basic interpersonal communicative skills and to learn cognitive-academic language by interacting with their helpers.
4.2.3 One participant recognized modifying learning expectations as an effective strategy for supporting ELLs.

Participants had contradicting opinions towards modifying expectations for ELL students. Molly advocated reducing expectations for these students. She stated, “expectations are not the same for students who have just come new, so we reduce a number of expectations or what they are required to do.” Considering the poor English skills ELL students might have, Molly used differentiation such as having students express their thoughts with drawings and/or oral expression instead of writing. In contrast, Belle did not agree to reduce the expectations for ELL students. She explained,

I don't think you would reduce what you're expecting because they're capable of doing the same work that the Grade 5 students are doing, whatever grade it is. But you have to change the language to help them. You give them language support so that they can meet that expectation.

Instead of reducing expectations, Belle simplified the language of instruction, chunked down the instruction and allowed for the use of the first language to assist ELLs in meeting the expectations. Differentiated instruction balances academic content and a student’s specific needs by changing four core elements related to learning curriculum subject areas: content, process, product and affect (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Reduced expectations employed by Molly was a change in content which was one of the aspects of differentiated instruction. Simplifying the language of instruction, chunking down the instruction and allowing for the use of the first language were the accommodations in process where ELLs could approach the same content in their own ways. Both modifying expectations and accommodations in process are the two aspects in differentiation that is advantageous to support ELLs in a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom.
4.3 Participants Considered Achievement of Classroom Tasks as an Indicator of Learning for ELLs and Voluntary Peer Support as an Outcome of Learning for the English-Speaking Peers.

Both participants noticed the progression in achievement of classroom tasks from ELLs as a result of their approach to supporting their English acquisition and academic performance. One participant focused more on the final products of ELLs as an indicator of learning, whereas another participant paid more attention to the ELLs’ increasing use of English in school in terms of assessing their learning outcomes. Furthermore, participants observed voluntary peer support from the English-speaking students as a result of the supportive approach in class. The English-speaking peers actively included ELLs in the school setting, helping them with the schoolwork as well as having fun with them at recess.

4.3.1 Participants considered demonstration of learning in the classroom tasks as an indicator of learning of ELL students.

Molly regarded student output of the classroom tasks as an indicator of learning. She explained, “I look at their output most of the time, such as what they’ve written in their writing journal, or what they’ve done in the math activity, and what they’re able to produce.” Apart from the output, she also paid attention to the process of learning for ELLs. She believed that learning process indicated student comprehension of the classroom tasks and assessing process in addition to final product was fair to ELLs. She articulated,

[assessing] process is more fair because the final product is not necessary gonna look like everybody else's. But if they understand some of the things that we've done in a shared way or together as a class, if they're contributing, it's a good indicator of comprehension for sure.

Similarly, Belle also focused on the progression of ELL students achieved in the classroom tasks. She paid more attention to their frequency of using English at school. She
thought the indicator of learning was that ELL students were “using English more.”

Specifically, if ELL students were able to listen to English, speak English and respond with more than single words, these were the indicators of learning of ELLs for Belle. Regardless of assessing the learning process or final products of the classroom tasks, student learning was demonstrated with English rather than any other languages. Basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins et al., 2012) are the two forms of language skills that ELLs need to master in order to meet the curriculum expectations. Both participants support ELLs’ English acquisition through the helping partner system and modifications and/or accommodations, and emphasized the increasing use of English in the classroom tasks as an indicator of learning.

4.3.2 Participants reported voluntary peer support as an outcome of learning of the English-speaking students.

Both participants observed voluntary support from the English-speaking peers as a result of their approach to supporting ELL students in English learning and subject matter learning. Molly stated that teachers could influence the students at a young age by stating the expectations for the English-speaking peers in terms of supporting ELL students in the class and by verbally reward those who helped. Once the expectations were clearly set and the helping behaviors were reinforced by the verbal reward, the English-speaking peers voluntarily supported ELL students academically and socially. Likewise, Belle mentioned that academic and social support from the English-speaking peers were noticeable in her school. She briefed, “I haven’t seen exclusion but a lot of peer support in our classrooms and the playground.”

Young adolescent ELLs are sensitive to peer perception towards them; given their difference in language, race, dress and cultural practices then their peers’, the desire of ELLs to fit into mainstream culture may lead many of them to reject their home culture and
language (C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, 1995). Voluntary peer support in Molly’s and Belle’s schools reflected peer acceptance towards ELL students. Such acceptance was conducive to for ELLs to establish a positive view on their identity and to smooth their process of fitting into a new culture.

4.4 Participants Overcame Challenges Related to Limited Interaction Between Schools and Families and the Slow Student Learning Process by Seeking Help From Others Inside and Outside the School.

Both participants indicated some challenges they faced while supporting the language and cross-curricular learning of the ELLs. Specifically, one participant indicated that she was not able to support the cross-curricular learning of ELLs in one-on-one instruction because of the big class size. She overcame this problem by pairing ELLs with helping partners. Furthermore, both participants acknowledged that there might be a language barrier that prevented effective communications with students and families. They believed that the translation services available in school and online were useful to overcome this language barrier. Last, participants indicated that the slow learning process of ELLs might hinder the academic learning of ELLs and even delay the appropriate support given to the ELLs with special needs, whose low academic performance was rationalized by their poor English skills. The solution to this challenge was to adjust their teaching to better meet individual needs of the ELLs and collaborate with resource teachers to provide timely support.

4.4.1 One participant regarded limited one-on-one instructional time with ELLs as a barrier in supporting cross-curricular learning of ELLs, and paired ELLs with learning partners as a way to overcome this challenge.

Molly thought that limited one-on-one instructional time with ELLs resulting from a big class size was a barrier to support the academic learning of ELLs in a mainstream classroom. She explained that,
I got to deal with 25 students by the end of last school year. I had a new student from an Asian country who arrived in February, and my one-on-one time with him was almost non-existent. Beside reading with him to see where his reading level was or in a small guided reading group, I didn’t get very much time with him.

To deal with this challenge, Molly assigned the Asian student to sit with a learning partner while they were working at their desks. The learning partner was a highly helping person in the class and eager to explain and model what to do for the Asian ELL student. Moreover, in a weekly inter-grade reading program, this ELL student was paired with a Grade 3 reading buddy who spoke the same first language as the ELL student. While reading in pairs with that particular buddy, the Asian ELL could ask for translation in his first language if he did not know the meaning of the English reading. This pairing strategy allowed for learning opportunities to learn from the peers and encouraged the use of first language to help with sense making of English learning material. Pairing with learning partners turned out to be effective because the outcome observed from the Asian student was that, “his English level improved quickly by the end of the year. He was able to tell about social problems that he was having and explained what happened outside at recess,” stated Molly. Valuing students’ cultural capital such as language is beneficial to ELL student learning. Educational research regarding the increasingly diverse learner population suggests that classroom teachers integrate students’ language and culture as teaching resources, rather than regarding them as barriers to learning (Abrahams & Troike, 1972). Thus, Molly’s pairing ELLs with helping partners who spoke the same language as the ELLs reflected her teaching belief of respecting and valuing student’s cultural capital.

4.4.2 Participants regarded the language barrier as a challenge that hindered effective communication with students and families, and used translation services available in school and online as means to overcome this challenge.
Molly spoke to the language barrier resulting from the limited English knowledge of the parents. In terms of responses to this parent language barrier, she reported that the school board provided translators for report card interviews and the ESL teacher in her school could find her a translator that knows some languages. Although she could book the support provided by the school board and the ESL teachers in her school for report card interviews, she found the parent language barrier still hindered the effective communications with families about the progress of their child on a regular basis. She explained,

I like to communicate with the parents more often than just report card interviews. I like to send emails back and forth, and have conversations in the playground after school just how was the day today. You want to give ongoing feedback, not just 3-time feedback in the year. And they want it too, I'm sure. I know parents, a lot of parents want ongoing feedback not just two or three times a year.

In addition to the parent language barrier mentioned by Molly, Belle also reported that the language barrier prevented the newly-arrived ELL students with little English proficiency from building emotional connections in school. She mentioned that, “the initial 6 to 12 months in a new school was emotionally hard to those newly-arrived ELLs. Nobody is really paying attention to them, and they can’t communicate so they can’t make connections.” Thus, for those ELLs who came new directly from foreign countries, Belle would teach them basic vocabulary to enable them to convey their needs. Furthermore, the language barrier might impact the abilities of ELLs students to demonstrate their learning with English to meet the curriculum expectations. Belle illustrated this point with an example of her student,

Rebecca is quite proficient in meeting in expectations, but her language is still [developing]. She's not fluent. She can say what she needs to say. She's functional, but she's not fluent. What works well for her is if she can have Google Translate on the iPad, and then she can type in Japanese, and it translates for her. And that way we can
see her thinking, we can also read it. So if she's writing in English, then she's saying a lot less. And we can't see all the things she's thinking.

Even though Rebecca was functioning with English, Belle thought her non-fluency in English reduced Rebecca’s capability to show her real learning outcomes if she was required to perform the tasks with English. This thought could be explained by the research finding made by Cummins et al. (2012). In order to actively participate in the learning that meets the curriculum expectations, ELLs must master two distinct forms of English language. There are two distinct forms of language proficiency, which are referred to as basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP). In the case of Rebecca, she might have already developed proficiency in conversational English, but was still developing the cognitive-academic language proficiency.

4.4.3 Participants indicated that the slow learning process of the ELL students was a challenge to provide timely instruction and appropriate support, and adjustment in their teaching and collaboration with resource teachers as responses to this challenge.

Belle regarded the slow learning process of ELLs resulted from initially limited English proficiency as a challenge in the work of supporting ELLs. She stated, “the [learning] progress is slow initially if the children are acquiring vocabulary. You kinda feel stalled there because you can't get into the learning and the curriculum because you're still building basic vocabulary.” Belle’s response to this challenge was to nurture a safe environment for the ELL students because “they are keen to learn and get started in such an environment.” Similarly, Molly reported the slow learning process of ELLs was also a problem for her, but the situation was different from Belle’s. Molly had an ELL student named Kelly who had received extra withdrawn ESL support compared to other ELLs in her class. With the withdrawal support for 4 months, however, Kelly was still struggling in meeting the grade expectations. Therefore, Molly consulted to and collaborated with the ESL teacher reporting
Kelly’s situation to the school team meeting. Later Kelly was referred to receive Special Education with the specialists. In this case, the slow learning process might be caused merely by the student’s special educational needs, not the limited English skills. In fact, Kelly was able to verbally describe her thinking in English but had problem writing it down. Teachers of ELLs also face some potential difficulties in distinguishing ELLs with limited English proficiency from those with Special Education learning needs (James R. Squire Office of Policy Research, 2008). This research finding explains the challenge encountered by Molly in the case of Kelly. Molly treated Kelly as an ELL who learned slowly and achieved low academic outcome due to her initial limited English and did not adjust her teaching to support Kelly. After 3 to 4 months of withdrawn ESL support with little academic improvement, Molly started to seek help from the ESL resource teacher and Special Education specialists to provide Kelly with appropriate support.

4.5 Participants Identified a Supportive School Environment and Professional Resources as Important in Assisting Teachers With Supporting ELLs.

When asked about what factors supported them in working with ELLs, both participants found that a supportive and inclusive school environment definitely made a difference. Furthermore, they stated that professional resources available inside and outside of schools helped them gain professional knowledge and strategies to support ELLs.

4.5.1 Participants identified the school culture of inclusiveness as an important factor supporting them in this work.

Molly pointed out that she had “a culture of inclusiveness” in her school. She shared an example of how her school created an inclusive environment for the ELL students as follow,

I feel that the school is very inclusive. And on the announcements you will hear different students with different voices from different countries… They have accents
from a different country. But they're featured on the announcements just as much as any other students. So I guess that's the inclusive idea.

Molly believed that the inclusive school culture helped a teacher model inclusiveness to all students. She claimed that peer support was common in primary grades because “kids’ social groups are changing a lot in these grades,” and that teachers played an important role in encouraging English-speaking students to include ELL students. Teachers could encourage inclusiveness from English-speaking students by stating the expectations on the English-speaking and giving verbal rewards in terms of helping the ELL students. Molly explained,

We as teachers encourage inclusiveness. I noticed students include them (ELLs) quickly, especially if you talk to the students about it, like who can help, who can be the buddy, who can take for recess, encourage those students who are helping to feel like they’re really responsible, and verbally reward them for that.

Similarly, Belle also found her school a kind environment in which most teachers intend to make sure that kids are included. In addition to teachers nurturing inclusiveness, she witnessed a lot of peer support in the school. She reported, “I’ve seen a lot of ESL kids or ELL coming in and finding friends; I haven’t seen exclusion in our playground.”

Building an inclusive school culture is conducive to help ELL students accept their identity. According to C. Suárez-Orozco and M. Suárez-Orozco (1995), young ELL adolescents are sensitive to peer perception towards them and would be often regarded as different because of their language, race, dress, and cultural practices different from that of the mainstream. In the practices in Molly’s school, ELLs were provided opportunities to do the announcements as many as other students, regardless of their accents. This practice promotes an idea to the whole school that all students are equal and they are not different regardless of their language or background. Once school staff and students understood inclusion, they were positively influenced by this idea and included the ELL students around
them. Therefore, both participants stated that they saw much peer support for ELL students in the inclusive school environment.

4.5.2 Participants identified professional ESL/ELL resources provided inside and outside of schools as a valuable resource supporting them in this work.

Both participants recognized the usefulness of professional ESL/ELL resources in supporting their work. Molly spoke to the importance of consulting and collaborating with ESL teachers available in her school. She mentioned that ESL teachers were the professionals that teachers can ask if they need ideas because ESL teachers are educational experts; they have the professional training in supporting ELL students and rich experience working with ELLs. Molly also shared an example in which she collaborated with an ESL teacher to identify and support an ELL student with special educational needs. Thanks to the collaboration between the Molly and the ESL teacher, this ELL student who made unexpected slow learning progress received appropriate academic support.

Belle, a ESL resource teacher, suggested different means to support her working with ELL students. She articulated that when developing ELL students’ English language and academic proficiency, she starts with the resources provided in the professional library, and visits the exemplars of ELL teaching and learn from them. She also attends conferences relevant to ESL teaching to collect ideas. She explained,

[When developing ELL students’ English language and academic proficiency.] I always start with the resources, the professional library and see what they have, and I tap into those resources to get ideas. And then once I have sort of the general plan and place, I like to go to visit. I want to see a really good ESL program in action. For me, the most useful thing is to go watch an excellent ESL teacher. Second best for me, would be going to conference, having an annual conference and collecting ideas. Because that's the best practices of the larger community.
Inadequate tools to teach ELLs and the lack of professional development or in-service training for teaching ELLs pose challenges for teachers of ELLs (NEA Education Policy and Practice Department, 2008). Professional ESL/ELL resources available inside and outside of schools such as ESL teachers and conferences related to ESL teaching may ease these challenges and provide teachers with practical strategies to support ELLs. This finding in this section aligns with the literature that spoke to the lack of professional development or in-service training for teaching ELLs. Neither participant mentioned that they had taken any on-site professional training to improve their practices in teaching ELLs.

4.6 Conclusion

Through the analysis process, five main themes emerged. The findings included that participants considered student profile while designing lessons and assessments for ELLs and used differentiation to effectively support the learning of ELLs. In their work of supporting ELLs, the findings revealed that participants encountered challenges related to limited interaction between schools and families and the slow student learning process and that they were able to seek help and resources available inside and outside school to respond to these challenges and further improve their work. The significance of the findings showed that the development trajectory of the two forms of English has significant impact on the ELLs learning of subject matter, which has implications for teaching practices in supporting ELLs. Furthermore, the findings aligned with the existing literature that teachers may have difficulties distinguishing ELLs with merely low English level from the ELLs with special needs. Such difficulties would hinder teachers from providing appropriate and timely support to those ELLs with special educational needs. In Chapter 5, the discussion on specific implications for these findings would be given as well as the recommendations of further research.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the significance and implications of my research findings. I start by reviewing the key findings as well as significance of my research on how teachers support the academic needs of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Then I discuss the implications for the broad educational community and for myself as a teacher-researcher. Based on the implications of my research findings, I put forward recommendations that can be utilized by various stakeholders in relation to educational community, such as schools, teachers, and parents. Finally, I suggest important areas beneficial to further research.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

As discussed in the previous chapter of this research, I categorized my findings into five main themes. The first theme is: Participants considered student profiles when they planned lessons and assessments for ELLs. Specifically, they regarded students’ existing vocabulary level as an important factor to consider while designing lessons. They believed that the insufficient English vocabulary hindered ELLs from accessing the content knowledge in various subject area. Furthermore, both participants stated that they attended to the academic and emotional needs of ELL students in the planning process of instructions and assessments. The purpose of the focus on their emotional needs was to create an emotionally safe environment wherein ELLs can optimize their learning outcomes, alongside with the teachers’ support of their academic needs. Also, participants considered creating opportunities for ELLs to learn from their English-speaking peers so that ELLs were able to observe how their peers interacted with each other in English and how to apply advanced English vocabulary in the academic settings.

The second theme of my research findings is: Differentiation was considered to be the most effective strategy for supporting ELLs. My participants highlighted the importance of
visual aids in assisting the cognitive process of ELLs. The visual teaching and learning materials allowed ELLs to comprehend the taught content more easily because they could connect the knowledge taught in English with the visuals, activating their prior knowledge and their first language to make meaning of it. Having considered the needs of ELLs to learn from their English-speaking peers, both participants paired an ELL with a helping partner if necessary in their teaching practice. In terms of modifications in curriculum expectations, one participant agreed to reduce the number of expectations if the ELLs were too low in English proficiency that may prevent learning the content knowledge and demonstrating their learning in assessments. However, the other participant did not think it was necessary to lower the expectations of ELLs, what teachers had to do was to provide the step-by-step instruction with simpler language and direct modelling, making the instruction comprehensible for ELL students. Both accommodations, which means providing visual aids in this research, and modifications are two dimensions of differentiation. Teachers could choose either way or both ways to assist the learning of ELLs depending on their actual and individual needs.

The third finding connected to the previous finding, is: After providing the differentiation in instructions and assessments for ELLs, participants considered achievement of classroom tasks as an indicator of learning for ELLs and voluntary peer support as an outcome of learning for the English-speaking peers. The indicator of learning—achievement of classroom tasks—includes ELLs’ increase use of English in the academic settings and how well did ELLs perform in their learning products. In terms of the indicator of learning for the English-speaking counterparts, participants found that they voluntarily include ELLs within the schools, offering academic help and including ELLs in social settings.

The fourth theme of the research findings is: Participants overcame challenges related to limited interaction between schools and families and the slow student learning process by
seeking help from others inside and outside the school. Participants reported three challenges they encountered while supporting the ELLs. Two of the challenges related to the limited interaction with the students and their families. The big class size hindered teachers from having one-on-one instructional time with ELLs, preventing teachers from providing personalized teaching. Furthermore, participants may have difficulty communicating effectively with families who knew little English. Since the families, particularly the parents, are part of the stakeholders in the educational community, they play an important role in supporting student learning. Thus, the language barrier might disconnect the parents from their child’s learning because teachers were not able to keep them updated on the curriculum and learning process of their children. Also, participants indicated that the slow learning process of ELLs prevented teachers from teaching more curriculum content knowledge to them, yet sometimes the little progression in learning might result from the special educational needs of ELLs, rather than the poor English skills that ELLs have. Therefore, one participant reported that it was hard to provide timely and appropriate support to ELLs with special needs because their actual needs were shadowed by the limited English proficiency.

The last theme is: An inclusive school environment and professional resources were the important factors in assisting teachers in supporting ELLs. A schoolwide culture of inclusiveness was beneficial for teachers to promote the inclusive idea to all students. Teachers can promote inclusiveness by sharing what they expect the English-speaking peers to do and say to be kind and welcoming to the ELLs. In addition to the creation of an inclusive school environment, participants found it helpful to access professional ESL/ELL resources available inside and outside of schools. Within the school, participants were willing to consult with the ESL/ELL teachers when they needed help with the work of supporting the learning of ELLs in a regular classroom. Also, participants sought professional resources and
development outside school by visiting the teaching exemplars and attending to conferences related to the support of ELL students.

5.2 Implications

In this section, I outline the implications of my research study. I start by indicating the implications for those in the broad educational community. Next, I discuss the implications of my research for me as a teacher and a researcher.

5.2.1 The broad educational community

A schoolwide culture of inclusiveness promotes teachers’ contribution to supporting the academic and emotional needs of the English language learning students. A school nurturing an inclusive environment for ELL students helps teachers model the inclusiveness to all students in every classroom. The school culture of inclusiveness normalizes the differences of the ELLs and educates students to embrace and respect the differences. Young ELL adolescents are sensitive to peer perception towards them and would be often regarded as different because of their language, race, dress, and cultural practices different from that of the mainstream (C. Suárez-Orozco & M. Suárez-Orozco, 1995). ELL students learn well when they feel emotionally safe in a kind and welcoming environment; the inclusive school culture allows ELLs to bring in their cultural capital to their learning and free from judgement due to their differences.

ELL students might have slow learning process or low academic achievement initially because of the limited and developing English skills. The limited English vocabulary hinders ELLs from accessing the curriculum subject areas. Participants found them not able to teach the content knowledge to ELLs who have little English skills. Furthermore, the lack of English proficiency keeps ELLs from making effective communications with their peers and teachers, which further leads to emotional disconnection to them. According to Cummins et al. (2012), ELLs need to master 2 forms of English proficiency, basic interpersonal
communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP) in order
to meet the curriculum expectations. CALP takes much longer than BICS to develop to a
fluent level. Although ELLs have developed fluency in basic communicational English, they
may still encounter challenges in learning the core subjects such as Science and Social
Studies that require knowledge of high level Academic English vocabulary.

The literature on ELLs being misdiagnosed with special needs, as well as my
participant’s experience, has highlighted the possibility that educators might confuse ELLs
who have poor academic performance resulting from the limited English skills with ELLs
who are making academically low achievement due to the special educational needs. Initially,
it is difficult to identify the causes of slow learning progress of ELL students. ELLs are often
asked to take academic tests in English before they develop language proficiency (NEA
Education Policy and Practice Department, 2008). The poor performance of ELLs is thought
by some educators to have been caused by learning disabilities instead of language
differences. ELL students who have been misdiagnosed with disabilities are sent to special
education, in which the inappropriate placement can negatively affect the growth of ELLs
without disabilities (James R. Squire Office of Policy Research, 2008). However, if teachers
cannot identify the ELLs who have special learning needs alongside with limited English
skills, they may fail to address the special needs nor provide timely appropriate support to
those students. Thus, it implies that collaborative support is needed in the identification of
special needs of ELL students. In order for ELL students to succeed, classroom teachers
should collect and analyze the student progression and work collaboratively with other
educational professionals, such as ESL teachers and special education resource teachers, to
make the necessary support that fosters ELLs’ development as whole person.
5.2.2 Implications for myself as a teacher-researcher

I have gained a deeper understanding of what it is to be an English language learner supporter teaching in a mainstream classroom. I am aware that when I work as a homeroom teacher, I may teach a mixed population of English language learners and English-speaking students in my class, given the fact that Canada is a multicultural country and has an increase in migrant population. As a result, I should develop my competence in supporting the needs of ELL students in a regular classroom. I am committed to embracing many of the specific strategies the participants have used to support ELLs in regular classrooms in my own practice as a teacher.

One participant reported that ELL students might fail to build emotional connections with their English-speaking peers and teachers because of their limited English proficiency. Furthermore, they might have difficulty accessing the content knowledge that features high level language demand. Thus, in terms of my own practice, it is important for me make it my priority to get to know my students in terms of who they are, what language(s) they speak, what the existing English proficiency they have when they arrive in my class, and what their academic and emotional needs are. Equipping ELLs students with the language necessary to express their needs and learn content knowledge is important to improve their academic performance.

Integration of ELL students into mainstream classrooms benefits them academically. One of the benefits is that ELLs can learn from their English-speaking peers by observing the way they interact with English and how they use high-level academic vocabulary to express their thinking in relation to specific subject matter. Also, integrating ELLs in a mainstream classroom allows English-speaking peers to help ELLs with their learning. Through the helping partner system, English-speaking peers adopt a more open-mindedness to the linguistic and cultural differences, and the ELLs can access the learning with the help from
their peers. In terms of my practice, I will be committed to student learning by facilitating meaningful classroom interactions between ELL students and non-ELL students. By doing so, ELLs will be able to increase their English proficiency in academics due to the observation and learning opportunities provided. Furthermore, non-ELL students will also benefit from the interactions with ELLs and will be more tolerant for diversity, which leads to a more inclusive learning environment in the school setting.

Participants spoke about the modification of curriculum expectations they had on ELL students. They had contrasting ideas on the modification. Molly mentioned that she sometimes reduced the number of expectations for ELLs because she did not think they were able to achieve that many resulted from their poor English skills, whereas Belle kept high expectations for ELLs but she changed the way of instruction, such as simplifying the language of instruction, and chunking the instruction up. In terms of my practice, I will be mindful of what expectations I want ELLs to achieve. I will have the language objective and the content objective in mind while I plan lessons and assessments to students. I will also make the content knowledge accessible to ELLs, using various accommodation methods to help them comprehend and demonstrate their learning.

My research practice will be enhanced by what I have learned in my study. Both participants acknowledged the significance of gaining professional knowledge to support the learning of ELLs. As a teacher, it is important for me to keep updated about the research in relation to English Language Learner support and to reflect on my own practice in the lens of the latest research findings. Also, my future teaching practice which I think might benefit the learning of ELLs but has not been discussed in the existing literature will contribute to the field of ELL support if I decide to translate my teaching practice into an action research paper.
5.3 Recommendations

In this section, I make recommendations based on my research findings. The recommendations are organized into three components: schools, teachers and parents.

5.3.1 Schools

- It is important to nurture a school-wide welcoming and inclusive environment for ELLs wherein their cultural and linguistic diversity are celebrated. The school culture of inclusiveness not only lessens the stigma of being culturally and linguistically different, but also optimize the learning experience of all students.

- Build positive relationships and communications with all families by encouraging parents to participate in school events and providing translators/interpreters whenever possible.

- Ensure that the resources in classrooms and the school library reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the school community.

- It is essential to provide professional development that teaches to the practical strategies to incorporate appropriate instructions and assessments in mainstream classrooms in order to meet the needs of ELLs.

- Encourage homeroom teachers to collaborate with ESL/ELL specialists in their schools, if any, to build up their repertoire of instructional and assessment strategies in terms of supporting ELLs.

- It is important to provide ELLs with opportunities to represent themselves in various events and settings, such as allowing ELLs to feature on the school announcements as much as other students, regardless of their accent. The premise of the provision of such opportunities is that the school is a safe place for them to represent themselves, otherwise their diversity of cultures and languages will highlight their otherness to the English-speaking students.
5.3.2 Teachers

- It is necessary for teachers to learn about their students’ identities, cultures, experiences and languages when they newly arrive in the classroom.

- When designing lessons and assessments for ELL students, teachers should be mindful of the academic and emotional needs of the ELLs in their classes and make appropriate accommodations and/or modifications, if needed, to create equitable learning opportunities for English language development as well as academic performance improvement.

- It is important to provide opportunities of learning from peers for ELLs because they can seize these opportunities to observe student-student and student-teacher interactions with English, as well as to learn how to incorporate high-level English vocabulary in academic settings through various activities.

- Participate in professional development that helps to enrich their instructions and assessments in relation to facilitation of the success of ELLs.

- Collaborate with ESL/ELL specialists in their schools, if any, or the person who is responsible for ELLs to design the classroom teaching and assessments that can appropriately meet the needs of ELLs.

- Ensure that the cultural and linguistic differences of all learners are reflected in the classrooms. For example, teachers can bring in learning materials or classroom decorations of the cultures of the class community. Also, they can encourage ELLs to bring in their lived experiences to the lessons they’re learning, broadening the horizons of their English-speaking peers.

- It is important to involve parents in their child’s learning because they are an integral part of the educational system. To engage parents in the process of the student learning, teachers can communicate with parents on a regular basis to keep them
updated what their child have learned and what is new in the class. Create opportunities to interact with parents more than the report card interviews. When interact with parents, teachers need to be mindful of and respect the varied background experiences of diverse families.

5.3.3 Parents

- Take part in parent-teacher interviews to get updates and information on their child(ren)’s learning.
- Actively participate in school events that allow them to learn more about the Ontario curriculums and what their children are expected to learn at school.
- Encourage your child(ren) to develop and use their home language, as it could help with their leaning of English.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

In this section, I initiate the areas for further research based on my research findings and what I have learned from my participants. One area that is worthy of further research is to investigate how educators effectively identify the special needs of ELLs with limited English proficiency, whose slow learning progress or low academic performance might result from merely their special educational needs or the combination of exceptional needs and insufficient English knowledge. The existing literate raises the issue that ELLs may be misdiagnosed with learning disabilities because the current assessment methods fail to distinguish the causes of the poor learning outcomes—the special needs or the language learning problem (James R. Squire Office of Policy Research, 2008). Sometimes students with low English skills and those with special needs share similar learning behaviors, such as inability to retell a story, but the causes of these behaviors vary (Hamayan et al., 2007). One participant reported that one of her ELL students had been receiving withdrawn ESL support program for months before she was identified with exceptionalities and needed Special
Education support. Thus, it is an important area that needs further research on the effective approach to distinguish these two groups of ELL students so that they can be provided timely and appropriate support for their academic success.

Molly and Belle acknowledged the advantages of integrating ELLs into mainstream classrooms. The advantages included that it avoided ELLs being singled out in an ESL program which might highlight the cultural and linguistic diversity. Also, this integration model provided opportunities for ELLs to observed and imitate the ways their English-speaking peers interacted with English in both academic and social settings. Both participants shared their practical teaching and assessment approach to support the academic success of ELLs in their classes, and observed positive outcomes from both ELLs and the English-speaking peers. Participants found that ELLs increasingly used English to communicate and contributed more to the classroom tasks. Furthermore, participants noticed volunteer support from the English-speaking counterparts. With this in mind, I would like to propose subsequent research investigating how do English-speaking students benefit from the support teachers provide to the ELLs in a regular classroom in terms of academic and social contexts.

5.5 Concluding Comments

In this chapter I provided a short overview of my research findings as outlined in Chapter 4 in this paper. This research study has helped me not only to understand the various needs of ELLs, but also to visualize what teaching students with linguistic diversity may look like in a mainstream classroom. Based on my exploration of the research literature and my interviews with Molly and Belle, I have become more aware of the challenges I might encounter as I support the academic success of ELLs in regular classrooms. One of the main challenges is the difficulty in identifying the special needs of some ELLs and fail to provide timely and appropriate support to address their unique needs. On the other hand, according to the experiences of Molly and Belle, I have also learned the influential factors that assist me in
the work of supporting ELLs, such as building an supportive and inclusive school culture and taking advantage of professional resources available inside and outside of school to enhance my teaching practice.

Canada has witnessed an increase in the migrant population in recent years. This increase could lead to more ELL population in the public schools. Despite of the increasing ELL populations, the teacher population will remain homogeneous, which is mainly the white middle-class females (Howard, 2003). Such a teacher population may not be prepared to support the needs of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. In order to secure their academic success, ELLs not only need to acquire basic English conversational skills, but also need to develop proficiency in academic English that can be better facilitated in the integration education with English-speaking peers. Both my participants valued the benefits of the integration of ELLs into a mainstream classroom, such as opportunities to learn from peers and build emotional connections with peers. Thus, my research study informs me of the needs of ELLs in terms of academic learning and how I as a homeroom teacher can address the needs to support the student success.
References


Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date:

Dear ______________________,

My Name is Qiuying Wu 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 a small sample of Ontario elementary teachers is supporting the English language and academic proficiency of ELLs across curricular subject areas. I am interested in interviewing teachers with more than 5 years of teaching experience in elementary schools and who have a demonstrated commitment to supporting ELLs. 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,
Qiuying Wu

Phone Number: 
Email: qy.wu@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic
E-mail: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

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

I have read the letter provided to me by Qiuying 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

Introductory Script: 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 a small sample of Ontario elementary teachers supporting the English language and academic proficiency of ELLs across curricular subject areas. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your background information, perspectives, practices, and the kinds of things that support and challenge you when working with ELL students. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Information

1. How many years have you been working as an elementary school teacher in Canada?
2. What grades and subjects do you currently teach? Which have you previously taught?
3. Can you tell me about the school you work in?
   a) Probe re: Size, demographics, program priorities
   b) Are there any ESL program/services or support workers in your school?
   c) Do you fulfill any other role in the school in addition to being a classroom teacher? (e.g. ELL support worker, coach, advisor, lead etc.)
4. You have identified as someone who has exhibited leadership in the area of supporting ELLs. Can you tell me more about what kinds of personal, educational, or professional experiences you have had that have developed your interest in this topic?
5. What experiences have helped to prepare you for this work?
   a) Personal experiences?
   b) Educational experiences? Do you have special qualifications related to ESL? Have you taken any courses related to supporting ELLs?
   c) Professional experiences? (experience teaching ELLs, professional development)

**Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs**

6. In your view, what are the specific learning needs of ELL students?

7. In your experience, what range of barriers do ELLs face in schools?

8. In your experience, what does support for ELLs typically look like in schools?

9. From your perspective, what are the benefits and limitations of integrating ELL students in mainstream classrooms?

10. What are the benefits and limitations of pull-out support models?

11. In your experience, are ELLs typically supported to develop their English proficiency or to develop their academic proficiency, or both? Please explain.

12. How do you think the needs of ELLs related to both English language and academic proficiency can be further supported in schools?

**Teacher Practices**

13. What does support for ELLs look like in your classroom teaching?

14. How, if at all, do you differentiate your instruction for ELLs?

15. Can you describe for me some specific examples of the kinds of support you offer ELLs in an effort to develop their English language and academic proficiency across curricular subject areas?

16. How, if at all, do you differentiate your assessment for ELLs?

17. What factors do you take into account when designing and/or modifying lessons and assessment for ELLs, and why?
18. What instructional strategies do you consider to be most effective for supporting the English language proficiency of ELLs, and why?
   a) Can you provide some examples of how you have supported the English language proficiency of ELLs?

19. Which do you consider to be most effective for supporting their academic proficiency across curriculum subject-areas, and why?
   a) Can you provide some examples of how you have supported academic proficiency of ELLs?

20. What indicators of learning do you observe from ELLs as a result of your approach to supporting their English language and academic proficiency across curriculum subject areas? Can you speak to any examples?

21. What, if any, outcomes do you observe from their English-speaking peers? (e.g. peer support or social exclusion)

**Supports and Challenges**

22. What range of factors support you in developing ELL students’ English language and academic proficiency across subject areas? (e.g. access to ELL resource support person, collaborative school environment, school culture with high levels of ELLs, communication with parents etc.)

23. What range of resources support you in developing ELL students’ English language and academic proficiency across subject areas? (e.g. text resources, books, music, websites, e-resources, classroom space, educational assistants etc.)

24. What resources would help further support you?

25. What challenges do you encounter in this work and do you respond to these challenges while supporting the learning of ELL students?

**Next Steps**
26. What advice do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to supporting the English language and academic proficiency of ELLs in mainstream classrooms?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.