

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL)
LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS:
A SMALL CITY SCHOOLS CASE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the English as a Second Language (ESL) learning experiences of immigrant students in high schools in a small city. The aim of the study was to acquire a deeper understanding of how ESL services are organized and provided in schools in a small city where immigrant students are few in each school. A total of 10 participants were selected from among ESL students, their parents, ESL teachers, and subject area teachers. Interviews were conducted with each of these participants with the aim of obtaining insights regarding the ESL learning experiences of the students. Findings in this study show that limited English proficiency of these ESL students hindered their interaction with mainstream teachers and peers, their understanding of course content, and their selection of academic courses. Consequently, these prevented them from learning more English, performing well academically, and may block their direct admission to university.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Overview	1
Setting the Context of the Study	2
Purpose and Significance of the Study	9
Summary	11
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW	13
Theoretical Framework	13
<i>Historical background to theory.</i>	13
<i>Sociocultural theory</i>	16
<i>Sociocultural theory and second language classrooms</i>	22
Summary	25
Literature Review	26
ESL Programs	26
<i>The self-contained program option.</i>	29
<i>The withdrawal program option.</i>	30
<i>The mainstreaming program option.</i>	32
Problems Affecting ESL High School Students	33
ESL Perceptions and Funding	38
ESL Proficiency Levels and Rate of Acquisition	40
Age, Time in the Host Country, and ESL Acquisition	42
Language and Identity	44
Summary	46

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS	48
Introduction.....	48
Research Design.....	48
Participants.....	50
Data Collection	52
<i>Procedure</i>	52
Researcher Role	53
Ethical Considerations	54
Data Analysis	56
<i>Data analysis software</i>	58
<i>Steps in data analysis</i>	58
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	68
Participants' Profiles.....	68
<i>Camille</i>	68
<i>Juan</i>	69
<i>Fiki</i>	70
<i>Parent participants</i>	72
<i>Teacher participants</i>	74
Interviewing and Reflexivity	75
Telling Their Stories	77
Language Barrier	77
Cultural Conflict	81
Learning ESL	85
<i>ESL and ESL class</i>	86
<i>The nature of ESL program</i>	88
<i>Problems facing ESL programming</i>	90
<i>Positive program aspect</i>	92
<i>Motivation</i>	94
<i>ESL learning strategies</i>	95
Mainstream Classroom Learning.....	97

<i>Inclusion</i>	97
<i>Course selection</i>	101
<i>Teaching and learning approaches</i>	104
Support Systems.....	107
Time	110
Summary	113
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS	116
Implications for Practice	122
In-class Interaction Opportunities.....	122
<i>Buddy system</i>	127
<i>Peer tutoring/counseling</i>	128
<i>Oral communication strategies</i>	129
<i>Positive classroom and school atmosphere</i>	130
Participation in Extra-curricular Activities.....	131
ESL Support.....	134
Access to Academic Courses	137
Limitations of the Study.....	142
Suggestions for Further Research	143
Final Remarks	145
REFERENCES	147
APPENDIX A: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	154
APPENDIX B: LETTERS TO PARTICIPANTS	156
APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORMS	163
APPENDIX D: LETTER TO THE DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION, SCHOOL DISTRICT IN CLIFTWOOD.....	165

LIST OF TABLES

1	Highlights of Three Commonly Used ESL Program Options in Most English-Speaking Countries.....	28
2	Descriptive Categories.....	64
3	Summary of Student-Parent Profiles.....	73

LIST OF FIGURES

1	Process of Data Analysis.....	60
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Many parts of the world have experienced demographic changes in recent years. People seeking better economic environments, political and/or religious asylum, and opportunities to study abroad, or who are moving to join their relatives abroad have constituted a high number of immigrants entering English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States, and England, every year (Ashworth, 2000; Coelho, 1993; Parkin & Sidnell, 1992). These immigration patterns have brought learners with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds into the school systems of the host countries. These learners bring their culture and a myriad of experiences with them, which can enrich teaching and learning for all students (Parkin & Sidnell, 1992; Thonis, 1994). They also have the potential to contribute to the economic and social development of their adopted countries if they are educated properly (Ashworth, 1992).

English is gaining prominence around the world as the language of commerce and communication. As a result, immigrants are facing the task of learning English in order to facilitate their integration in their adopted English-speaking countries. Indeed, many immigrants are making efforts to learn English in their home countries before immigrating to their adopted countries. For example, in the period 2000 to 2002, the number of immigrants to Canada with some knowledge of English was much greater than that of immigrants who had some knowledge of French (Citizen and Immigration Canada, 2002). However, for most of these immigrants, the level of English attained in their home countries is fairly basic, and not adequate for academic learning in their host countries. Children joining schools in English-speaking countries with little or no knowledge of English are faced with the

challenge of learning English in order to integrate socially and academically in their new schools. Because of these children's different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, their presence in schools calls for changes in pedagogy, teacher education, and teaching resources in the educational systems of these countries, in order to accommodate the new students (Spangenberg-Urbschat & Pritchard, 1994). As a result, educators in English-speaking countries have faced the challenges of teaching the English language, as well as curriculum content in English to immigrant children who speak languages other than English (Spangenberg-Urbschat & Pritchard, 1994).

This study investigates English as a Second Language (ESL) learning experiences of immigrant students in high schools in a small city in British Columbia (BC). ESL programs provided in these schools to help ESL students learn English are examined in order to determine how adequately ESL students' linguistic needs are addressed. The following section establishes the context of this study by presenting the limitations of various studies that have focused on ESL students, hence, pointing to the rationale for, and significance of this study.

Setting the Context of the Study

There is a paucity of research on ESL students and programs in schools in small urban areas. Schools in large urban areas where immigrant students are concentrated have been the focus of most studies on ESL students and programs (Gunderson, 2000; Watt & Roessingh, 1994; Derwing, DeCorby, Ichikawa, & Jamieson, 1999; Hébert & Reis, 1999). ESL programs are fairly well established in such schools, and subject area teachers are likely to adjust their teaching to suit ESL students, whose numbers may equal or surpass those of English-speaking students in the classrooms. Data from the BC Ministry of Education (1999)

indicate that about 90% of ESL students' enrollments have been in the Lower Mainland school districts. This leaves enrollment for the remaining 10% to be distributed among other areas of BC.

Many of the studies focusing on ESL programs and ESL students' success and failure stories in schools in large urban areas (Gunderson, 2000; Watt & Roessingh, 1994; Derwing et al., 1999; Hébert & Reis, 1999) can be criticized for giving too little attention to the ways in which context shapes ESL policies and practices. For example, few researchers have studied the impact of having proportionately few ESL students in a school. However, having small numbers of ESL students in a school may impact not only on decisions to provide ESL programs in such schools, but also on policy decisions regarding funding, provision of qualified ESL teachers, and provision of teaching and learning materials. Information from the BC Ministry of Education (1999) indicates that a school district with many ESL students may offer a wider range of program options than that with few ESL students scattered in a geographical area. For example, in a school district with many ESL students, self-contained ESL classes can be offered concurrently with pull-out classes. This enables the schools in such a district to provide different kinds of help to different students based on their levels of language proficiency.

Watt and Roessingh (1994) investigated drop-out rates of ESL students in one urban high school. They reported high drop-out rates of ESL students in that high school. Although such drop-out rates indicate that a problem existed which precluded many ESL students from graduating, the problems leading to such drop-out rates by ESL students are not well described in this study. Their study involved tracking former ESL students' school records to determine their performance and levels of high school education reached. Watt's and

Roessingh's conclusion that many students dropped out due to lack of adequate school support was drawn from scanty information they got from records of the students' interviews with the school counselors, although they indicated that not all students, especially those with beginner's English proficiency level, discussed their problems with a school counselor before dropping out of school. Because the drop-out rate of students with beginner's proficiency level is the highest (95.5%), it can be inferred that this group of students faced more, and probably different, problems than are suggested by the little information provided on why students dropped out of school. These researchers were unable to establish personal and outside school factors that may have contributed to the students' decisions to drop out since their perceptions were not sought.

In another study of drop-out rates of ESL high school students, Watt and Roessingh (2001) linked their investigation to changes in ESL program structure and funding in a school district in Alberta, Canada. They found that although the general drop-out rate of ESL students reported in their earlier study had not changed, the budget cuts for ESL services had resulted in a hasty integration of ESL students into academic mainstream courses. This integration affected the educational success of the ESL students negatively. Although their study looked at ESL issues through a different lens from other studies on issues that affect ESL students, it still focused on a school in a large urban area and, therefore, the findings may not apply to a school in a small city. Social environments that ESL students find themselves in affect their language acquisition patterns, and large urban areas may provide different social settings from small cities, due to differences in minority-majority proportions. For example, ESL students in small cities may interact more with English language speakers because they may lack people from their ethnic communities with whom

to interact. These interactions will more likely result in the minorities learning more English from their English-speaking peers. In contrast, immigrant students whose ethnic community members are concentrated within a large urban area may interact more with these people, hence failing to learn English in natural, social settings. Although ESL students in schools in large and small cities may face some similar challenges, (e.g., learning English and using it for school learning, re-defining their identities, and dropping out of school) it is important to find out what challenges distinguish them as a result of their different environments. This distinction is important for policy formulation on ESL programming for students in large and small cities.

Some studies on ESL students have concentrated on a particular issue (e.g., drop-out rate) thereby failing to explore the combination of factors leading to the issue under investigation. Watt's and Roessingh's (1994, 2001) studies on ESL students' drop-out rates, Cummins' (1981) study on the effects that age on arrival to a new country has on second language learning for immigrant children, and Collier's (1987) study on the relationship between age and second language acquisition have contributed valid information regarding different aspects of ESL students. However, their unilateral focuses, coupled with the quantitative approach they adopted, precluded them from capturing the complex personal and environmental factors that affect ESL students' academic performances. Because a single experience occurs not in isolation but in relation to other experiences that influence it, a qualitative approach is suitable for investigating the myriad and multifaceted issues that comprise peoples' life experiences. It also allows the people being investigated to voice their lived experiences.

Several studies have focused on eliciting ESL students' perceptions of their experiences in order to describe how well they adjust to their new school and out-of-school environments, and the effects that their experiences have had on their academic achievement. Early (1992) studied a group of ESL students who were identified as being "academically successful", in order to determine factors that contributed to their success. She found that ample time spent on schoolwork, frequent requests for help, and a strong goal-orientation were some of the factors that enabled these students to perform well. While findings of this study are illuminating, the study has two main limitations. First, only the views of successful students were sought. There is need to investigate the perceptions of average ESL students, as well as those of students who are performing poorly and may be at risk of dropping out of school. More studies on students who drop out need to be carried out, too. With this knowledge, programs can be tailored to the average students, and also, intervention strategies can be designed for those who are struggling to prevent them from dropping out. Second, teachers and parents of these students were not contacted for their views on the students' performance, a gesture that would have yielded more and diverse information on the students and their experiences.

In a similar study, Hébert and Reis (1999) studied culturally diverse, high-achieving high school students in an urban area school. The researchers sought the views of students, teachers, parents, administrators, school counselors, coaches, and other people that they thought would give insights into these students' experiences. The researchers concluded that a network of supportive adults and achieving peers, a strong belief in self, and challenging learning experiences contributed to the students' good academic achievement. Hébert's and Reis' study, like Early's (1992), focused on the perceptions of one group of culturally diverse

students – the high-achievers. While the stories of the achieving students are happy ones, it would be worthwhile to listen to the stories of the average culturally-diverse high school students, the underachieving, as well as of those who drop out, which are likely to be sad stories of dissatisfaction and frustration in schools. Such stories will point to solutions towards improving the students' situations.

Watt, Roessingh, and Bosetti (1996) investigated educational and cultural adjustment processes of ESL high school students. By eliciting ESL students' stories about their adjustment patterns to high school life, these researchers exposed not only the culture shock that the students experience but also the many stages of adjustment that they go through. Despite feelings of fear, low self-esteem and loss of identity that students in this study reported, some still indicated high aspirations for post secondary education and high profile careers. Undoubtedly, these researchers contributed important information towards understanding ESL students' challenges in their new environments. However, they did not describe ESL students' experiences from a wider perspective of their teachers and parents. Although the students mentioned that family members and teachers encouraged them on, it would have been helpful to hear from these significant others about ways in which they helped the students, and the challenges they think the students faced.

In Derwing et al.'s (1999) study of factors that affect the success of ESL high school students, teachers' and ESL students' views were sought. These participants indicated the age cap of 19 years up to which students can attend school and then get "pushed out" to be an important factor affecting the success of ESL students. The students reported that a stigma was attached to them for being in an ESL class, which made them feel uncomfortable. Teachers in the study reported a lack of support from the school administration and the whole

school. However, like Early (1992) and Watt et al. (1996), the study left out the voices of the students' parents whose views and participation have been shown to be important in ESL students' education (Ashworth, 2000; Parkin & Sidnell, 1992). Investigations on the participation of ESL students' parents in their children's education have showed that, despite a lack of familiarity with the school systems in the host countries, language barrier, and struggles with economic survival (e.g., working long hours) these parents make efforts to be part of their children's education and to encourage them to perform well in their studies (Valdés, 1998; Hébert & Reis, 1999; Ashworth, 2000).

Gunderson's (2000) study on immigrant students' school and social experiences elicited the views of the students and their parents. From the students' and parents' accounts, the gap between home and school cultures was too wide, leaving the students feeling isolated and confused about schools' activities. The students indicated that a negative attitude was accorded them and the programs, and that their situation limited interaction opportunities with their English-speaking peers. These affected their school activities and achievements negatively. Although Gunderson had the students' and their parents' views, incorporation of teachers' views would have provided information on administrative and classroom issues that contributed to the students' experiences.

In summary, a wealth of research on ESL students and issues exists, but gaps are evident in some areas. High schools in large urban areas with proportionately many ESL students in each school have been the focus of many studies on ESL students and their learning experiences. This focus has resulted in little effort towards investigating the experiences of ESL students in high schools in small cities, where ESL students are likely to be few in each school. In addition, some of those studies have concentrated on a particular

issue each (e.g., drop-out rates) that pertains to ESL students, and employed the quantitative approach to research. Such single focuses, as well as the quantitative approach, have hindered these studies from investigating and reporting on the multidimensional issues that comprise ESL students' experiences. Some of the earlier studies on ESL students have taken a narrow focus by eliciting the views of one or two groups of people (e.g., either the achieving group of ESL students, ESL students, ESL students and parents, or ESL students and teachers) in one study. Giving an equal chance to all groups of ESL students (i.e., the underachievers, the average, and the achievers) to air their views, as well as seeking the views of teachers and parents all in one study, is likely to provide a wider perspective on ESL students' experiences. With the exception of students who have dropped out of school, my study, as described below, sought to fill the above-mentioned gaps in ESL research.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study investigated ESL learning experiences of immigrant students in high schools in a small city (hereafter referred to as "Cliftwood") in the Canadian province of BC with a population of 72, 406 (Statistics Canada, 2004), where ESL students are few in schools. I aimed to acquire a deeper understanding of how ESL services are organized and provided in schools in a small city where immigrant students are few in each school, as opposed to schools in big cities where there are many immigrant students. In this study, ESL students' perceptions of themselves and ESL programs, as well as the perceptions that ESL teachers, subject area teachers, and parents of ESL students hold about ESL students and the programs were investigated. The ESL students' own views provided detailed accounts of issues that affect their social and academic lives. The views of teachers and parents were also important in shedding light into student and situational factors (e.g., administrative and home

factors) that affect ESL students. Such different perspectives provided comprehensive insights not only on ESL students' experiences, but also on how the choice and delivery of ESL services in schools with few ESL students impact the teaching of, and learning by ESL students, and subsequently, their academic achievement. Such insights are instrumental in efforts to design programs and other interventions that will address the ESL learning challenges that ESL students face.

A qualitative approach including semi-structured interview questions and a report of participants' own words was used in this study in order to examine the participants' experiences. This approach allowed an investigation of the participants in their natural setting so that their experiences reflect the meanings they attach to their environments. The use of semi-structured interview questions enabled a detailed investigation of the participants' perceptions of ESL students and programs. A qualitative approach allowed reporting of detailed descriptive accounts of the participants' perceptions. As a result, a fairly comprehensive understanding of immigrant ESL students' stories of their fears, failures, and successes in Canadian high schools in a small city was reached.

The following general questions guided this study:

1. What is the nature of ESL programs in high schools in a small city?
2. How does the nature of ESL programs in which ESL students participate impact their school lives?
3. How do ESL students perceive their learning experiences?
4. How do ESL teachers perceive ESL students' learning experiences?
5. How do subject area teachers perceive ESL students' learning experiences?

6. How do parents of ESL students perceive the learning experiences of their children?

This study augments the literature on issues that affect the social lives and academic performance of ESL students but. More importantly, it presents the perspectives of ESL students, ESL teachers, subject area teachers, as well as the students' parents about these students' social and academic experiences, and the delivery of ESL programs in high schools in a small city. Finally, the study provides policy and pedagogical suggestions and guidelines that ESL stakeholders in Cliftwood's high schools can draw from.

Summary

This chapter established the study's perspective. The overview presented the general circumstance— change in demographics in most English-speaking countries due to migration patterns— which has increased diversity in schools in the immigrants' host countries. This change necessitated a change in the schools' pedagogies in order to accommodate the culturally and linguistically different students. Immigrant students and adjustment efforts in schools in English-speaking countries set the stage for this study as did other related studies before it. Numerous studies on how schools in host countries respond to immigrant students' social and academic needs, and how these students adjust to their new environments, have taken place in large urban schools while others have focused on isolated issues that affect immigrant students. Still other studies have investigated immigrant students' experiences from a narrow perspective of one or two groups of people (e.g., ESL students) and through the use of a quantitative approach. Although all these studies have increased understanding of particular issues relating to immigrant students and their host countries' schools, additional contexts and perspectives need to be explored in order to gain understanding of the

experiences of immigrant students in different school environments. The rationale for this study, therefore, is to fill the gaps in the afore-mentioned studies on ESL students and issues. Finally, the significance of this study was outlined.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Historical background to theory. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a fairly recent, interdisciplinary field of study. Its rapid development can be traced to the 1970s and 1980s as researchers and practitioners in many fields of inquiry became interested in understanding learners' cognitive processes (Toohey, 2000). Research in SLA employs theory, research methods, and findings from a spectrum of fields such as education, linguistics, anthropology, and psychology, among others (Leung, 2001). As a result, many SLA theories have emerged based on different disciplines and frameworks, and focusing on factors that each theorist finds influence second language acquisition. Among the factors identified are learner characteristics and cognitive processes during second language learning.

Compared to other disciplines, linguistics and psychology have had a larger impact on the way SLA has been understood. From the field of linguistics, Chomsky (1975) advanced the universal grammar theory in which he defined universal grammar as the system of abstract principles, conditions, and rules that are properties of all human languages. According to Chomsky, universal grammar can be said to be the expression of the essence of human language. It specifies what language learning must achieve, to be successful. This view presents language as an innate, rule-governed system, and learning as a cognitive process that occurs naturally (Toohey, 2000). Such a stance failed to consider how sociocultural, socio-historical, and sociopolitical perspectives shape learners, and learning processes (Watson-Gegeo, 2004).

Whereas structural linguistics focuses on the constraints of grammar formation, psychology's emphasis is on the actual mechanisms involved in SLA (Gass & Selinker, 2001). An influential theory of SLA with a psychological perspective is the Monitor Model, advanced by Krashen (1985). This model is based on five basic hypotheses namely; the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. However, the Input and Affective-Filter Hypotheses are ones that are central to the Monitor Model. According to Krashen, the two account for SLA.

The Input Hypothesis states that learners acquire language naturally when they are exposed to comprehensible input. Comprehensible input is defined as language that is heard or read, and is a little beyond the learners' current knowledge. Krashen represented learners' current language level as i , and the next knowledge level as $i + 1$. Movement from i to $i + 1$, and, therefore, acquiring new language structures occurs naturally when input is comprehensible. Krashen considered learners to have an internal Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which subconsciously acts upon, and assimilates the received input. The Affective Filter Hypothesis, on the other hand, explains learner variability in acquiring a second language. Affective factors such as motivation, attitude, anxiety, and self-confidence are important in determining whether acquisition will take place or not. The filters either hinder or promote language acquisition/input processing. Learners with high motivation and self-confidence, positive attitude, and low anxiety will have low filters and will acquire more language. Those with the opposite affective factors will have high filters, hence, acquire little language.

Krashen's model has made significant contributions to pedagogical strategies practiced by teachers of second language including motivation, provision of comprehensible input to the learners, and avoiding the correction of errors during language acquisition activities. However, it has fallen short of placing SLA in the social, historical, and political contexts in which it takes place. By presenting the requirements of language learning as comprehensible input, the LAD, and low affective filters, learners are perceived as passive (as opposed to active participants in learning) who acquire language subconsciously through the help of LAD. As a result, language acquisition is seen as a fixed and predictable process available to everybody, given the necessary predispositions. By the same token, language learning is considered to be independent of linguistic/social interaction. In social contexts, language learning is constructed and comprehension involves more than decoding of utterances (Dunn & Lantolf 1998). An understanding of the context of interaction and comprehension, as well as the ways in which learners construct and manipulate such contexts, is important in understanding the comprehension process.

Prominent linguistic and psychological approaches to SLA, such as Chomsky's and Krashen's theories, have presented language as a natural phenomenon and have emphasized individual characteristics and cognitive processes over the wider socio-historical contexts that shape language acquisition. By doing this, they have obscured the significance of human activity and the role that human interaction plays in the learning and use of language (Dunn & Lantolf, 1998).

The 1990s marked developments that focused on the inadequacies of nativist and mechanistic theories of SLA. The shift has been towards a theory of SLA that erases boundaries between language learning and language use, and between learning and

developmental processes. The result has been an increasing employment of sociocultural theory, advanced from the psycholinguistic insights of Vygotsky, in contemporary studies of SLA. Within this theory, learners are perceived as active participants in the process of language acquisition. Learning is situated within an interactive context where participants engage in activities co-constructed with other individuals (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). Watson-Gegeo (2004) also concurs that sociocultural theory recognizes that cognitive development originates in social interaction and is shaped by cultural and sociopolitical processes. The theoretical framework of my study is consistent with sociocultural theory. The theory and its relevance to SLA are discussed in detail in the section below.

Sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory has roots in the psycholinguistic theoretical insights of Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, and his followers. According to this theory, social and individual processes are interdependent in the co-construction of knowledge. Human activities are mediated by language and other symbol systems, and are best understood when examined over time. (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky (1978) argued that in order to understand how humans organize and acquire knowledge of their world, it is important to understand the higher forms of their mental processes (i.e., conceptual thought, voluntary attention, logical memory, rational thought, and problem solving, among others). According to Vygotsky, one way of understanding these mental processes is by observing them as they go through the human developmental process.

Vygotsky (1978) noted that human development is not solely the growth of inborn faculties, but also a transformation of these innate capacities as they interact with socioculturally constructed and mediated activities. For example, a child's capacity for language learning is influenced by his/her verbal interaction with other people, resulting in

language learning. In stressing the importance of the sociocultural setting as a primary factor in the development of human forms of higher mental activities, Vygotsky (1981) explained that:

Any function in the child's cultural development appears...on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. (p.163)

The shift of these basic mental functions from the interpsychological level to the higher mental functions at the intrapsychological level enables a child/novice to gain control of his or her world.

Social interaction and higher mental processes are mediated by language, a socially constituted and historically developed psychological tool that enables humans to participate in their social and intellectual worlds. While humans use physical tools to change objects in their external environment, psychological tools/signs are directed towards organizing and controlling humans' mental activities. When a linguistic sign (i.e., speech) is used with any human activity, the activity is transformed and organized into a different form (Vygotsky, 1978). Wertsch (1991) asserted that socially-provided semiotic (signs and symbols, including language) means and practices that get internalized and are available for independent functioning are important in supporting and changing mental activities. This underscores the importance of language as a semiotic symbol system in mediating the development of higher forms of human mental functioning.

Sociocultural theory is increasingly gaining prominence in SLA research. From this perspective, learning (or cognitive development) is viewed to originate in a social setting such as a language classroom. Here, a learner observes, participates, and interacts with adults and more skilled peers in society, and acquires socioculturally defined values and

competence (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 1994; Hall, 1993). Anton (1999) points out that in effective interaction between teachers and students, language is used as a psychological tool to assist students to perform at higher levels than they would without help. Learning of a second language based on sociocultural theory draws from Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD), which he conceived as an interactive plane where learning takes place. He defined ZPD as:

The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through solving problems under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.
(p. 86)

In stressing the importance of interaction at ZPD, Lantolf and Appel (1994) asserted that the task that is carried out during interpersonal interaction is not what is important, but rather the learning that results from this interaction.

A sociocultural approach to SLA, especially the Vygotskian notion of ZPD, becomes important in challenging the traditional cognitive (nativist) approaches to SLA, which hold the idea that language develops naturally due to inborn language structures in the mind. When viewed from the perspective of these traditional cognitive approaches, the language learner is presented as a passive recipient of information and language learning is reduced to internal mental processes such as input processing, formation of inter-language representations, and reliance on the development of innate linguistic faculties to explain learning (Donato, 2000). The ability or inability to learn the target language by the learner is attributed to his/her characteristics such as learning strategies, attitudes, and motivation. While these conditions affect language learning, they are shaped by the social and contextual environments in which the learner operates. The learning opportunities given to a learner, the resources available to him/her, and the level of participation of other more knowledgeable

members of this learning community shape how a language learner positions him/herself, and, consequently, how much language he/she learns (Gillette, 1994; Hall, 1997).

The teacher's role during second language teaching and learning is also re-constructed by sociocultural theory. While a practice such as explicit (teacher-centered) teaching depicts the teacher as a giver of knowledge, implicit teaching (e.g., the teacher gives information and the student repeats it back to the teacher) reduces the teacher to a provider of input. According to Adair-Hauck and Donato (1994), the sociocultural perspective of language learning views the teacher's role as a reflective problem-solver and mediator. The teacher establishes the student's current knowledge and then guides him/her towards accomplishing the task at hand. The teacher organizes the task as a joint problem-solving activity and encourages the learner to participate more. The learner becomes an active participant in the socioculturally mediated task, upon which his/her cognitive development depends.

Studies by Anton (1999) and Adair-Hauck and Donato (1994) on how teaching in a second-language classroom takes place revealed that teachers employ other-regulation verbal and nonverbal strategies (e.g., pointing, explicit directives, and elaborate speech) at the initial stage of the task. They gradually guide the students towards self-regulation through strategies such as abbreviated speech, implicit directives, and finally by providing feedback on the student's task once he/she engages in the task independently. Adair-Hauck and Donato note that towards the final stage of the task, the activity becomes the primary object of focus and guiding strategies become secondary. This means that learning has taken place; the social and individual activities have been mediated by semiotic symbols transforming them into intra-mental functions that the learner uses to perform the task independently. As Vygotsky (1981)

observes, humans' psychological nature represents the collective internalized social relations that have become part of the individual and form his/her structure. Anton observed that learner-centered discourse enables negotiation of meaning and understanding of the task, which presents a conducive environment for second language learning. In both studies, language played an important role in interaction which enabled teacher-student collaboration in working on the task to a point where the student could complete the tasks independently.

SLA theories based on nativist views portray the nature of language acquisition as psychological in that it originates from the learner's mind and moves towards socialization of that individual into the community of native speakers of the target language (Hall, 1997). On the contrary, a sociocultural perspective views language learning as originating from socially constituted interactive activities, and the learner internalizes different aspects of these activities and uses them for in-group activities. Hall (1993) and Doehler (2002) find the acquisition of language to be an essential part of the process of learning to participate in socioculturally valued activities in which learning occurs. Doehler indicates that in a learning environment, one needs to have knowledge and understanding of the rules, regularities, and values of a given social situation. Hall (1993) refers to this knowledge as the socioculturally defined resources and the conventions of appropriating these resources in group interactions. Such resources include, among others, the various settings where interactions take place, who participates in particular settings' interactions, conventions of turn-taking, and the purpose and content of interaction in any given setting. The novice member is provided with these resources and conventions through participation in socioculturally valued activities of the target language community. Knowledge of such resources is especially important for a second language learner who needs to get acquainted with interaction conventions of the

speech community of the target language in order for him/her to participate in the community's activities, which will result in his/her sociocultural competence and learning.

Proponents of a sociocultural approach to SLA advocate for the development of structures and functions of language through using language in a social setting (Donato, 2000). However, research on cognitively oriented SLA approaches suggests that the knowledge base of language learning develops in a particular order of phonological, morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic linguistic systems. Pedagogical practices based on cognitive models organize the teaching of components of these linguistic systems (e.g., grammatical categories) from simple to complex. Such organization may result in rote learning and meaningless operation with these linguistic forms at the beginning of instruction (they are sometimes devoid of meaningful context), and encourages a teacher-centered classroom environment (Hall, 1997; Adair-Hauck & Donato, 1994). A sociocultural view of creating awareness of language structures and functions is, on the other hand, connected to the way a particular culture defines and organizes communicative activities among its speech community members. While knowledge of language structures and functions equips the learner with rules of the linguistic components, language performance (ability to apply these rules appropriately in using language) is an essential part of language learning, which is realized through interaction in real interactive settings. Knowledge of language rules and appropriation of these rules in communication is what defines an individual's communicative competence within a speech community (Wertsch, 1991).

Sociocultural theory is increasingly being applied to various SLA studies focusing on classroom teaching and learning (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). From a sociocultural perspective, a classroom is a form of social setting where interactions and, consequently,

learning take place. For many second language learners in a school environment, a classroom becomes significant as the first social setting where learning of a different language takes place (Hall, 1997). This view gives the classroom the status of a developmental context, with the developmental processes being mediated by semiotic resources such as the classroom environment itself, print materials, and, more importantly, classroom discourse (Wertsh, 1991). Classroom discourse can be in the form of instructional conversations that the teacher uses to initiate new or build onto students' prior knowledge, and to guide students towards goal-oriented tasks, among other uses. It can also involve the kind of less informal talk that a teacher engages in when dealing with administrative tasks (behavior management, roll-taking, issuing passes, etc). Whether formal or informal, classroom discourses are important to language classrooms because they present the students with an opportunity to learn language in socially rich and practical environments that enhance language growth and development (Hall, 1997; Donato, 2000).

The construction of a classroom as a context for development enables an investigation of the language learning processes that make language development possible. Because the classroom presents a social setting for language use, it becomes suitable for an investigation of how interactive processes in the classroom shape and contribute to the social and cognitive developments of the learners. Such a sociocultural theoretical focus of exploring the processes of language learning have implications for teaching practices in identifying and providing interactive activities that will enhance second language learning in the classroom (Schinke-Llano, 1993).

Sociocultural theory and second language classrooms. The increased appeal for sociocultural theory in SLA research stems from its potential to transform second language

classrooms and increase social and academic success for linguistically and culturally different students. One of the theory's premises is that knowledge is negotiated among participants in socially-constructed activities. This premise addresses the issue of unequal power relations in second language classrooms. Instead of viewing linguistically and culturally different students as disadvantaged over their mainstream counterparts due to lack of English knowledge, their differences are accepted as starting points for learning. Diversity is recognized, accepted, and respected and ESL and/or mainstream teachers with ESL students in their classrooms use the linguistic and cultural knowledge that students bring to the classroom as a basis for negotiating new linguistic and cultural skills appropriate for school learning. This has the potential to facilitate a fairly equal access to the school's linguistic resources and knowledge by all students.

Learning results from learners' participation in the discourse of the class. The level at which ESL students participate in the activities of their classrooms is closely tied to their feeling of a sense of group membership. Because language is one way of expressing one's identity and group membership, the way ESL students are positioned in the English learning context determines the level at which they participate in social and academic activities of the classroom. If ESL students perceive that learning English is intended to replace their languages and cultural practices, thereby denying them their identities, they may participate less in the class's activities and, therefore, internalize limited tools and recourses (i.e., English language and school cultural practices) necessary for their learning. From a sociocultural perspective, English language and practices should be taught to ESL students with the aim of appropriating them to the social and academic learning and practices of the school.

The notion of ZPD in sociocultural theory plays a significant role in the acquisition of ESL as well as in the mastery of course content by ESL students. Successful learning at the ZPD requires the interaction and participation of more knowledgeable adults and peers with the novice learner. In a second language learning classroom, mastery of English language and course content depends on the teacher's ability to determine the current students' linguistic and content levels, in order to present tasks that are appropriate, and then mediate learning to help students to master information at a higher level. Gibbons (2003) found mediation strategies such as re-wording part of learners' speech, signaling to learners how to reformulate their speech, and indicating the need for reformulation to be effective in gradually leading ESL students not only to a mastery of course content but also to an understanding and use of academic vocabulary specific to a particular school subject. According to Platt and Troudi (1997), lack of guidance by the teacher or peers, or provision of help outside the ZPD of an ESL student hinders genuine participation in the learning process and, subsequently, prevents learning from taking place.

Appropriate learning opportunities and relevant resources/activities available to learners of a second language are important for successful learning at the ZPD. Toohey and Norton (2001) observed that the way communities and their practices are structured can foster or impede learners' access to the linguistic resources of these communities. From a sociocultural perspective, ESL classrooms are seen to consist of communities of learners in which particular opportunities and resources can facilitate or hamper learning of English by ESL students. Varied culturally-relevant resources and meaningful interaction opportunities (e.g., teacher talk, student-student/teacher discussions, and role plays) in an ESL classroom can facilitate learning of English and course content. To be meaningful, these interactions

should be monitored and guided by the teacher to ensure that the students acquire culturally appropriate linguistic skills and knowledge of using these skills in interaction. Selection of interaction opportunities requires that the teacher is sensitive to diverse cultural beliefs about interaction. Such knowledge will enable the teacher to create diversified, culturally-relevant interaction opportunities that meet the diverse interaction styles of ESL students. Provision of resources/activities that relate to the students' cultural beliefs and understanding encourages students' interaction. Lack of appropriate interaction opportunities and activities would result in ESL students participating in limited and superficial ways in the classroom, and, hence, failing to succeed academically.

Summary

Sociocultural theory is gaining prominence in SLA research. Its premise that social and individual processes are interdependent in co-construction of knowledge forms the base for the transformation of second language classrooms by redefining not only how second language learners are perceived but also ways in which instruction, learning opportunities and activities are organized. Within this theory, second language learners are seen as active participants in their learning processes, and learning as situated in an interactive social context. Given this understanding, second language teachers will become more sensitive in providing relevant assistance, and linguistically and culturally appropriate learning activities that will promote social and academic achievement of second language learners. The following section focuses on the needs and challenges of ESL learners which need to be addressed from a sociocultural perspective if their learning in second language classrooms is to be successful.

Literature Review

ESL Programs

Most English-speaking countries with immigrant students have designed ESL programs aimed at addressing the linguistic needs of these students. The students are expected to learn English, and use it to learn other school subjects. These programs vary from one country to the other in terms of program options available, as well as in the terminology used to refer to them. Indeed, these terms are also used to refer to the students who are getting assistance through the programs. In Canada, the program is known as “English as a Second Language” (ESL), and the students are, therefore, “ESL students.” In Australia, the students are referred to as “Non English Speaking Background (NESB) students” and in the United States as “Limited English Proficient (LEP) students” or “bilingual students” (Ashworth, 2000). Although such students have been referred to as “bilingual” in England, the current preferred term is “English as an Additional Language (EAL) students” (Leung, 2001). Because the focus of my study is Canada, and for consistency, I will use the term English as a Second Language (ESL) in the rest of the thesis to refer to either the program for immigrant students in schools, or to the students themselves.

Program options for ESL students are varied, and are delivered differently in Canada, Australia, England, and the United States. Further differences are found across the various states/provinces in each country as well as in different schools within the states/provinces (Parkin & Sidnell, 1992). Ashworth (2000) found a total of 28 ESL program options used in the four countries. Baker (1996) described 10 program options used in the United States alone. No one particular program option is suitable for all schools or students, but the options

vary depending on the policy orientations of the state/province, the school size, available resources, and the needs of individual students (Coelho, 1998; Brinton, Sasser, & Winningham, 1991). The linguistic/cultural backgrounds of ESL students may also impact decisions about the nature of ESL programming offered at a particular place. For example, in an area where ESL students from a particular language community are concentrated, the program option offered in schools in that area may differ from schools in an area with immigrants from a variety of linguistic/cultural backgrounds. A case in point is the bilingual program option common especially in the United States, in areas with high concentration of native speakers of a particular language (e.g., Spanish). Bilingual classes are taught by a bilingual teacher or co-taught by an English-speaking teacher and a teacher's aide proficient in the language of the students. This option is common at the elementary school level, especially at the lower grades.

Since ESL program options and delivery modes differ from one country to another and some options overlap in the way they are structured, categorizing program types is problematic. Consequently, three commonly used program options in most English-speaking countries namely self-contained, withdrawal, and mainstreaming, are described here. Although the bilingual program option is common in the United States, it is not common at high school level and will not, therefore, be explored further in this study. Highlights of the three program options are presented in Table 1 below. It is important to note, however, that even with the commonly offered program options, the mode of delivery is different among countries and states/provinces in those countries.

Table 1
Highlights of Three Commonly Used ESL Program Options in Most English-Speaking Countries

Program Options	Description	Delivery modes
Self-contained	<p>Designed for students with very little or no English knowledge. Students meet either in a school or district reception center for instruction. Basic English communication skills are taught. Academic instruction is given in English or students' first language, if possible. Students vary in terms of age, and cultural, linguistic, and academic backgrounds.</p>	<p>Students may spend either full days for one year in an ESL class or they may spend half a day in an ESL class and half in a regular classroom taking courses that are less demanding of proficient knowledge of English.</p> <p>Students spend days or weeks in a school or district ESL center where they are assessed for placement in schools.</p>
Withdrawal/Pullout	<p>Aimed at providing ongoing language support outside of the regular classroom as students acquire knowledge in content areas. Instruction is given in a simplified form of English. The program may be used as an alternative to an English course or to teach other subjects in simplified English. Students are withdrawn in groups based on English language or grade levels.</p>	<p>Students are time-tabled for ESL classes alongside regular classes and are withdrawn for ESL instruction at an ESL class or center.</p> <p>Students are taught by either an ESL teacher, an English language support teacher, or bilingual or English-speaking volunteers.</p>
Mainstreaming	<p>Students are integrated into a regular classroom. Instruction is given in English. Students are expected to learn English naturally from their English-speaking peers.</p>	<p>Students are mainstreamed either with in-class help from an ESL teacher or without any ESL support.</p>

The self-contained program option. The self-contained (also known as intensive support or reception center) program, is designed for students with very little or no knowledge of English. Students in this program typically form a heterogeneous group in terms of age, linguistic, cultural, and academic backgrounds. Students learn basic communication skills to enable them to cope with the daily demands of their new environment (Parkin & Sidnell, 1992). Modes of delivery in this option range from students spending full days for up to one year in an ESL class, to half-day in ESL class, and half in a regular classroom taking courses whose language demands enable the students to participate actively and learn the content. This may include Physical Education, Art, and Keyboarding. Another delivery mode in the self-contained program is a school or district reception center where new immigrant students spend days or weeks, during which time they are assessed for placement. Some school districts may have one or two reception centers and ESL students have to travel out of their neighborhoods to schools that have ESL centers. Other districts may have a center in each school. Whenever possible, students may receive instruction in their first language as well as English in the centers (Coelho, 1998). Students' English proficiency levels when they arrive in the host country determine whether they will spend full of half days in an ESL class, or whether they will spend more time in a school/district reception center.

Students in this program option have the advantage of receiving intensive English language teaching by an ESL teacher who understands their linguistic, cultural, and social needs. Individualized support is also possible and students can learn at their own pace. The disadvantage of this option is that the students are separated from their English-speaking peers, which denies them the opportunity to learn English through natural immersion. They

also may lose the opportunity for instruction by subject specialists in courses such as math and physics. The students may also lag behind in their academic work, especially if the curriculum they are taught does not match that of the mainstream (Coelho, 1998; Ashworth, 2000). For students who have to spend some time at a district reception center, traveling long distances to the center may be necessary for some. This, coupled with a feeling of isolation may cause anxiety to the students. Ashworth notes that adolescent students in a self-contained program may feel stigmatized and distanced from regular school life.

The withdrawal program option. In a withdrawal or pullout program, students are time-tabled into an ESL class alongside other regular subjects. Under this option, students may go to an English language-learning center where they are taught by an ESL teacher, or by an English language support teacher (also called itinerant ESL teacher) who travels from one school to another to give ESL instruction. Students may also have the support of bilingual or English-speaking volunteers, who assist either individual students or small groups.

The withdrawal option aims at providing the students with ongoing language support as they acquire knowledge in content areas until they fully integrate into the mainstream, or as long as they may need the support. Instruction is provided in simplified English that matches the students' proficiency. In secondary schools, this program may serve as an alternative to an English course that parallels a core English course in the mainstream class and students get credits for it. The program may also be used to parallel other subjects such as Science and Geography so that the students continue to gain content area knowledge.

Withdrawal methods vary within this option (Coelho, 1998). Students may be withdrawn based on their English proficiency levels, which means having students from

different grade levels, but with the same English language proficiency. Although this may facilitate the teacher's planning of language instruction, it would prevent consideration of different maturity levels of the learners and different curricular content, especially if the program is aimed at helping students to get knowledge in school subjects other than English. It is also difficult for the teacher to have knowledge of all subject area content in the different grade levels represented in this language proficiency homogeneous group. ESL students' withdrawal based on the same grade level results in a group with varying English proficiency levels, and the teacher has to assign different tasks to each student depending on his/her proficiency. This language proficiency heterogeneous group can, however, be beneficial to teaching if the more proficient learners can help the less proficient ones.

Because of the adjustment problems that some ESL students may have, withdrawal programs can provide a safe place for the students to begin adjusting to their new environment. They also have the opportunity to interact with, and learn English from their English-speaking peers (Coelho, 1998; Ashworth, 2000). Disadvantages associated with this program option, however, are that ESL students may fall behind their English-speaking peers in content areas, and a stigma may be attached to them as a result of being withdrawn for instruction (Baker 1996). When an itinerant ESL teacher gives instruction, traveling from one school to another may limit his/her time to work with the students.

The withdrawal program has timetabling implications for schools and may impact choice of subjects for ESL students. The timetable should be organized in such a way that ESL students are withdrawn when their mainstream peers are taking linguistically demanding core courses. This leaves the rest of the school time for electives for all the students. If this is not possible for any reason, ESL students may end up choosing subjects that are not of

interest to them, or, worse, staying idle or going home early because of lack of subject choices. Valdes' (1998) study of how immigrant students without any knowledge of English language adjusted to their host country where English was used, for example, revealed that immigrant students from the school the researcher investigated were sent home at noon because courses that suited them were not available. Such an act brings into question the equality of instruction time between ESL and non-ESL students in schools, and also what the academic achievement implications are for ESL students.

The mainstreaming program option. The mainstreaming program option involves the integration of ESL students into the regular classroom. Mainstreaming provides an ESL student with the opportunity to learn English from English-speaking peers, build social relations with them, and follow the same curriculum as the others. Students may be mainstreamed with support from an ESL teacher who visits the students in the classroom and assists them. This provides a valuable opportunity for ESL and mainstream teachers to work together in meeting ESL students' needs. It can also form a good base for evaluating the ESL program (Coelho, 1998). However, subject area teachers may find this arrangement time consuming and disruptive to the class. Mainstreaming without support, on the other hand, means that the students get no English language support. This is what has been termed as the "sink or swim" option (Ashworth, 2000; Baker, 1996; Brinton et al., 1991).

In my opinion, a student's level of English proficiency would be a factor to consider when mainstreaming him/her without support. Although it may be suitable for a student with intermediate to advanced English proficiency, it may cause frustration for a student who is operating at the elementary level of proficiency. Determination of a student's English proficiency level should be done carefully in order to avoid mainstreaming a student who

appears fairly proficient at the conversational English level but may lack English skills needed for academic learning. Other student and school factors may determine how useful mainstreaming without support would be to ESL students and caution should, therefore, be exercised when choosing this option.

According to Ashworth (2000) and Trueba (1989), the choice of which program to implement and the modes of delivery in each country and its states/provinces is largely governed by government language policies, as well as political philosophies regarding immigrant children's education. Unfortunately, these policies and philosophies are mostly tied to economic and social dynamics as opposed to the linguistic needs of immigrant students, in my view. ESL program funding depends on the availability of funding and how well parents of ESL students can lobby for this funding. Since most of these parents have English language barriers and pressing economic needs, negotiation with policy makers may not be possible. The educational needs of immigrant students, rather than economic and social status considerations, would be a good starting point in policy formulation and in determining the programs to use, and how they are delivered.

Problems Affecting ESL High School Students

Despite the array of ESL programs aimed at helping immigrant children learn English as the mainstream language, and use it to learn school subjects, various research studies on immigrant children's education reveal unsatisfactory services to these children, making high school graduation a goal that is unattainable for most ESL students (Roessingh & Field, 2000). Apart from language problems, social and emotional adjustments that immigrant students face correlate with drop-out rates from high school (Baker, 1996). Cummins (1993)

argues that in most parts of North America, the educational environments of ESL students restrict their personal, social, and intellectual development.

Watt and Roessingh (1994) tracked the school progress of a group of high school students in a large urban high school in Alberta, Canada, from the time they enrolled in their first ESL class to the time they left school. The study revealed a 74% drop-out rate among ESL students in the school. These researchers found ESL students' drop-out rate to be two to three times that of their Canadian counterparts in the same province. The drop-out rate was closely tied to the students' levels of English proficiency at the high school entry level. Those who started with a low/beginners English proficiency level had a 95.5% drop-out rate, 70% drop-out rate for those with an intermediate level, and 50% drop-out for those who came with advanced proficiency. Records of some of these students' interviews with the school counselors before they dropped out revealed that for many of these students, being mainstreamed with little or no continued ESL support gave them a sense of lack of personal and educational care by the teachers. Fear of failure also contributed to their decisions to drop-out. Similarly, former ESL students in Watt et al.'s (1996) study expressed frustrations with being "pushed out" of ESL programs too fast. Once integrated in the mainstream classroom, they realized how little English they had acquired in the ESL class, and learning in an all-English classroom without further language support became unbearable. Some dropped out of school as a result.

In a study of the academic achievement of ESL high school students in another urban school district in Alberta, Derwing et al. (1999) found a 46% drop-out rate of ESL high school students within that district. This was high compared to 30% drop-out rate of all high school students in that province. Factors contributing to the drop-out rate included the stigma

attached to ESL students, and the province's age cap of 19 years for students to attend school after which they are "pushed out" of school. It is worth noting that the age cap of 19 years was set with English-speaking students in mind and would, therefore, affect immigrant students in such a province negatively, especially those who immigrate at an older age (Watt & Roessingh, 1994). Other drop-out contributory factors included conflicting educational goals between students and teachers, as well as the teachers' perceptions of a lack of support for ESL programs and students by the school's administration.

The drop-out rates reported in the aforementioned studies raise the question of whether ESL high school students are getting equal education opportunities with native English-speakers in their adopted countries. It is disheartening to note that even students who come to the country with an advanced English proficiency level (as pointed out by Watt & Roessingh, 1994) have only a 50% chance of completing high school, on average. Although it is not clear from Watt's and Roessingh's study whether these students' advanced English knowledge was in basic communication skills or in linguistic skills required for academic learning, this finding suggests that continued ESL support for ESL students should not be based on their perceived level of English proficiency, but on the students' need for that support. The age cap of 19 years for high school attendance, after which one has to attend an adult learning institution in order to earn a high school diploma, seems to be one of the major factors contributing to high drop-out and push-out rates for ESL high school students (Derwing et al., 1999; Watt & Roessingh, 1994). Although the option of earning a high school diploma in an adult institution is available to students over 19 years, this environment may not be as socially and academically supportive as the schools', considering the linguistic challenge that ESL students face, and their need for interaction in order to learn English. In

addition, some adult learning institutions will charge fees for ESL services. This indicates that policy revision is necessary if ESL students who join high schools in their adopted countries at varying ages are to be accommodated.

Hébert and Reis (1999) investigated the academic experiences of culturally diverse, high-achieving urban high school students in order to understand what enables them to succeed academically. All the students in the study indicated that supportive adults (teachers, counselors, and coaches) as well as family members contributed significantly to their good academic performance. They also reported appropriately challenging learning experiences, positive self-esteem, and determination to overcome urban challenges as other factors that contributed to their success. Other findings on the importance of supportive adults were reported by Ponsford and Lapadat (2001) in their study of academically capable mainstream students but who were failing in their senior high school years. From Ponsford's and Lapadat's study, lack of good relationships between teachers and students as well as general lack of support by the school contributed to a decline in students' academic performance. Clearly, teachers' and other school personnel's guidance and support play an important role in the academic achievements of both mainstream and non-mainstream students. If lack of such support could put mainstream students at risk of failing in their schoolwork, it would have more serious effects (e.g., dropping out of school) on immigrant students who are faced with multiple challenges of adjusting to their new environment, learning English, and striving to perform well in school. Teachers and schools should take the responsibility for supporting students, in general, and ESL students, in particular.

Unfortunately, research shows that aspects of culture (e.g., language and beliefs) that pose integration and adjustment problems to immigrant students may go unnoticed by

members of the mainstream community, leaving such students without support in their adjustment processes. In a study of how adult university students described their ongoing language and literacy development, Lapadat (2004), for example, found that participants whose parents had immigrated to Canada and, therefore, grew up in two cultures, identified integration and learning problems in Canadian schools as a result of conflicting cultural and linguistic orientations. Participants who did not have such experiences and, therefore, considered themselves full members of the mainstream community, on the other hand, did not address culture as an issue affecting their language and literacy development as they grew up. Watt et al. (1996) also note that members of the mainstream community naively assume that immigrants will always adjust successfully. Watt et al. contend that the adjustment process may never end, or it may end with unpleasant results. Such findings indicate clearly why most ESL students still have difficulties performing well in schools and finally not graduating from high school. Lapadat stresses that schools can offer better support to students through knowing them, their homes, and their social situations.

Gunderson's (2000) study of ESL students' experiences in a highly culturally and linguistically diversified region in BC, Canada, reiterated some of Derwing et al.'s (1999) study findings. Despite the teachers' feelings of the need for ESL programs for the students, many students expressed concern that ESL classes used up time that they would have spent learning school subjects. They found this time to be critical especially for secondary school students who had limited time before graduating. The students also perceived other students and teachers to hold them and ESL classes in low esteem. The ESL program was associated with being "second-class students, those who had little chance to go to university" (p. 699). This stereotypical perception of immigrant students who attend ESL classes in schools is

unfortunate since most academically capable students and those in schools in high socio-economic areas indicate aspirations for university education (Gunderson, 2000; Roessingh & Field, 2000; Early, 1992).

ESL Perceptions and Funding

Failure of ESL programs to adequately meet the needs of ESL students can be traced to the way educators, education planners, and the general public view ESL students and programs. The amount of support available to them also determines how well ESL programs provide academic and social help for the students. In the BC Ministry of Education Annual Report (1999/2000), 40% of the members of the public who participated in a survey to assess satisfaction with schools' operations suggested that the government should not provide ESL funding but that parents of these students should take the responsibility of educating their children. This kind of view reveals a negative attitude and lack of consideration for ESL students. Some teachers in Valdés' (1998) study refused to work with ESL students while white parents expressed fear that the presence of immigrant students would lower the school's academic standard, and bring in insecurity resulting from immigrant students' involvement in gangs and violence. Such stereotypical comments clearly indicate the low esteem in which the mainstream community in the school held immigrant children. ESL and mainstream teachers in Derwing et al.'s (1999) study pointed out the negative attitude held towards ESL students and teachers by some teachers in schools. They found a general lack of support for the program by the administration and the entire school. According to them, increased funding, support from the whole school, and recognition of ESL as an important academic course, would uplift ESL standards.

Leung (2001) found that although ESL is an integral part of SLA, an established interdisciplinary field of inquiry, it continues to be marginalized in the school system in England, since it does not have subject discipline status in the National Curriculum. Funding for ESL staff has also depended on budgetary considerations rather than students' needs, which has impeded long term development in the program due to the short-term nature of funding. Regarding funding for ESL programs, Ashworth (2000) observes, "Unfortunately, ESL programs...seem to be vulnerable to economic cycles and policy changes that affect funding. ESL programs are often the last to be funded when times are good and the first to be cut when money is tight" (p. 41). She underscores the importance of stable and sufficient funding for educational programs for them to be effective.

Funding for ESL classes in the United States and Canada is partly based on the length of time that immigrant students are assumed to need in order to become sufficiently proficient in English so as to learn curriculum content. Unfortunately, funders and education planners do not address the nature of this proficiency and how long it takes a student to acquire English proficiency (Cummins, 1994, 1996). Instead of determining how long students will need to be funded to attend ESL classes based on their language proficiency, some school districts use students' age (e.g., 19 years as revealed in Derwing et al.'s study, 1999) after which they have to leave secondary school and complete their studies in an adult education setting (e.g., a continuing education center or an open learning agency). Others set a number of years within which a student can be funded, after which he/she has to either pay for ESL classes personally, or do without ESL support completely. In the BC Ministry of Education Policy Document on K-12 funding, a five years' funding period is allowed for an ESL student who joins a school in BC province. It is necessary to understand the nature of

English proficiency that ESL students acquire as well as the time it takes them to acquire it if more favorable and objective funding criteria are to be adopted.

ESL Proficiency Levels and Rate of Acquisition

Cummins (1994) distinguished between basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency levels for learners of a second language. Basic interpersonal communication skills proficiency represents day-to-day interactions, and involves face-to-face, context-embedded communication where meaning can be negotiated between the participants, and meaningful paralinguistic and situational cues facilitate understanding. Direct conversations are one situation in which basic interpersonal communication skills are represented since verbal and nonverbal cues can be used to indicate lack of communication and to ask for clarification. Visual representations (e.g., maps) and hands-on activities (e.g., laboratory activities) can also represent basic interpersonal communication skills because they present contexts with experiences that students may be familiar with. Even with availability of such cues and representations, however, Li's (1999a) study on how much information is communicated during face-to-face interactions revealed that it is more difficult to attain effective communication in intercultural conversations than in intracultural conversations. This held true even when the second-language speaker had adequate language ability to participate in a conversation. Li found that lack of shared cultural knowledge hindered effective intercultural communication. Li (1999b) stressed the importance of grounding (constant checking for understanding between interlocutors through questioning, repeating, paraphrasing, explaining, and confirming information) in facilitating human communication not only in intercultural conversations but also in intracultural dialogue.

conflict in students' and their parents' beliefs regarding their level of knowledge of English in Gunderson's (2000) study. Parents whose children could help them with communication and translation of day-to-day operations viewed their children to be competent in English, requiring no more ESL support. On the contrary, such students attributed most of their academic difficulties to insufficient knowledge of English. It is my opinion that there is a need for parents, teachers, educators, and policy makers to be educated about the different levels and rates of English language attainment for ESL students.

Age, Time in the Host Country, and ESL Acquisition

ESL students' ages at the time of immigration, and the length of time in the new country have been found to be among factors contributing to the rate at which these students develop cognitive academic language proficiency (Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1981). Collier found that students who immigrate at ages 12-15 experience the most difficulties in reaching grade level norms in academic achievement. Students in this age bracket perform fairly well shortly after they arrive in a new country after which their performance declines (Collier, 1987, Cummins, 1981). Research has attributed this performance trend to the linguistic and cognitive abilities of the learner in the first language (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 1996; Cummins, 1994). The premise of this research is that humans possess a universal ability to transfer some linguistic knowledge from one language to another. The transfer ability depends on how well skills in the first language have been acquired, as well as on the similarity in formal (e.g., grammatical) and pragmatic (e.g., rules for using language in context) features in first and second languages. Research has not, however, addressed how differences in first and second languages' features affect transferability, and, therefore, learning of a second language.

Cognitive academic language proficiency, on the other hand, represents the level of language competence used in academic communication. It involves context-reduced communication, and meaning interpretation depends on linguistic cues. This level of proficiency is cognitively demanding because it requires high level knowledge of the language. Activities in this level of language proficiency include reading and writing essays without the help of visual aids. Such activities are abstract, with linguistic symbols and imageries that a student without knowledge of the language and the meaning of such symbols and imageries will not comprehend. Cummins found that education planners and educators tended to confuse the two levels, affecting not only funding for ESL programs, but also the way educators deal with ESL students.

Whereas attaining basic interpersonal communication skills proficiency takes immigrant students learning ESL about two years because its demands are not purely linguistic (Cummins, 1994; 1981), research suggest that cognitive academic language proficiency for successful academic achievement of immigrant students may take between four to eight years (Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1981). Non-ESL teachers and administrators may lack knowledge of this finding and, therefore, may fail to appreciate the sometimes slow academic progress of ESL students (Markham, 2000). ESL students' mastery of basic interpersonal communication skills has been misinterpreted to indicate a general proficiency in English, blinding educators and policy makers on the continued need for English support for ESL students. By the same token, many ESL students who exhibit proficient conversational skills in English but not as good academic performance have been mistakenly labeled "learning disabled" and put in special education classes (Cummins, 1994). A lack of understanding of the differences between the two levels of English proficiency revealed a

According to Collier (1987), students who are 12 years and older are more cognitively mature than younger ones, and their first language acquisition is likely to be complete by the time they migrate. They also have more advanced linguistic content knowledge as well as more developed metacognitive abilities. They are, therefore, able to transfer first language linguistic and cognitive academic knowledge, as well as metacognitive abilities to the second language, particularly at the beginning stage of second language exposure. A few years in the new country receiving instruction in the second language means that cognitive and academic development in their first language is no longer supported as they concentrate on acquiring English. With time, as higher level linguistic abilities in the first language fail to progress, they become inadequate to support content learning in the second language.

Collier (1987) observed that by the time 12-15 year old ESL students have attained reasonable English proficiency to enable them learn content subjects, they are two to three years behind their age-grade level in cognitive academic language proficiency development and content mastery. Even after their achievement starts to improve, adolescent ESL students might still take extra time to approach grade level norms in all subjects. Cummins (1994) attributed this delay to the fact that as ESL students are developing their linguistic skills, their native English speaking peers are also gaining more sophisticated linguistic skills. As a result, ESL students keep chasing a moving target, a task that takes a long time to accomplish. These findings have academic implications for high school ESL students who are faced with the challenge of simultaneously developing proficiency in the English language, and trying to meet high school graduation requirements (Roessingh & Field, 2000; Cummins, 1981).

Language and Identity

Schools do not exist in a vacuum but are part of social and language communities. They represent the values and attitudes of the communities in which they operate. Auerbach (1995) argues that the everyday decisions that teachers make in the classrooms both prescribe, and are prescribed by, the social order outside the classroom. The communities' and the schools' cultures, values, beliefs, and attitudes, serve as markers of identity and membership for people in those communities. Immigrant students not only encounter new cultural and linguistic environments but also bring their own culture, values, beliefs, and attitudes with them. They are, therefore, faced with the challenge of maintaining their social and self identities as well as negotiating new identities in the new communities, a process that McNamara (1997) found affects their attitudes to their own languages and learning the language of the new communities. When immigrant students feel that their identity is threatened by being devalued by the schools, some opt to drop out in order to protect their self-identity (Cummins, 1996).

Language is one important way of establishing self-identity and group membership, and using a particular language in particular ways negotiates the user's status in that community (Lippi-Green, 1997; Gee, 1996). Miller (2000) has pointed out that language use shapes identities, and which language is being used is an important concern in identity discourse. This linkage between language and identity was evidenced in Miller's study among immigrant ESL students in Australia. She found the use of home language with friends at school and outside school to be a coping mechanism for these students, because it offered them a sense of safety and belonging. Social interaction activities that they engaged in were also dependent on their friends whose language they shared. Knowledge of who we

are emerges in relation to others and makes people become more sensitive about their identity (Hall, 1996). The way the dominant group speaks to, and about a minority group affects the way members of the minority group view not only the dominant group, but also themselves (van Dijk, Ting-Toomey, Smitherman, & Troutman, 1997). As such, ESL students' motivation to learn English, and to participate in social and academic activities of their English-speaking peers will be driven by how much they can represent themselves in English, and the way they feel represented by the mainstream society.

Gee (1996) represented discourse (meaningful stretches of language or language-in-use) metaphorically as, "... [an] identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize" (p. 127). This representation of language implies that anybody who does not share in a particular group's language lacks all other requirements of that group, and is unlikely to interact with members of that group because he/she will not be recognized. ESL students find themselves in such a situation when they attend schools in English-speaking communities, and learning English becomes necessary for them in order to belong. Trueba (1989) acknowledges the social and psychological challenges that linguistic minority students face in redefining their identity and bridging the gap between home and school cultures. However, he underscores the need for them to learn the mainstream language in order to attain the linguistic, social, cultural, and cognitive skills necessary for adjusting and re-defining their identity in the mainstream language. It is important that linguistic minority students be seen, heard, and accepted as members of the community whose language they are learning, as failure to do so means that they risk exclusion from the

dominant group's operations (Miller, 2000; Trueba, 1989). Exclusion will lead to social and academic failures for these students.

SLA research findings reveal that communicative interactions between the learners of a second language and the speakers of the language facilitate learning the language (Cummins, 1996). To help second language learners to acquire the school language, classrooms and schools, in general, have the responsibility of apprenticing the learners in the target language through meaningful academic and social activities (Gee, 1996). The ESL students in Miller's (2000) study reported a lack of communication between them and their English-speaking peers, resulting in a feeling of discrimination and a negative attitude towards the students and English language. Such a situation negatively affects ESL students' social and academic lives. Auerbach (1995) and Miller challenge schools to create healthy interaction opportunities for all students in order to facilitate the learning of English, academic content, as well as the school social norms by ESL students.

Summary

Research findings on ESL students and their learning environments indicate that ESL programs are in place in most schools with students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Despite this measure, dissatisfaction with the nature of support that these students are receiving in schools in their adopted countries is evident in the literature. The reported high drop-out rates of ESL students compared to their native English-speaking peers in various high schools are an indication that schools with immigrant students have not taken up fully the challenge of supporting culturally and linguistically different high school students. Unwillingness to understand and accommodate ESL students' cultural and linguistic differences has resulted in lack of continued ESL support and general support in

adjusting socially and academically, precluding many ESL students from graduating from high schools. Policy and administrative dictates such as the age cap of 19 years of high school attendance as well as inadequate funding have also impacted ESL students negatively. Because studies on ESL acquisition show that it takes older ESL students longer to approach grade level norms, more time and funding are required in order to ensure successful acquisition of ESL and academic success for these students. ESL and SLA literature have emphasized the importance of social interaction in supporting ESL acquisition and giving ESL students a sense of belonging in their new environments. Since social interactions by ESL students in schools depend on the level at which they perceive they are welcome to participate in social activities, schools have the responsibility of providing welcoming social environments where ESL students will feel free to participate.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Introduction

Methodology in this study adhered to a qualitative research approach. I used case study design in order to capture the uniqueness of ESL programs and ESL students' learning experiences in high schools in a small city. A sample of 10 participants was drawn from ESL students, their parents, and teachers. I collected data through interviews with the participants, using semi-structured interview questions and probes in order to pursue important leads. Finally, I employed an inductive thematic analysis approach in analyzing the data, which enabled me to discover overarching themes that emerged from individual's data and from across participants' data. Each of these aspects of the method is addressed in detail below.

Research Design

My study took a case study approach in investigating ESL learning experiences of immigrant high school students in a small city context. The context of schools in a small city became the case of study because of the instrumental role it plays in providing settings where ESL support is given. In effect, it provided the basis for this study. Within this context, ESL programs' structure and delivery modes, which contribute to the students' ESL learning experiences, were examined to determine how the choice and delivery of ESL services in schools with few ESL students impact on the teaching of, and learning by ESL students, and, subsequently, their academic achievement. Yin (2003a) points out that a "case" is not necessarily monolithic but it may have sub-units within it for analysis. Yin refers to this kind of case as the "embedded case study design". In this study, therefore, ESL programs can be viewed as sub-units embedded in a small city schools "case". Perspectives by ESL students,

ESL teachers, subject area teachers and parents of ESL students regarding ESL programs and students' ESL experiences were sought within the context of schools in a small city.

BC Ministry of Education documentation (1999) states that delivery of ESL services depends on the number of students requiring the services, and their location within the school district, among other factors. From this information, my assessment is that ESL services are unique depending on the number of students and the location of the school. Yin (2003a) suggests that one rationale for using the case study design is when the case is unique. A case study, therefore, becomes a suitable design for this study for capturing the uniqueness of an ESL program and students in a particular location. Yin (2003a, b) contends that case study is the method to use to examine a phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the unit of study cannot be set apart from its context. Miller (1997) indicates that with theoretical shifts in SLA, as in other disciplines, methodological shifts are also necessary if the methodology chosen to address a certain research question is to reflect the theory upon which it is framed. She finds case study method to have the potential to account for the theoretical shift of language in SLA, namely, language learning as discourse acquisition. When language learning is viewed this way, real-life settings under which learners of a second language operate become important for capturing the multi-dimensional factors that influence SLA. Case study method, at least as defined in the qualitative paradigm, enables a researcher to study the phenomenon of interest in its natural setting (Merriam, 1988).

To identify and familiarize myself with the context of my study in Cliftwood, I started by visiting junior secondary and secondary schools in the city to find out whether they had ESL students and programs. I discussed my study with ESL teachers in the schools where the programs were available. Schools in which this study took place are located in a

small city. To avoid compromising the anonymity of the schools, teachers, and the students involved in this study, information regarding the number of schools that had ESL programs, or a description of the schools will not be provided in this study. With permission from the schools' administration and the ESL teachers, I made informal visits to ESL classrooms to observe how these teachers work with the students. The teachers briefed me informally on the nature of ESL programs in their schools, and what their work involves. They also introduced me informally to ESL students. These visits played an important role in framing the focus of my study on issues that I found needed investigating in these contexts. At my request, these ESL teachers played an instrumental role in contacting and connecting me with some subject area teachers who teach the ESL students.

Upon approval of this study by the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) Research Ethics Board and the school district in Cliftwood, I embarked on the process of recruiting participants. I visited ESL classrooms and invited students to participate. A total of eight ESL students volunteered to participate in this study. I selected three students that met the selection criteria described in the participants section below. I invited the students' parents to participate in the study during my meeting with them to discuss my study, and to request their permission for their children to participate. Parents of the students whom I had selected agreed to participate. ESL and subject area teachers who participated in this study were those I had contacted during the preparatory stage for the study.

Participants

I interviewed 10 participants in this study: three ESL students (Camille, Fiki, and Juan), two ESL teachers (Cindy and Jason), three parents of ESL students (Nadia, Edem, and Natalia), and two subject area teachers (Kathy and Wayne). All the names are pseudonyms.

Two students were in senior high and one in junior high. They had been receiving ESL support for at least one year. The students and their parents have diverse cultural backgrounds – Asian, South American, and African. Selection criteria for the students included having different cultural/linguistic backgrounds from each other, being immigrants from a non-English-speaking country, and not having had previous knowledge of English language. They also must have enrolled in either junior secondary or secondary school in Canada right after arrival in the country (i.e., they must have been in Canada for a period of between one to five years). In addition, they must have received ESL support for a minimum of one year and still be attending ESL classes by the time they were interviewed for this study. The students' parents qualified for the study by the virtue of being immigrants to Canada and parents of the participating students. The selection criterion for subject area teachers was that they were teaching (an) ESL student(s) in at least one school subject. The ESL teachers were teaching ESL at the secondary school level at the time of the study.

I chose to study high school ESL students for three reasons. First, mastery of English language is crucial for these students since they have to use it to master other school subjects. Second, these students have time constraints (five years or less) between the time they join high school and the time they graduate, leaving them with little time to learn English and use it to learn other subjects in order to fulfill graduation requirements. Third, high school students are at a challenging developmental stage marked with physical, intellectual, emotional, and social changes (Ashworth, 2000). How additional challenges of learning a new language and re-defining their identities affect their academic achievement is, therefore, worth investigating.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through interviews with the participants. I used semi-structured interview questions, and employed a probing method to pursue important leads (see Appendix A for sample interview questions). Semi-structured interview questions also enabled me to get as much information as possible from the participants, while, at the same time, directing and regulating each participant's talk in order to address issues that were pertinent to the study. Although different data collection methods are used across disciplines that use case study method, semi-structured interviews are popular because they address the topic at hand and, at the same time, draw from the informant's emerging world view (Merriam, 1988).

Procedure. I met with all participants and spelled out my responsibilities and expectations of them, and what they could expect of me. I presented and discussed the letters explaining the study (see Appendix B) and the consent forms with all participants (see Appendix C), before they signed the consent forms (note: parents signed consent forms allowing their children to participate and the students, too, signed an assent form for their participation). I also offered to answer any questions they may have had regarding the study at that point. After the participants had given informed consent for their participation, we proceeded to schedule the interviews. The scheduling of all interviews was done in person and a convenient time and place for the interviews were mutually agreed upon. The students' parents were involved in the scheduling of their children's interviews.

Student and parent participants were interviewed individually in two different sessions, each lasting 30 minutes. The rationale for having two sessions was threefold. First, I was able to get an in-depth account of their perceptions and experiences without making

them tired by interviewing them for one long session. Second, I had a chance to pursue important information during the second session after doing preliminary data analysis for the first session. Third, the second session allowed me to check the information with the participants to ensure validity of the initial data and findings, especially given these participants' limited English proficiency which may have affected expression of their experiences. To minimize chances of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, I arranged for translators to give translation services to participants who may have needed them. However, these participants felt that they were capable of expressing themselves in English and they, therefore, did not make use of the translators' services. My assessment of the information these participants gave is that it was clear despite some language difficulties. Any unclear information was checked with them during the second interview sessions for correct understanding and interpretation.

The ESL and subject area teachers were each interviewed for one session, lasting 45 minutes. After preliminary analysis of their data, I did member checks with these participants to ascertain the accurate representation of the information they had given. Interviews with all the 10 participants were tape recorded for transcription. I also wrote field notes immediately after the interview to capture non-verbal information from the interviews, and on my reflections on the interview sessions. These notes were useful in following up some issues/questions with particular participants that needed clarification or additional information.

Researcher Role

During this study and the interviews, I positioned myself as a researcher responsible for data collection and analysis, and as a teacher who has had a different experience working

with ESL students. Van Lier (1988) observes that the researcher brings ideas and experiences he/she has gathered over the years to the study, information which provides some kind of common ground between the researcher and the setting. I have previously taught immigrant high school students in my home country who, like the student participants in this study, did not speak English, but had to learn the language and use it to learn the school subjects that were taught in English. Since my home country is not considered English-speaking, yet English is the language of instruction in schools, no consideration is made in schools for immigrant students who do not speak English. I have thought about the learning and social problems faced by these students in retrospect (mainly because of being in a linguistically and culturally different environment) and realized the disadvantaged situation in which they are placed. These experiences inspired me to undertake this study. My personal aims in the study, therefore, were twofold. First, as a researcher, I hoped to gain knowledge about the challenges that ESL students face in schools. Second, as a teacher-learner, I hoped to take up the knowledge from the experiences that the participants describe and use it to advocate for ESL students who are struggling through school without help. These aims, and my role as an outsider to this school system, gave me a balanced position between the teachers, and the students and their parents.

Ethical Considerations

One ethical consideration in a study is to ensure informed consent by all participants. To ensure that the prospective participants understood fully the nature of the study and what was expected of them before consenting to participate, I met with each of them and explained that the purpose of the study was to get his/her perceptions on ESL programs and the experiences of ESL students. The participants were also informed of the voluntary nature of

their participation in the study and that they had the right to withdraw at any time. I explained that if any participant chose to withdraw, any data he/she had provided would not be used in the study. This information was also provided in writing in form of letters that I gave to them all. None of the participants opted to withdraw their participation. The student and parent participants in this study had limited English proficiency. To ensure that these participants understood the participation information, I arranged with a local immigrant support agency in Cliftwood to provide translation services if needed.

Assurance and maintenance of participants' anonymity and confidentiality of the information they provide is another important ethical consideration in research. I assured the participants in writing and verbally that their anonymity and that of their schools would be maintained through the use of code names in the transcriptions and reporting of findings. I also assured them that strict confidentiality would be maintained in the handling of the data. The tape-recorded information would be accessed by me only for transcription purposes, and the tapes would be locked up in a safe place throughout the study period. Upon completion of the study, the tapes would be kept for about two years after which they would be destroyed. I anticipated in this study that ESL students comprise a small fraction of the population of schools in Cliftwood city, and there was likely to be only one ESL teacher in each school. I, therefore, anticipated that both the ESL student and teacher participants may feel uneasy about giving sensitive or negative information for fear of retribution by their teachers and administrators, respectively. To encourage the participants not to withhold important but sensitive information, I informed them that the data they provided would be reported in the most anonymous way possible by, for example, avoiding the use of any information that alluded to, or that may lead to identification of an individual, or his/her school. Member

checking gave the participants the opportunity to remove or modify interpretations they may have felt uncomfortable with.

I acknowledged the fact that the student and parent participants are immigrants, some of whom may have had unpleasant experiences. Although my study focuses on their experiences relating to ESL in Canadian schools, these participants potentially could have recalled past experiences that caused them anxiety when asked in the interviews about their current situations. In anticipation of this possibility, I contacted the counselors in the students' schools who agreed to provide counseling services, if required. A counselor at the local immigrant support agency also agreed to provide counseling services to parent participants, if they needed them.

The participants were informed that the final report of findings from this study would be put together in form of a thesis, which would be available in the UNBC library for anybody who wishes to access the findings. I also indicated a possibility of publishing the results, observing safeguards of anonymity for individual schools and the school district. Finally, I ensured that this study adhered to the required ethical considerations by obtaining approval from the Research Ethics Board at UNBC, which ensures that research is done within the University's ethical guidelines. I also contacted the school district in Cliftwood for permission to carry out the study in the schools (see appendix D for a letter to the Director of Curriculum and Instruction in the school district in Cliftwood).

Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data is an ongoing process as opposed to a particular stage in a study. Collection of data should go hand-in hand with analysis from the first time a qualitative researcher gets to the field (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). As data

are collected and analyzed, the researcher examines the existing data to determine whether new data need to be collected in order to clarify, confirm, or fill in gaps that may exist in the current data. Based on preliminary data analysis, the researcher may also need to revise his/her data collection techniques in order to collect richer data that will address the research question(s) more adequately (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Erlandson, et al., 1993). According to Miles and Huberman, simultaneous data collection and analysis ease the potentially huge and overwhelming data analysis process, which may de-motivate and slow down the researcher in his/her analytical task.

I began data analysis in this study after my first interview with a participant. The simultaneous data collection and analysis were, for me, not only preferable but also necessary in enabling me to collect more data from the participants to clarify and confirm my emerging understandings, as well as to reveal ideas that needed further investigation. From the four groups of participants that I interviewed for this study, parent and student participants were interviewed individually for two sessions each. I analyzed data from the first session in order to present to these participants ideas that emerged from the preliminary data analysis for member checking, before collecting more data in the second session. Analyzing data immediately after collection also pointed me to issues that I needed to pursue with particular participants, and helped me to adjust my interviewing strategies in order to collect data that were richer and more relevant to my research questions. Preliminary data analysis for ESL and subject area teachers' data enabled me to present to them my interpretations of their data for member checking via electronic mail before I could engage in further analysis of all data.

Data analysis software. I used the QDA software package *QSR NUD*IST Vivo* (Richards, 1999) (commonly referred to as NVivo), for data management and analysis in this study. The software was useful to me because of its capacity to handle large text files, which characterized my data. Its features and functions enabled me to make multiple passes at my data as I examined, labeled, and re-labeled idea units and code categories during the analysis. NVivo also provided me with a convenient way of writing and storing ideas that emerged during the data analysis process. Consistent with Weitzman's (2000) and Tesch's (1990) observation, I found that NVivo presented me with tools for searching my data, coding, sorting, and linking them during the analysis. Although some researchers are still managing their data through traditional methods (using multicolored pens to mark up data, scissors and glue to cut and paste idea sections of data, and index cards to sort out idea units), I found that using a QDA software eased the task of analyzing data quite significantly. For information on features and functions of NVivo, see Richards (1999) and Fraser (1999). For purposes of describing my data analysis in this study, I will integrate and discuss in the *Steps in data analysis* section below, only the software functions that I used in my data analysis.

Steps in data analysis. Understanding and applying methods of data analysis are central to qualitative research. Although I used QDA software, the task of thinking through the data and making meaning of it, and deciding how it will be analyzed rested with me as the analyst. The software only provided the tools for organizing such thoughts and meanings logically, to enable analysis (Weitzman, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I applied an inductive thematic analysis approach in order to discover overarching themes that emerged from an individual participant's data and from across participants' data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In order to make sense of the data, I started by performing a preliminary analysis of all

participants' data collected at phase one, before conducting second interviews with student and parent participants. In further analysis of all the data (students' and parents' data from first and second interviews, and teachers' data) I was guided by three analytical steps, namely; unitizing textual data into idea units, coding categories, and integrating categories (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In outlining the different steps, I will define each step, describe explicitly how I worked with the data at each step, and identify the NVivo (Richards, 1999) functions that proved helpful in handling and analyzing the data. Figure 1 below summarizes the process of data analysis.

I started by creating a project in NVivo (Richards, 1999) in which to store data, observations, ideas, and links between them. I then imported all the document files of verbatim transcripts that had been word processed and saved as rich text format (rtf), into the project. Unitizing the data, the first step in the analysis, involved a careful reading of each transcript and identifying units of data that were informative, in the sense that they enlightened me on particular issues of the context or participants specific to my study by, for example, providing an answer to a question such as "What does this scenario mean?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These idea units were assigned a preliminary coding label. Units that I identified for coding varied in length from a single word or a few words, to phrases, a single sentence or several sentences, and even paragraphs (Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Erlandson, et al, 1993). In this step, I created codes that named my constructs of the participants' meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used this type of codes (rather than the "in-vivo" option of using the participants' actual words as labels) because I found them to be useful in getting me started on constructing meaning of what the data presented.

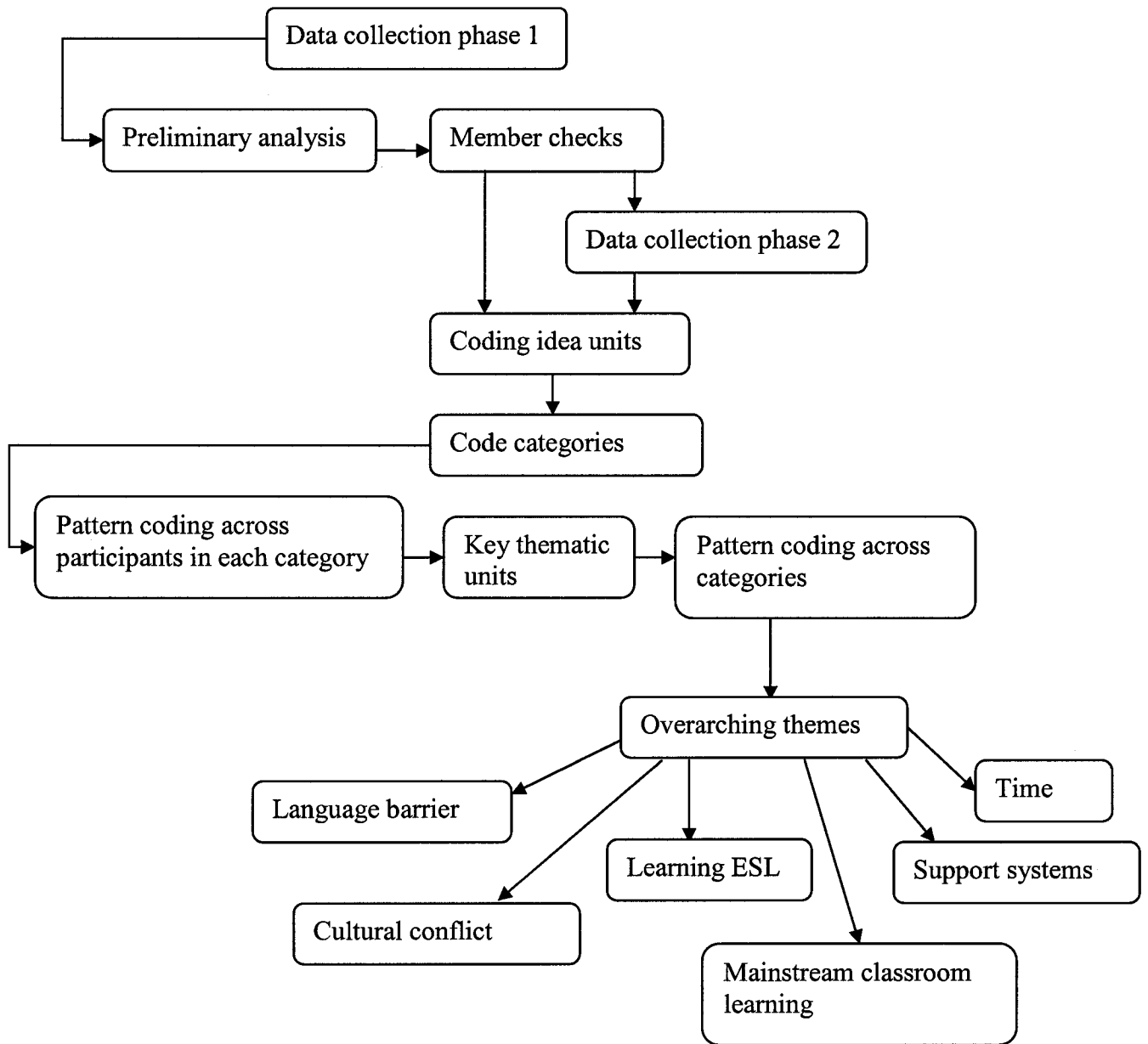


Figure 1. Process of Data Analysis.

During the coding process, I used the coder window instead of other coding options in NVivo (1999) because with the coder, I could easily and quickly change or delete codes as needed. I engaged in highlighting the text segment that I wanted to code and then typing the desired code name in the space provided. Clicking on the code button then saved the code at a node.¹ Because my aim was to break down the data into meaningful units at this stage, the codes lacked structure and all the nodes were, therefore, saved as free nodes. I continued with the process of highlighting and coding until I had coded all idea units in one transcript before moving on to the next. Because the coder window displays the node names of the already created nodes, text segments from other transcripts that qualified to be coded at an existing node were simply selected and coded at the appropriate nodes. New free nodes were created to code text segments from different transcripts that expressed new ideas. This process generated a long list of free nodes. According to Mason (1996), this first step in data analysis marks the beginning of the process of creating interpretive, conceptual, or analytical categories and themes, as well as providing the researcher with a sense of the coverage of his/her data.

Step two of data analysis involved a more fine-grained sorting of the coded idea units into categories. Categories function to focus and organize the retrieval of sections of text, or elements of data for purposes of some form of further analysis or manipulation. They are also a way of representing associations or relationships among data (Mason, 1996). Codes used to label categories at this stage are descriptive in that they serve to assign a group of segments of text to a class of phenomena (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Although data analysis for this study was mainly inductive, I conceived of some code categories a priori from the interview questions as well as from the literature on the topic of study. These deductive codes included:

¹ Nodes are databases in NVivo where categories and coding are stored.

“success and failure”, “cultural differences”, “ESL program usefulness”, and “school and family support”. These codes featured extensively in the participants’ interviews, making them major themes or important components of themes that emerged from the data.

Developing code categories require that similarities and differences among idea units be examined. Idea units that were similar in meaning were grouped (re-coded) together under one category and different ones formed the basis for a different category. Idea units that did not seem to fit with any others or into any defined category were placed in a miscellaneous category for later consideration (Erlandson, et al, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba point out that categories are most distinct when idea units in each category are as homogenous as possible, and different categories are as heterogeneous as possible. The development of coding categories is, therefore, an iterative cycle where the analyst re-examines the categories over and over until all idea units have been coded under some category (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The NodeLink feature in NVivo (Richards, 1999) is a powerful tool that automatically links all the nodes and idea units coded at them to all the documents in the project. This linkage enabled me to browse each node to see what codes were shared across documents (for example, was the code “learner attitudes” coded across documents?) and what text segments were represented by a particular code across the documents. I obtained a printout of the all the nodes with the idea units coded under each. This meant that I could examine a collection of all text segments from all the documents coded at a node, without having to refer to individual documents. This visual representation of codes and text segments that they coded enabled me to examine and think through the codes to assess for similarities and differences among the idea units.

To develop descriptive code categories from the nodes' printouts, I carried out a node-by-node comparison across participants' data to identify similarities and differences of the idea units coded at them. I grouped segments that I felt conveyed the same ideas together and developed a category name that I felt described them effectively. I used the DataBite link feature in NVivo (Richards, 1999) to make internal annotations about particular idea units on which I wished to comment. Most of these annotations were interpretive or inferential in nature, making them useful in the comparison of idea units. I also created a memo in which I wrote a description of each category that I created to assist me in maintaining a clear distinction between categories. Additionally, I wrote in the memo thoughts and ideas that emerged about particular categories as I created them. These thoughts and ideas were revisited as the analysis progressed. After re-examining and re-organizing idea units into categories, I developed a total of 16 descriptive categories that contained thematic units expressing participants' ideas. These descriptive categories were: Importance of ESL, Motivation, ESL Program nature, English learning strategies, Time, Communication barriers, Teachers' challenges, Culture mismatch, Teachers' approaches, Students' approaches, Course selection, Inclusion, Policies, Support, Students' attributes, and Teachers' past experiences. Table 2 below shows the categories and their descriptions.

I did the comparison of idea units in different nodes, re-labeling, and re-assigning of codes manually on paper first by marking the segments and indicating on the margin the category under which they would be placed, before entering them into NVivo (Richards, 1999). While manual re-assignment of codes was a time-consuming but necessary task, re-organizing the codes into categories in the software proved to be a quick and efficient task. The initially saved free codes were easily and quickly retrieved for re-coding.

Table 2

Descriptive Categories

Categories	Description
Importance of ESL	participants' perceptions on the role of ESL in the students' school and social lives
Motivation	parents' reasons for encouraging their children to learn English and the students' reasons for learning it
ESL program nature	how ESL program impacts on ESL students' learning
English learning strategies	methods employed by ESL students to learn English
Time	time factors impacting students' English/subjects' learning
Communication barriers	ESL students' inabilities to use English to communicate with teachers and mainstream students
Teachers' challenges	pressures teachers felt working with ESL students
Cultural mismatch	differences between home/school cultural activities/beliefs
Teachers' approaches	how teachers taught ESL students in the mainstream classroom
Students' approaches	how ESL students learned in the mainstream classroom
Course selection	courses chosen by ESL students and why
Inclusion	views on putting ESL students in a mainstream classroom
Policies	rules and regulations impacting ESL students' learning
Support	how various agents helped ESL students
Student attributes	qualities that characterized ESL students
Teachers' past experiences	how teachers' previous contacts with ESL students influenced the way they worked with the ESL students in this study

With the codes displayed in the node browser and the coder window open at the same time, I created tree nodes to store the various code categories. Using the initial coding procedure, I selected text segments that I felt fitted under a particular category, and re-coded them under it. I continued with this process until all similar idea units were re-coded under the same code category. If all text segments in a free node were re-coded under code categories that defined them, those free nodes were deleted. If, however, some segments in a node did not or could not fit into any category, that free node was retained in order to hold those idea units for further consideration. By the end of this process, I had a total of 42 tree- and sub-tree nodes and three free nodes. Of these tree nodes, the 16 descriptive categories in table 2 were the super- ordinate (parent) nodes and the thematic units in each descriptive category formed the subordinate (child) nodes. After the codes were organized and re-filed under the various categories, printouts of files on different categories (tree nodes) were obtained for further examination.

The third step in data analysis is integrating code categories by determining conceptual relationships within and among the various categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To determine these relationships, I reviewed each category to identify common key thematic units that ran across all the participants. In this context, thematic ideas were considered key if patterns of their occurrence were identified either across the three student participants, the three parent participants, the four teacher participants or across a minimum of three participants from any of the participants' groups. In the descriptive category *Importance of ESL*, for example, *Adjustment to a new environment* was a key thematic unit because it recurred across the three student participants. More key thematic units were identified across participants in each category.

I also conducted a cross-category comparison of thematic units. Additional thematic units were identified across categories and compared to the existing key thematic units. If I identified patterns among them, I added them to the list of key thematic units. Key thematic units were identified in 15 out of the sixteen descriptive categories resulting from commonalities of particular thematic units among three or more participants. In the descriptive category *Teachers' past experiences*, commonalities of thematic units existed between two participants and these units did not, therefore, qualify as key. All the identified key thematic units were then grouped together by pattern codes according to their similarities. This pattern coding of key thematic units yielded six overarching themes namely; Language barrier, Cultural conflict, Learning ESL, Mainstream classroom learning, Support systems, and Time.

Using NVivo (Richards, 1999) made the task of identifying relationships among categories fast and relatively easy. The availability in each category of a collection of idea units from all participants' data eased the process of identifying thematic units and noting to what extent the themes were characteristic across participants. I found that manually marking off thematic units that recurred across participants on printouts of all categories proved more efficient for me as the similarities and differences became more apparent with this approach. Consequently, thematic units' comparisons across categories were made easy. Like in the previous analytical steps, re-organizations of categories in NVivo in order to come up with clear pattern categories was a fast process because the code categories were easily retrieved for pattern coding. I used the same procedure of selecting data sections and re-coding them under the appropriate pattern categories at this step. After carefully examining the pattern categories, overarching themes into which various categories fit were identifiable.

Overall, using NVivo (Richards, 1999) for data analysis in this study proved advantageous in that, among other functions, the coding process was simple. In addition, codes and categories were well organized, easily retrieved for further examination, and their re-organization as needed was fast and less laborious. Although re-labeling and re-organizing codes and categories were done manually on printouts before changing them on NVivo, the clutter involved in traditional data analysis was reduced tremendously.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Participants' Profiles

Camille. Camille is a female student from South America. She was 17 years old and in grade 11 when I interviewed her. She had been in Canada for slightly over two years, and had been receiving ESL support from her school for that period of time. She lives with her mother and siblings. I realized that Camille had a busy lifestyle right from the time I contacted her by phone to schedule the first interview. Besides her school assignments, she went a few times on school trips related to her Physical Education (PE) course. She also had a part-time job, at which she worked on weekends, and some week days. In addition, she and her mother set aside time over weekends to do cleaning and go shopping. Camille enjoys going out with friends for movies and parties.

Talking to Camille on the phone for the first time, I realized that she spoke fairly fluent and grammatically correct English. She said that she neither spoke any English when she moved to Canada, nor did she receive private tutoring in Canada to improve her English. On the basis of her background, I perceived Camille to be a suitable candidate for my study, especially in providing insights on factors that contribute to learning English by ESL students. This initial conversation and others later during the interviews portrayed Camille as quite sociable, ambitious, and open to learning new things. These characteristics were evidenced in her summary of her high school experiences since she has been in Canada:

It has been really fun. I don't think I don't like it. There are so many good things you learn, you know being in a place where you have never been before and you don't know what people are like, just a totally different world....²You learn new things and then you are like wow! There are different things everywhere so you just learn because it's amazing how everything works. It's different than what you were expecting or how things are in your country and so it's always good to try and learn

² Ellipses in the participants' quotes in this chapter indicate that words, phrases, or sentences have been omitted.

new things. You kind of have to want to learn and want to meet people coz you can't practice your pronunciation or your conversation if you don't talk to anybody.

Camille already had a clear vision for her future career and she was taking academic science courses and English in preparation for university education to pursue a career in astronomy. She indicated that the courses were difficult but she was managing through hard work.

Juan. Juan is a male student from Asia. He was 17 years and in grade 11 when I interviewed him. Juan had been receiving ESL support for slightly over one year, the same period of time he had been in Canada. He lives with his parents and siblings. I first met Juan when I paid an informal visit to his ESL classroom to familiarize myself with the operations of the ESL program in his school. He was the only immigrant ESL student in the school at that time, but there were Canadian-born students in his class receiving English as a Second Dialect (ESD) support. The ESL teacher requested Juan to chat with me for a few minutes about my study. Juan is soft-spoken, and it was easy to detect that he was out-growing a shy personality, a fact that his parent attested to during my interview with the parent. Juan admitted during the first interview that he did not talk much with other students, especially in the mainstream classrooms because: "See, I don't talk because I am a pretty quiet person. I just wait until they talk to me and we talk. I don't want to start a talk actually. If they don't, I don't talk to them." However, Juan has a good sense of humor.

Although Juan's spoken English was fairly ungrammatical, he was not shy to talk to me before and during the interviews. He, instead, showed enthusiasm about relating his experiences in a Canadian high school, which portrayed him as having gone through a confusing and difficult adjustment process. This is how Juan described his high school experiences in Canada:

It was very strange and very difficult for me at first time. The whole thing, school, everything, the culture, language, of course, yeah, that was really different. It is getting better now, getting easier than before. You keep on going and also adjusting.

Because of his quiet personality and low English proficiency level, Juan did not reach out to other students for socialization. His home factors also made it difficult for him either to engage in club activities in the school or to find a part time job. On how he tries to make friends, Juan replied: "I got one friend and he is like 'this is Juan from [country X].' I don't actually communicate to the other people that I don't know. My friend is the one who introduce me to his friends." Juan added that he did not socialize because: "I don't think [the other students] will understand me. That is why I am really too scared. I don't know what that person says about me, about my English." Juan wants to study mechanics after high school. He, however, was not taking academic science courses that would enable him to pursue that career. He indicated that he found the non-academic courses he was taking to be challenging because of his low English proficiency level. Juan contributed important information to this study especially regarding cultural differences between his home country school and his school in Canada.

Fiki. Fiki is a female student from Africa. She was 16 years old and in grade 10 when I interviewed her. She had been receiving ESL support from her school for about one and a half years. She lives with her parents and siblings. I first saw Fiki in her ESL classroom during my informal visit to her class. She sat quietly by herself, and was not involved in chatting and calling for help as was characteristic of her classmates. Eight months later when I visited the same classroom with the intent of inviting ESL students to participate in the study, Fiki's behavior was different. She was actively involved in the class' talk including

calling the ESL teacher for help when she needed it. Her comment during our first interview confirmed my observation:

When I come here in ESL, I see my friends they speak English. I was just quiet because I don't know anything. I can hear them what they are saying but I don't know [what] they means. Two months like that I start to listen to what they saying and then I start to talk to them too in ESL, talk to teacher with English and then am learn English.

Fiki can be described as struggling with speaking and comprehending English.

Although I understood what she was saying during the interviews, I had to repeat and re-word many of my questions as well as probe her for explanations to her mainly short answers. She, however, was humorous in relating experiences that surprised her in her school in Canada. She, for example, humorously expressed a culture shock experience this way: "Ooh! (laughing) when I come here in Canada, I was like so surprised with like you can have a boyfriend or girlfriend in school and you can kiss your boyfriend or girlfriend in school. There in my country they don't do that." Fiki was taking non-academic courses such as cafeteria and sewing but she expressed the challenge she faced in studying these courses because of her low English proficiency level. She said, "I have problem with reading because when I came here I can't speak English. I can read it sometimes but I don't know [what] they means. That is my problem."

Although Fiki indicated that she could say anything in her ESL class, she was afraid to talk in the mainstream classes and to socialize with students in those classes. According to her, "Am just thinking if I talk to students in the other class, maybe they are not gonna understand me that good." Fiki did not socialize a lot outside school either. On how she spent her free time out of school, she said, "I stay at home, do my homework, then help my mom. I don't go for parties. If they invite me, I just tell them I have something to do." Fiki was

anxious about her academic performance and indicated that she worked hard and asked for help with what she did not understand. She had not, however, made up her mind yet on what she wanted to do after high school. Fiki's involvement in this study provided a perspective of an ESL student who was struggling with English, and how that was impacting her social and academic lives.

Parent participants. As indicated earlier in chapter 3, I invited the parents to participate in this study when I visited their homes to request for permission for their children to participate. All the three parents, one male and two females (Edem, Natalia, and Nadia) agreed to participate. All the parents were middle-aged and fairly new immigrants who had been in Canada for the same period of time as their children. By the time of the interviews, one parent worked part-time, the other was a full-time ESL student, and the other was trying to find work. They were all very welcoming and pleasant to talk to.

All the parents perceived that their children are lucky to be in Canada, receiving what they considered to be a good education, and learning English. One parent said, "I thank God because I came here in Canada. I want my children to grow up here in Canada for good education." Regarding her family's stay in Canada, another parent observed: "So far it's good. For parents especially when you move out of your country and come to a new country, you want the best for your child." The other parent liked the idea that students in Canadian schools are more involved in their learning through projects, for example. She said: "I prefer here because the students need investigate for her or his experience for himself or herself. In my country I think it's more rules. The teacher has a program and she follows all the rules. You follow rules all the time." These parents, however, strongly expressed the importance of their cultures, and the need for their children to uphold their cultural beliefs and practices.

Although these parents indicated their perceived benefits of being in Canada, two of the parents viewed it as an advantage to their children rather than to themselves. One of them indicated that, “I need a future for my children. This is the reason brought me to Canada. Not me. Me I will struggle to work here in Canada by all means.” The two expressed their frustrations about finding good jobs in Canada, which made providing for their children to their satisfaction to be difficult. Although one parent was a professional in his country, he has been unable to find a job in his profession in Canada. He also had a hard time finding any other work that he would be comfortable doing. The other parent’s comment is representative of their situation:

It’s really difficult because professional people came to Canada but never work in the same profession. I don’t understand because people study for a long time; know how to do the job, but not possible work in the same profession, only taxi, clean. No, I need more opportunity. The immigrant need more opportunity, equal opportunity. You left your family, your country, you left your culture...but your profession, you never happy.

The three parents provided insightful information regarding their children’s experiences in their home countries and in Canada, and regarding ways in which they are involved in their children’s education. Table 3 below provides a summary of student-parent profiles.

Table 3
Summary of Student-Parent Profiles

Student	Age	Origin	Years in ESL class	Character	Parent
Camille (F)	17	S/America	2+	Sociable	Nadia (F) Full time ESL student
Juan (M)	17	Asia	1+	Shy	Natalie (F) Part time job
Fiki (F)	16	Africa	1+	Reserved	Edem (M) Unemployed

Teacher participants. Teacher participants in this study comprised two ESL teachers (Cindy and Jason) and two subject area teachers (Wayne and Kathy). The two subject area teachers taught ESL student(s) in their mainstream classes. All these teacher participants are of Anglo-Saxon background. One of the subject area teachers taught academic and communications English, while the other taught drafting and math. All these teachers had been teaching for at least 10 years and so they can be described as being experienced in their areas. Cindy, for example, commented that her experience in teaching ESL students enabled her to assist a group of students sitting around her, working on different subjects. She was able to help ESL students with assignments in a varied range of subjects from their other classes because: "I have been doing it for so long. I guess I can figure it out."

Coincidentally, the four teachers had encountered cultural and linguistic differences outside their classrooms, in various ways. Two teachers had family members from different cultural backgrounds, and one of these two teachers had also traveled extensively and had lived abroad for a while. Another teacher had traveled abroad briefly, while the other teacher had stayed abroad teaching English for some years. It seems that these teachers' experiences with culturally and linguistically different people shaped their attitudes towards the ESL students in their classrooms. With regard to teaching ESL students, one teacher commented: "I enjoy them. I have traveled a lot and I tried to learn some other languages. So I am not intimidated, I guess, by people who can't speak English the way some other teachers may be." Another teacher indicated that he tried to help ESL students a lot because: "I have traveled. I understand what it means not to understand what's being said around you....Unfortunately, one of the students I had before I traveled and the one I had after, so they may have had different experiences."

These four teachers described their experiences teaching ESL students as pleasant, albeit challenging. The ESL teachers taught English to the students, but mainly through the courses that the students were taking in the mainstream classrooms. The subject area teachers also indicated that they tried to teach English to the ESL students in their classrooms. However, intensive English teaching was not always possible. Kathy observed that ESL students had problems with verb tenses in her class but: “I can spend little time helping them with it but to get them some structured time working with it in another situation is really hard.” The four teachers’ contributions addressed key areas in my study, namely: ESL students’ learning experiences in the classrooms, the structure of the ESL program in their schools, and the administrative factors that impact ESL students’ learning.

Interviewing and Reflexivity

My experiences, worldview, and the theoretical framework that I adopted for this study greatly influenced the data collection and interpretation processes. Participants’ selection and rapport building were impacted by my experiences. In this study, I positioned myself as a researcher, as a university student who is in Canada temporarily for studies, and also as a high school teacher with experience in teaching immigrant students in my country. I perceived that my position as a teacher influenced the teacher participants’ acceptance of me, while my position as an “outsider” to the mainstream community facilitated the development of rapport and trust with the parent and student participants. As a researcher, I had the responsibility of interpreting and making meaning of the participants’ data in order to answer my research questions.

The interview questions that I constructed for this study, as well as the meanings I attached to the participants’ transcripts were shaped by my knowledge as a researcher, my

beliefs as a teacher, and my experiences in a culturally and linguistically different environment. For example, although I did not experience language barrier when I came to Canada, I felt that I identified with the ESL students' and parents' experiences of being in a new country and "immersed" in a new culture. I was, therefore, aware that differences between their home countries and Canada would be central to the student's school experiences. This prompted me to design some interview questions focusing on these differences.

Interviews with two of the parents and their children took place in their homes, while interviews with one parent and the child took place in a research room at the University of Northern British Columbia. I took the responsibility of transporting the parent and the child from their home and back during the four interview sessions that we had between them. Conducting interviews in the homes of the two parents and their children provided me with spontaneous information about their homes and, to some extent, their daily routines. The context of their homes, coupled with the information they provided, enhanced my understanding of them and the data they provided. The experience of transporting the other parent and the child to the interview site exposed me to the multiple responsibilities of a researcher during a study.

Interviews with the ESL teachers took place in their respective ESL classrooms. There were materials posted on the wall containing information such as the definition of verbs, nouns, and adjectives. There were also posters on definitions of mathematical signs such as addition, multiplication, and division. In one of the classrooms, there was a poster on racism and acceptance of differences. In the other classroom, things that particular students needed to do were written on the board, probably as reminders to those students. This

information supplemented the ESL teachers' information on how they worked with ESL students. The construction of the overarching themes and the pedagogical guidelines that I suggested in this study, therefore, reflect my active involvement in interpreting and shaping meaning of all the participants' data.

Telling Their Stories

The six overarching themes that emerged from the participants' data: *Language barrier*, *Cultural conflict*, *Learning ESL*, *Mainstream classroom learning*, *Support systems*, and *Time*, represent the learning and social experiences of ESL students, the teachers' experiences working with these students, as well as the teachers' and parents' views on the students' experiences. In this chapter, each of the themes are explained descriptively using direct quotes of participants' own words in order to illustrate ways in which learning ESL influenced the students' lives as perceived by the students, parents, and teachers.

Language Barrier

This theme expressed the challenges that ESL students faced in their social lives and learning as a result of little or lack of knowledge of English language. All the students in this study indicated that communication barriers existed between them and their English speaking peers, resulting in a feeling of isolation. Camille said:

Trying getting into the conversation took me a while. I was just sitting there in the cafeteria listening to my friends talking I didn't know what they were saying. It kind of makes you be like a lonely kid in school. But then if you know English you can talk to them so you don't feel as alone, like you are aside.

Fiki expressed this sentiment when she said, "I see my friends they speak English so I was just quiet because I don't know anything. I was just quiet and listened to them." This is how Juan explained his feeling of isolation, "It is difficult to make friends actually if you...speak different language, it's pretty hard because my English is not good enough to communicate."

The students' idea that isolation was as a result of having limited knowledge of English language was reiterated by two teachers. Kathy observed:

The ESL students tend to group together...for several years they don't mix with the other students; even Canadian born students of other cultures don't mix with the ESL students, the new immigrants. In my class, I have two girls from [countries A and B] and a boy from [country Y] sitting together because they are the ones that don't know English and they are more comfortable with each other.

Cindy also observed: "I think the more they have been here the more they make friends with the other students."

The observation that isolation due to a language barrier put these students at a disadvantage is consistent with the central tenet of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991) that language mediates social interaction and higher mental processes (learning). Because these students were unable to interact with their more knowledgeable peers, it is possible that learning English language and the culture that comes with it was difficult for them. We can speculate that this linguistic isolation would similarly limit their effective participation in the intellectual world of the classroom. It takes motivation and determination for ESL students to succeed in learning English in this situation.

From the teachers' observations above, it seems that English language proficiency was an important determinant of group membership for these ESL students. In trying to explain why the new immigrants do not mix with other students, Kathy remarked:

I think there's more of a social difference because as I say, in the school we get all colors and shapes....We have people, for example, East Indians that have been in Canada for generations and East Indians that have been here for two years. The same with blacks that have been in Canada for many years and blacks that are new immigrants. It seems like the older generations mix with whomever and the newer generation is sort of set apart for a while.

These observations are consistent with Lippi-Green's (1997) and Gee's (1996) opinion that language is important in establishing group membership. It seems that these ESL students

were set aside for a while by their English speaking peers because they lacked the language which, according to Gee, informs group members on how to behave in order to be recognized as group members. Because these ESL students were isolated on grounds of their limited English proficiency, I argue that it was difficult for them to negotiate group membership with their English-speaking peers.

Comments by participants also indicated that academic success or failure in the classroom for these ESL students was determined by their levels of English knowledge. Instances of failure in the classroom were reported by various participants in this study. All parent participants acknowledged that their children were having difficulties performing well in the classroom as a result of limited English proficiency. Edem said about his child:

Fiki has a problem in learning subjects. She cannot write a letter to somebody, she cannot write a note to somebody to the office, she cannot write an application for job, she cannot fill a form. If you give this book to Fiki she cannot read.

Asked whether her child's grades dropped because of limited English language proficiency, Nadia said, "For Camille, in Socials and math...in reading in ESL class." In response to whether her child was experiencing learning problems as a result of problems with English, Natalia said, "Even if Juan does not tell me I don't understand this mother, but I know. The main thing I did was to buy him a dictionary."

Among the students, Fiki's sentiment is reflective of the other students' experiences regarding their performance in school:

In my country I always passed all my courses because I know what they are saying...because it is my language. But here it is different because it is not my language I am just learning...in my country all my report cards they are so good but here they are not good...because here it is too hard, if you don't know English and you don't know how to read that good it is too hard to get your report card to be that good.

Kathy, one of the subject area teachers, also attested to this in her words, "...and you hate to see them fail just because of language difficulties and yet sometimes that happens." Wayne, another subject area teacher, gave an account of an ESL student in his class who was failing.

According to Wayne:

The one student I had in my class was not doing well. He didn't seem to have the motivation. He worked pretty hard but he could have done better for himself if he applied himself to work and I am sure part of the reason because he had difficult time with the language so he did not have the motivation to try as hard.

Language difficulties for these ESL students had implications for their career choices and access to well-paying jobs after high school graduation. Because these students had limited English proficiency, they took some non-academic courses, which they felt demanded less English, in order to fulfill graduation requirements. Such courses lead to careers in practical fields, and are relatively perceived as "easy" courses. Taking these courses in place of academic courses required for university entrance acted as a road-block to direct admission to university and well-paying professional jobs later in life. According to Kathy:

[With] Communications 11 and 12, a student can get their graduation certificate from high school but they don't have entry to college or university...they will have to go back and do academic English to qualify for many programs in college, even technical programs.

These non-academic courses also seemed to steer ESL students towards low-paying jobs after graduation. According to Kathy, "There's a lot of jobs you could do without academic courses but they are not well paid."

Parents and students also commented on the impact of limited English proficiency on the students' future career paths. Edem said this about his child's job prospect:

There are some works you can do in writing and some like McDonald. Fiki is taking Cafeteria classes. She can work in McDonald or in KFC...but in another job, she cannot work because she don't know English.

Camille, who wants to pursue a career in astronomy, emphasized the need to perform well in all subjects, and especially in academic English. She said, "I need English too, a lot, if you have no English, you are screwed, pretty much." In my opinion, only highly motivated and goal-oriented ESL students may attempt to take academic courses, such as English, after graduating from high school, in order to upgrade their academic qualifications to attain university admission. If their English proficiency has not improved significantly by the time they graduate from high school, they may shy away from attempting to take academic courses. As a result, their career choices will be limited and many high-paying professional careers requiring university degrees will be out of reach.

Cultural Conflict

Language is an important cultural element and learning English by ESL students in this study would also involve learning values, beliefs, and attitudes represented by the mainstream culture. I found that by immigrating to an English-speaking country, these students became immersed in a different culture where everyday life activities and school operations were conducted in English rather than their native languages. The nature of those activities differed, and the "taken-for-granted" knowledge and values imbedded within those activities also differed. From their accounts, it can be seen that they experienced cultural mismatch in their homes, home country schools, and schools here in Canada. While they indicated that they found some of these cultural differences to be advantageous to their social and school lives, others were in opposition to their own beliefs, posing a challenge to their adjustment process.

The school culture for these students differed from that in their home countries' schools in various aspects. There were differences in the schools' routines and schedules. Asked about his memory attending a Canadian school for the first time, Juan said, "It was crazy. I have no clue what to do...the students will go into the teachers' rooms... in [his country] actually teachers goes in the students' room." Nadia, Natalia (parents), and Juan also indicated that schools in their home country operated for longer hours each day than schools in Canada. According to Nadia, "In [her country] there are about eight classes in a day one has to take a variety of classes a day, about eight hours of studying." Juan said, "In my school in [his country], the class starts at 7:30 am and you should be in the school like 6:30 am or 6:45 am and the school ends at 4:20 pm...nine classes per day." Natalia indicated, "School starts from nine in the morning and ends at five in the afternoon."

Cultural differences were also reported in the code of behavior in the students' home countries' schools and in schools in Canada. Asked what he found ESL students to struggle with, Jason, one of the teachers, replied:

Part of it is just the cultural issues in that the social life...is so different from what most of them are used to...nobody wears uniform, student-teacher relationship is much more casual [in Canadian schools]... a lot of students just take a lot of time to get used to that...it's fairly chaotic for people who are used to a lot of structure in their education system.

Fiki expressed her experience with her current school's code of behavior this way, "When I came here I was so surprised because if you are late for school...teacher is not gonna do anything to you. But in my country, the teacher is gonna beating your hand." Juan indicated that rules in his home country school were very strict. In his words:

You have to go to school in school uniform and if you don't, you can't enter the school.... If you were late while the class was having a test, there is no chances; they won't give you the test anymore.

Nadia reiterated Juan's view on strictness of rules in her home country schools, "It's more strict about the school, about the time, about the uniforms, and respect for your teachers, the students never leave the classes...never to escape."

These students also experienced a mismatch in the academic cultures in their home countries' schools and current schools. Nadia and Natalia, for example, indicated a difference in the range and quality of courses, respectively, offered in their children's current schools. Nadia observed, "In the high school I like the children have options for learn...mechanics, cooking, baking. They don't have those options in [her country]". According to Natalia, "I check the subjects here sometimes, same things but they have more advance." Understanding course content was also affected by culture as Wayne, a subject area teacher, observed: "A lot of what we teach is very culturally relevant to our culture and when a student is coming from a different culture...you will explain something using a certain reference in Canada and they will not understand." In recognition of this fact, the teachers tried to relate course contents to what the ESL students would understand. Jason indicated, "I always try to have a student working on...something that is gonna be somewhat culturally relevant." Kathy, on the other hand, tried to use course materials (e.g., stories, poems, and passages) with varied ethnic perspectives. In terms of course grading practices, Juan distinguished between his home country school and his current school in these words, "If you are making mess...you won't get a good mark. The teachers basically they mark you based on your attitude...and your work."

A conflict between the students' home beliefs and values and those of their new environment were evident in the participants' responses. While the new environment was pulling the students towards learning the mainstream culture, all the parents expressed the

need for their children to retain their culture as part of their heritage. Edem said, “But for my children, I cannot let them to lose their culture, I cannot allow them to forget their tradition.” According to Nadia, “I don’t like they forget [her language] because it is only the communication with my family...it is very important...it is my roots.” While Natalia indicated that it was fine for her child to learn some cultural aspects of his peers, she expressed this exception, “...but I always tell Juan if we are in the house, because we have a culture in [her country]...you have to bless the parents...part of respect.” While the above aspirations regarding the students’ cultures were clearly valuable, some home beliefs, practices, and values proved to conflict with the mainstream culture, impacting on the students’ social and academic lives.

First, social interaction, which is important for learning English by ESL students, would be restricted by their cultural beliefs as indicated by Nadia’s and Edem’s views. Edem said “Here in Canada, there is freedom for children...to mean that even my daughter ...can sleep outside from my house...but for me, no because we have tradition.” In Nadia’s words, “There is much freedom in school. When you have children not more mature, it is difficult because you never know where is your children, what he/she is doing.” Second, classroom learning by ESL students was affected by their home beliefs and cultures. Jason, for example, observed that ESL students’ belief in respecting teachers and older people too much sometimes inhibited their learning in the classrooms. Jason commented, “[This belief] is kind of a drawback too in that the students don’t really tell you [that they don’t understand] ...they don’t want to offend you.” Cindy also observed that some ESL students fail to reach their full academic potential because of their cultural beliefs, “I find a lot of my girls all they want to

do is get married because they come from cultures where if you are not married by the time you are 19 and 20, you are old.”

All the cultural mismatches discussed above attest to the challenges that ESL students in this study had to deal with in their adjustment processes. Apart from learning English, these students had to adjust to the social and academic environments of their new schools, while at the same time trying to cope with the pressures of retaining their home cultural beliefs and practices. This finding is in agreement with Watt et al.’s (1996) study on how high school ESL students adjust culturally and academically. These researchers observed that ESL students are faced with the two-fold burden of learning English in order to compete academically, as well as dealing with culture shock. They pointed out that these burdens prevent academic success of many ESL students.

Parents and students reported a liking for some cultural aspects of the schools such as shorter school hours and less strict rules than they experienced in schools in their home countries. However, adjusting to such environments may not only take time for the students but it may also cause confusion. For example, students may think that teachers are uncaring and, therefore, fail to obey them if they find them to be less strict and more casual in their operations than in schools in their home countries. They might also take advantage of the less strict rules and arrive late for school or skip school at times. As Nadia observed, student maturity is important in being able to adjust to some of the cultural differences that ESL students encounter.

Learning ESL

This theme focuses on the role participants perceived the English language and ESL class to play in the students’ social and academic lives; students’ motivation for learning

English; and strategies that the students applied in learning English. In addition, the nature of ESL program available to the students, and the teachers' views on working with ESL students are discussed.

ESL and ESL class. The importance of English for students in this study was acknowledged by all participants. Learning English as a Second Language was viewed as important in the students' adjustment processes to the new environment. All students indicated that they had more than one ESL block each day in their first term in the new schools. Camille, Fiki, and Juan had two, three, and two blocks, respectively. Each of these students appreciated being in the ESL class. In Camille's words:

I was glad I went to ESL because there they helped me out and they told me which one was the next class, where I was supposed to go, who was my teacher...my teacher would just go and talk to my teachers and let them know I was an ESL student.

Fiki and Juan found the ESL class to be important in helping them to learn English which would, in return, help them to learn other school subjects. Fiki liked the ESL class because:

If there was no ESL, I couldn't be in school because there is no class that was gonna teach me about English or something like that and there is no class that is gonna help me after the school or tomorrow morning because now when I am in ESL, if I went to my class and I have homework that I don't know how to do it, tomorrow I will come to [ESL teacher] and the teacher is gonna help me with the homework. The teacher is gonna explain it for me so slowly then I understand then I can do it tomorrow in [mainstream] class. In ESL class, they teach you English, they taught us English and how to learn everything in it.

According to Juan, "Advantages [of being in an ESL class] are your language is getting good, they help me out, they help me with improving my English."

The ESL class served as a safe place for the ESL students. Some of their social and emotional needs, such as interaction, comfort, and a sense of belonging, were met in the ESL class. These needs were difficult to find outside this class due to their low level of English

language proficiency. Juan said, “I feel more comfortable in my ESL class.” Fiki expressed the same feeling:

When am in ESL class, I feel good but if I went to another class that is not ESL, I feel like am scared or something because if I want to say something to students I am gonna be afraid to say it. In the ESL [class] I can just say it like that. I am just thinking if I talk to students in the other class maybe they are not gonna understand me that good.

Cindy, an ESL teacher, understood the students’ difficulties:

They feel comfortable in this classroom, they know they can just come here and hang out if they don’t have something that really, really needs doing...the kids need a down time and this is where they can be themselves. In their other classrooms they are always nervous and always on edge because they are thinking... ‘I don’t know what is going on.’

Similarly, Wayne, a subject area teacher, observed:

[The ESL class] gives them a half of the day where they don’t have to feel like they have to fit it...they feel safe not to know something. They don’t feel like they are going to be ridiculed or pointed out that they don’t know the meaning of a certain word because that is the job of that teacher.

For the ESL students, being in an ESL class helped them in learning other school subjects. Students and parents indicated that ESL teachers were quite helpful in facilitating the understanding of course content. The teachers too indicated their commitment in helping the students to perform well in their other classes. Nadia, a parent, commented that, given the students’ little knowledge of English language, if there was no help from ESL class, “It’s more difficult because in high school they need understanding math, biology, chemistry, and physics, everything in English...the teacher in ESL explain to Camille her homework.” Cindy also expressed the important role of ESL class: “We help the students to try and be successful in the courses they are taking...they are basically learning English through the courses that they are taking.” One subject area teacher, Wayne, had this to say about the ESL class’ usefulness in helping the students with their courses:

The class is also a good opportunity for them to sit back and reinforce some of the things they have learned. If they hear something that I say in the classroom, a certain phrase or a certain instruction and they don't quite understand it even if I explain it in different ways, they can go to the ESL classroom and that teacher may give them another way of understanding things. That teacher has the time and the resources to sit down and not worry about 30 other kids in the classroom and can get to focus a little more on getting to the help they needed.

According to Jason, an ESL teacher, ESL class provided a chance to, "go over the concepts of today's work...and assist in test review." All the students appreciated the help they got with their homework, and that they could take tests from their other courses to the ESL class for help with understanding the questions. Roessingh (1995) proposes that in order to help ESL students in high school mainstream classrooms to succeed, ESL teachers must become more conversant with the demands and content requirements of the mainstream curriculum. I found it impressive that ESL teachers in this study seem to have risen to this challenge.

The nature of ESL program. Schools in which this study was conducted provided an ESL program to address the linguistic needs of ESL students. The program option provided in each of these schools was Withdrawal (see Table 1 above) and, instead of being organized in different levels (i.e., beginners, intermediate, and advanced) depending on the students' English proficiency levels, students from different grades and with different English proficiency levels converged in the ESL class/resource room during their designated ESL class block. Cindy commented on the way that the program is set up: "In my class I have students that have just arrived into the country and...students who are taking quite challenging courses...my class basically is run like a learning assistance." In addition to having immigrant students with different language proficiency levels, Canadian-born students who spoke an English dialect other than the "standard" English dialect that was used in schools were put in the ESL class to learn English as a Second Dialect (ESD). Most of the

ESD students were of First Nations origin. Jason described the nature of his ESL class in these words:

My classes are a real mix...I will have a block that is ESL/ESD so I will have some students who are working with ESL materials and some are ESD...and I also might have within that same block other students who are working on optional materials.

Several participants gave their views on the nature of the ESL program in the schools.

Jason thought that it was not a great program because, “if you mix all different kids in different classes and call it ESL but you are still working with many other kinds of kids, that’s not ESL, I don’t think it is.” Kathy indicated that ESL students’ success in learning English would depend on the kind of ESL program available in their school. With regard to the ESL program in her school she said, “when all levels are mixed together as what [teacher X] has here, it often becomes just a support for the other courses rather than actually working through specific English skills.” Camille, an ESL student, found some pros and cons of having ESL students with varying English levels all in one ESL class:

I think that is good, sometimes bad. Good thing is because it helps like if you know English a little bit then you will help someone who does not know anything, then you are even learning how to teach somebody else something what you are just learning...so you have to find a way to make them understand...The bad thing is maybe the advanced people don’t keep learning...but I think most of the things are good because you get to learn a lot.

Although participants expressed dissatisfaction with the nature of the ESL program in their schools, there was also a feeling of its acceptance. On whether she was satisfied with the nature of the program, Cindy said, “Well, I can’t really see that it could be any other way, not up here. We don’t have the huge numbers like they have in Vancouver. In Vancouver they have the ESL classes’ level 1, 2, and 3...here we can’t do that because of the lack of numbers...” Jason also saw the impossibility of grouping ESL students into different levels,

“I think that in [his school] we don’t have as many ESL students..., numbers are not there to warrant having separate ESL class.”

These participants’ observations confirmed my initial assumption in this study that a relationship exists between numbers of ESL students and the nature of the ESL programming in schools involved in this study. Furthermore, the type of ESL programming in these schools impacted teaching and students’ learning.

Problems facing ESL programming. It seems that having mixed groups of ESL and other students (e.g., ESD) in one ESL classroom resulted in high student numbers per teacher. The mix and the high student-teacher ratio made working effectively with ESL students to be challenging for ESL teachers and students. According to Jason:

It is difficult to have mixed groups like that to actually have a small group session with three or four students where you are getting them to interact and communicate more,...it’s hard to do one-on-one thing like if you got 12 or 14 students all doing different things...it’s hard to kind of spread yourself around.

Cindy explained that trying to help everybody in the room was difficult because, “you are helping like every five minutes...you are trying to help as many students as you can...there’s always different assignments going on. You just have to be very flexible, incredibly flexible.” Camille related a similar experience in her comment that getting the teacher’s help whenever an ESL student needed it was not always possible because of the teacher-student ratio, and because of the students’ different English language levels, resulting in some students needing more time with teachers than others. In her words:

Right now we have two teachers in our class for like about 20...but then sometimes you try to get help but then they have to take their time explaining things [to students] so there is not enough time, so that is when you have to like work by yourself.

Kathy also observed that the way ESL program was structured did not provide adequate opportunities for the students to learn English skills. She said:

[Teacher X] is trying to do everything at every level with too many students so for them to be able to do structured lessons that gradually build the skills is really difficult. It would be useful if they were able to have a class where their job was to learn English structure and grammar and vocabulary. But I don't see this is possible here the way they organize it [the ESL program] because there's so many levels and so little time for the ESL.

Teacher participants attributed the problems preventing adequate ESL support to inadequate funding for ESL services in their schools. Cindy, an ESL teacher who was working half time because of financial cutbacks to the ESL program in her school, pointed out that the few ESL blocks offered contributed to a high student-teacher ratio in her classroom. She perceived more funding to have the potential to enable her to offer adequate ESL support to all students. Cindy observed:

The problem is about funding at the school. We used to have two and a half teachers working and now it's just me, half time. With the budget cuts, the teachers are expected to do more and more. The ratio used to be one full-time teacher for every 38 ESL students and now it's one to 76. If you don't have 76 students you are not full time. With a little more funding, it would be possible to have an ESL teacher all day. If we could offer ESL for four blocks, then I would be able to help all students and I would have fewer students in each block.

Jason, another ESL teacher, expressed the need for more funding in order to increase ESL support time as well as the organization of the program in his school. He commented:

I would like to see the government put funding back where it was. This semester I have one block and that is not devoted to ESL students only. It's mixed up with a bunch of other stuff. I have English as a Second Dialect (ESD) kids and others who are taking pre-employment courses.³ I would certainly like to have more time to work with ESL students and not have them thrown in with lots of other kids.

Increased funding was also perceived by Kathy, a subject area teacher, to have the potential of improving the quality of ESL support. She commented:

Improving ESL support would take an administration that understands the needs of ESL students better and didn't just assume that they were gonna learn English

³ Pre-employment courses are designed for students with difficulties experiencing success in the regular curriculum courses. The courses are meant to equip the students with English, numeracy, social, and job skills necessary for employment.

naturally with one very overworked and helpful teacher. The students need more tutoring when they first arrive where you may only have three or four or five students working with one teacher rather than 16; and that they would be grouped by level to some degree so that you can have some skills for each level that they can work on. This is not possible without funding to hire more ESL teachers or aides.

Although ESL teachers in this study indicated that they had aides at the time I interviewed them, they reported that this had not always been the case, and that the availability of aides in the future was uncertain. The government should make a long-term commitment to assist ESL teachers to help ESL students. By helping immigrant students realize their academic and social potentials, the government will be preparing these youths to contribute meaningfully to the economic and social growth of the country. This view was supported by Kathy's reflection on the amount of support she perceived ESL students to receive in Canada. In her opinion:

I don't think the system right now is giving enough support for teenagers that are coming into the system. They are not recognizing that if they put sufficient money, time, and effort in supporting new immigrants right from the beginning, [immigrant teenagers] would be independent much sooner and probably, be able to give back to the community.

Positive program aspect. It is clear from the above observations that the teachers were trying to do their best in helping the students. However, the ESL program structure, coupled with limited funding, posed a challenge to effective learning of the English language, as well as allowing too little time to support students with their other coursework in the ESL classroom. One positive aspect of the program structure was, however, evident from the teachers' comments. Because the program was not organized in levels, there was not a time when ESL students were cut off from receiving ESL assistance from the ESL teachers. Even after an ESL students' funding time was over, ESL teachers in these schools

volunteered their time to provide ESL support to the students who needed it, either in the ESL class or informally.

Cindy commented that she arranged to provide ESL help to students who requested for it. She said:

Last semester I was only working half time ...but I had a bunch of students who needed help. I just tell them [to] tell me a day or two so I don't make other appointments or whatever and if I can stay [to help] I stay. So, some kids came almost two or three times in a week to do their stuff with me.

Jason also indicated that he continued to give ESL support to those students who needed it even though they were no longer getting funding. According to him:

There is a maximum of five years of funding in this province so beyond that five years they...don't get the ESL funding but I have some students who...are not getting any ESL time this semester...and they can always come and talk to me after school of whenever.

It seems that the small numbers of ESL students and the way the program was structured enabled a bond to develop between the ESL teachers and the students to a point where the teachers felt extra responsibility for the students' progress and success. Apart from helping students without funding, these teachers indicated that they still followed the progress of ESL students who felt they did not need the help anymore and, therefore, were not allocated ESL time in their timetable. The teachers inquired about the students' progress whenever they met them on the hallways and also talked to their regular classroom teachers. According to Cindy, "some students decide that they don't need ESL help anymore ...you talk to them in the hallways... because what happens I become like a mother to them...I kind of keep them on track."

In undertaking this study in the context of schools in a small city, I anticipated that ESL students would not have much support, given the nature of ESL program in their

schools. Mainstreaming students too fast or without further support have been identified as reasons for many ESL high school students dropping out of school (Watt & Roessingh, 1994; Watt et al., 1996). I, therefore, anticipated that students in these schools would drop out due to lack of adequate support in the mainstream classrooms. However, participants' data did not support this supposition. It seems that although working with mixed groups of students in one classroom was challenging, the fact that ESL students were few in number, along with the teachers' determination enabled continued support for the students. Such support helped to prevent them from dropping out. Although teacher participants did not track or record the graduation rates of ESL students in these schools, they reported that almost all ESL students in the schools graduated.

Motivation. Different factors motivated ESL students in this study to learn English. A common source of motivation for them was their parents, whose knowledge of the importance of English and the need to learn it in order to operate in their new environment, led them to encourage their children to learn English. Although Natalia accepted that she sometimes feels awkward using English with her child at home, she emphasized that learning English is essential. She said, "That is reality, we are here in Canada, we have to speak English even if it is inside the house." Nadia wanted her child to learn English because, "in the future, I have bilingual children...English it is really important around the world." Edem perceived learning English to be important in enabling his child to learn, participate, and benefit from the "good things" in Canada. He said, "You can learn everything in Canada through English. You benefit a lot, like education." These parents' realizations of the importance of learning English by ESL students who immigrate to an English-speaking country was also pointed out by Trueba (1989).

Students' future goals and aspirations also motivated them to learn English. Camille's aspirations to be an astronomer made her want to work hard in learning English: "That's [astronomy] what am gonna do and I plan on doing it so I have to work really hard on my English to make it better." Juan had aspirations to go to college and that motivated him to learn English. Jason, Kathy, and Cindy gave examples of other ESL students whose motivations to learn English came from their understanding that English was necessary for them to meet their future goals of getting college and university admission.

ESL learning strategies. All participants agreed that practicing speaking and reading English was an important strategy in learning English. Socializing with English speakers was identified as an opportunity for the students to practice their spoken English, and hence, to learn more. Camille found that talking to people not only helped her to learn how to speak English but also improved her grammar and writing, "I did a lot of talking with my friends...when you talk to people, you find the right way to say things, you know the order of words and it helps you with the grammar and then it helps you with the writing too because you know how it sounds." Cindy, an ESL teacher, thought that interaction between ESL students and their English-speaking peers should be encouraged because, "every time they are interacting, they are having to speak English and I think that is very good." Juan indicated that he practices speaking English with his family members: "My family, when I talk to them I don't use my language so I will use English so it helps a lot in practicing." As will be discussed later in this chapter, there seem to have been opportunities for ESL students to interact with their English-speaking peers. However, ESL students did not make use of those opportunities. Kathy, a subject area teacher, pointed out that since ESL students did not socialize with their English-speaking peers, all the ESL students heard was, "very limited or

broken English. They tend [ed] to pick up the language of the hallway...and it tends to be very slang and colloquial.”

Participants also identified reading and use of worksheets as ways of practicing learning English. Natalia said about her child, “I find Juan reading books to enhance or practice more English...and he has to answer questions if he really understood what he is reading.” Fiki indicated that her ESL teacher uses the same method to make the students practice English, “Like [teacher X] can give you a book to read...and the questions too you are gonna answer them.” Camille indicated that she did a lot of worksheets on different English language aspects. Nadia, Camille, and Cindy mentioned sports and popular culture as helpful means of learning ESL. According to Nadia, one can practice English through, “TV, the music, and also movies...you watch movie in the TV in English and after you present the report...what did you learn, what did you understand?” Camille summed up her ESL learning strategies this way: “Probably like movies, music, and friends, they are like the most things that help me a lot with my English.”

It is important to note that although socialization was identified as an important English practicing strategy, only one student, Camille, reported socializing a lot with English-speakers. Juan preferred to practice speaking English with his family members while Fiki relied on the academic opportunities for practicing English offered in her class. Because the role that socialization plays in learning ESL cannot be overemphasized, schools have the responsibility of creating interaction environments that would encourage ESL students to socialize with their English-speaking peers without feeling intimidated by their levels of English proficiency.

Mainstream Classroom Learning

This theme captures the experiences of these ESL students in mainstream classrooms, including their learning approaches and the approaches used by their teachers. Participants' views on the benefits of having ESL students in mainstream classrooms, as well as the types of courses selected by ESL students, are discussed.

Inclusion. Teacher participants gave their views on having ESL students take courses in the mainstream classrooms alongside the ESL block. Subject area teachers, Wayne and Kathy, observed that putting ESL students in the mainstream classrooms for part of the day benefited not only the students but also the teachers in that it helped teachers learn to adapt their teaching. Wayne observed that in a regular classroom, the ESL students: "get the interaction...get to know the language a lot more...get to have more opportunity to use it in an everyday version rather than being segregated in an ESL class." However, Wayne cautioned that the students would only benefit from this inclusion if they were comfortable with the level of language being used. Kathy also gave her views on inclusion, "I think that, maybe, the ESL class can become too safe a place for them and they do need to be put out to take a risk and try... [see] how much confidence they have socially." Although Cindy, an ESL teacher, supported inclusion of ESL students in the regular classrooms, she expressed fears that the mainstream classrooms were not meeting the interaction needs for the students. She commented: "They [ESL students] go to their other classes and they are very quiet. They do their work, the teacher asks for volunteer to do something, they are not gonna speak up." Cindy's view suggests that putting ESL students in the regular classrooms will not always result in interaction. Harklau (1994) found that the sociolinguistic environment of the mainstream classrooms often intimidates ESL students, precluding them from interacting

with their English-speaking peers. Interaction with English speakers is important in the development of English proficiency and for giving ESL students a sense of belonging to the English-speaking society. As such, schools have the responsibility of supporting learning and interaction needs of ESL students (Cummins, 1994).

The subject area teachers reported that having ESL students in their classes made them re-think their teaching strategies in order to accommodate the ESL students. Kathy pointed out that some of these adjustments benefited not only ESL students but also the rest of the students. Kathy said: "It [inclusion] makes me re-think how I teach and what other things I can do that will make it easier for them [ESL students] to understand and I find when I do that then I am also doing things that help English speakers as well." One adjustment that Kathy makes in her class is to provide background information (e.g., cultural and historical) on topics instead of assuming that the students have this background knowledge. Wayne reported a similar thing: "I think it [inclusion] has made me more aware of how I explain things, knowing that if I use this example they may not understand it so I try to think of different ways of saying the same thing." Wayne's other adjustments included not using long, wordy explanations and trying to keep things simple, short and easy to understand. In my opinion, such strategies would also work well for many English-speaking students.

ESL students introduced the class to different cultural perspectives and experiences, and, sometimes, served as resource persons. Jason thought that ESL students contribute a lot to the class because, "in most cases most of the students have had a harder time than in here and it's good for other kids to know how good you have it here and what a good system you have." Kathy and Wayne found that ESL students who were comfortable and willing to share

their experiences could reinforce learning for the class by relating their real life experiences or giving examples from their cultures. According to Kathy:

Everybody in the class is interested in hearing a different experience. Three quarters of the class was born in Cliftwood and sometimes you can, when you are reading about something in a story...you can ask the immigrant what was his experience with that.

Wayne expressed the important learning perspectives that an ESL student provided in the regular classroom:

I thought it was very nice in the math class with the student I had...I would use [the student] to share different perspectives on things a lot...so it gave the students a different perspective on things...it made them realize that there is a bigger world out there than what they are aware of.

Kathy and Wayne pointed out that sharing of different perspectives by ESL students was also a way of fostering multicultural understanding and acceptance of diversity.

Three of the teacher participants in this study perceived the ESL students to possess some positive qualities that made the teachers to enjoy working with them in the classrooms. Regarding having ESL students in one of the non-academic courses that Kathy taught, she commented that because most mainstream students in non-academic classes are not very motivated to learn; "it's a treat to have the ESL students in the class because they are usually very motivated and they work very hard and so they stand out in a class that isn't motivated and doesn't work hard." Jason and Cindy reiterated Kathy's observations. According to Jason: "[ESL students] are pleasant to work with and hard working... [they] are polite, much better work ethics than the average students are." Cindy described ESL students as very friendly, respectful, and valuing education. She expressed the students' determination in the mainstream classroom in these words:

I know my students are always trying to hand in all their assignments.... In most part they are successful in their courses; they may fail the exams, but they will always have 100% or 80% for homework assignment because they are diligent.

I found it interesting that teachers in this study attributed only positive qualities to the ESL students. Although some students may have possessed those qualities, this view presents ESL students in a stereotypical manner where all of them are assumed to conform to particular characteristics. In addition, these teachers' views stand in contrast to other literature on ESL students (e.g., Valdes, 1998; Platt & Troudi, 1997) in which ESL students are presented as deficient and problematic. Platt and Troudi argue that teachers' beliefs and experiences shape their attitudes towards ESL students. It is, therefore, possible that teacher participants' experiences in different cultural and linguistic environments outside their classrooms may have influenced their views on these ESL students. A finding such as this should, therefore, be embraced with caution because exceptions exist.

Indicators of hard work were, however, evidenced in these ESL students' comments. For them, reviewing their day's work after school is a common practice in order to identify areas in their courses with which they need extra help. Juan said, "After school, I am in my room reviewing my lessons." Fiki set aside some time to review her work and complete her assignments as much as she could. She, however, added: "If I can't do it [the assignment], I leave it and then go and ask the teacher the following day." Camille described her experience taking academic English 10 in the mainstream classroom: "After two semesters after I started [school in Canada] I did English 10 and it was quite hard but it was challenging though like it made me work harder." The challenge of taking courses in the mainstream classes seemed to stimulate these students to work hard.

Course selection. Student participants in this study reported that they took non-academic courses, especially at their entry point in schools in Canada, because they found these subjects to be less demanding on their English proficiency. In the first semester, Fiki took sewing and non-academic math while Juan took woodwork and food safety. Camille took Physical Education (PE) and math because, “we thought that math didn’t have too much words like not too much English...I wasn’t gonna go to an [academic] English class right away or socials or chemistry.”

However, there are indications from these participants’ and their teachers’ comments that many ESL students continue to choose non-academic courses as they move on in their grade levels, and may end up graduating with only such courses. Of the three students in this study, only Camille was starting to take academic courses. Camille pointed out that other ESL students in her class were taking non-academic courses. She said: “The other students are taking guitar, cooking, metal works, PE, sewing, Communications 11; they don’t even take [academic] English.” Kathy also observed: “Most of the new immigrants will eventually end up in Communications (a non-academic English course).” Cindy, too, commented on the persistence of non-academic course choices made by ESL students: “I hate to say it but...most of my students...graduate with easier courses in our school...they will graduate with Communications rather than the [Academic] English....but they don’t, they can’t do it.”

Although Jason indicated that the type of courses that ESL students choose mainly depends on individuals, language barrier and policy dictates seemed to direct course choices for students in this study more than other factors. Camille’s comment is indicative of how language barrier affects course selection for ESL students: “Not everybody goes for that

[academic courses] especially if you are learning a new language. They kind of go for the easy stuff because they find it too hard, maybe.” The BC Ministry of Education (2004) has a 19 year age limit policy for high school attendance, after which students have to complete their studies in an adult learning setting. The older ESL students are when they join a school in the BC, the more inclined they are to take non-academic courses in order to fulfill graduation requirements within the time limit. Cindy explained:

Part of the problem is that at the high school level... they can range from ages 13 to 17 or 18 years old, and when they come, they don't wanna be here for ever so if they are older we try and put them in grade 10, 11, and 12 courses because they just want to graduate while if you are younger, they are lucky actually because they don't have that big pressure...like I am already 17...and I am still doing grade 10 stuff.

Kathy too noted that some ESL students' ages and academic preparedness by the time they immigrate necessitate that they take the “easier” option, at least in the course that she taught. She gave an example of a grade 12 ESL student who was turning 19 while still taking non-academic courses but had to graduate with those courses because of his age. Asked whether students have to leave school once they are 19, Kathy replied, “Don't have to, but they have to have special permission to stay and a few students stay up to 20...but by that time they don't fit in socially anymore.” For ESL students who joined a Canadian high school at an older age and with low academic preparedness, Kathy observed: “When they are 16, you have to deliver the curriculum and often you can't meet their needs because they are too far behind. For the older ones, the ones who come here when they are 15, 16, 17, then that's usually Communications 11.” Jason also recalled an experience with one ESL student, “I remember one boy from [country Y] who had to leave because he was too old, he was going to be 20 ...so he had to move on, he enrolled in adult programs and graduated from [an adult institution].”

Because ESL students vary a lot in age by the time they immigrate to their adopted countries, such an age limit would result in ESL students who reach 19 to be “pushed out” of regular school to adult learning institutions. These institutions may not offer them the social and academic support that they need for their academic success. In addition, academic courses such as physics, chemistry, biology, and math in grades 11, and 12 build on from the lower grades. It is difficult, therefore, for older ESL students who join a Canadian high school at these upper grade levels, and who lack background knowledge in such academic courses to select them. The BC Ministry of Education’s (1999) policy of putting new immigrant students in their age-appropriate grades in schools narrows their chances of attaining background knowledge in upper level courses so that they have a wide selection of courses to choose from. Edem expressed surprise about his child being put in high school even though the child did not know any English. He said: “I surprised when I come here and...they say Fiki can go to [high school Z]. I said why and they said no, we have a system here in Canada for education. When a child have age of 15 years, the government they cannot allow him/her to go to junior.”⁴ Cindy noted the effects of this policy on the ESL students’ course selection:

So when they come when they are 15,16, or 17 years old, we don’t put them back in grade eight, we can’t do that but then you have to think about it. These kids are gonna do biology 11 let’s say if they haven’t done the grade eight or nine or 10 science, it’s hard, it’s very hard.

Although the policy of putting new immigrant ESL students in their age-appropriate grades posed course selection problems to the students, enrolling them in lower grades would have meant that they would not fit in socially because they would be older than their classmates. It

⁴ By “junior”, Edem meant a grade below his child’s age-appropriate grade.

seems to me that the solution may be to put the ESL students in their age-appropriate grades and support them in developing their English proficiency alongside course content.

Roessingh and Field (2000) proposed a strategy for helping ESL students to gain the knowledge they need in academic courses, while at the same time developing their English proficiency. They suggested that right timing (when a student should take a particular course depending on his/her language comfort level) and sequencing of courses, distribution of workload, and plenty of time for ESL students to work through the courses would enable them to graduate with academic courses. Roessingh's and Field's proposal is extended in the next chapter.

Teaching and learning approaches. The three ESL students reported that teachers in the mainstream classrooms did not adjust their teaching in order to accommodate them. The students reported that they had to devise coping approaches that would enable them to benefit from mainstream learning. Camille's comment reflects these students' feelings about learning in the mainstream classroom:

It's very different coz they teach the class, they don't teach you...you have to see how to find a way to get along with it, understand it yourself...the teacher is not gonna sit right beside you teaching you the lesson so that you understand it.

Fiki expressed her experience in the mainstream classroom in these words:

Other class is hard because you have to read a lot of English and you have to speak a lot of English too. I don't understand the more because the teacher talk too fast and you can't understand what he is saying. They don't care if they have a student who does not speak English; they don't care, like they are just saying those things that they said everyday to students.

Juan said that he got a lot of help in the ESL class but not in the mainstream class. He noted:

"In the other courses, a teacher actually don't spend so much time with you; some teachers don't have time." These students, however, seemed to accept why the teachers could not

adjust their teaching for them. According to Camille, “They won’t because it could be one ESL student in a class of 29, 30 Canadians so they can’t [adjust].” Fiki said that she could not request a teacher to adjust his/her teaching for her: “No, I can’t say that because...he has to teach the students but he can teach [her] after the students leave; then he can explain what he said in class.” Juan thought that teachers did not adjust their teaching in his classes because, “they have a lot of kids, they don’t have time, but it’s all right.”

The strategies that these students used to ensure they learned in the mainstream classrooms included asking for help from teachers after classes, reviewing their work after a class or at home, and sometimes just trying to understand the content on their own. This is how Camille coped:

You have to ask them a lot... but I don’t ask them right in the middle of the lesson. I take all my notes, write everything they say and I read it over and if I don’t understand something I go to them like right after class or when we are working, everyone is working and...ask them for help.

According to Camille, the kind of help she received did not seem adequate to understand the content. She said, “and that’s just all the help, you want them to teach you what you are supposed to do in that class so you can read it over and over, you have to find a way to do your stuff.” Fiki, too, said that she asked for help after class but sometimes she tried to understand the information herself. If she had an assignment, for example, she said, “I try to think how I did it last time and do it that way.” Juan, who said that his teachers tried to tell him what to do in the classrooms, said that he reviews his day’s work so he can identify things that he does not understand and ask for help. He said, “After school I am in my room for 30 minutes reviewing my lessons.”

The subject area teachers interviewed in this study indicated that they tried to help the students individually in the classroom. Kathy said, “When I get the class going on with an

activity I will go over and help them individually...because I know they think about it in a different way....” Kathy also indicated that she paired up students most of the time so that they could discuss work if they needed to. An ESL student could be paired up with a native English speaker or with another ESL student. Wayne also helped students individually: “If they are having individual difficulties, if you give the lesson to the group and they [the students] start to work, there is always time to have to work a little more individually with them [ESL students].” He, however, indicated that he preferred the students to ask for help. He said: “As long as the student is willing to ask, it’s pretty easy to get a round the problem...I put more responsibility on the students themselves to get help where they think they are gonna get the help best.”

It is clear that these students’ accounts are in contrast with the teachers’ comments about adapting their teaching to accommodate ESL students. While the teachers interviewed in this study may have adapted their teaching, it is possible that their strategies were not meeting the needs of these students adequately. Subsequently, the students did not recognize the teachers’ efforts as aimed at helping them. It is also evident from the students’ comments that most mainstream teachers are not adjusting their teaching in order to accommodate ESL students. I think that it is unfortunate that these students have to ask for help constantly and in most cases, they get help only after class. The implication for their learning is that they are likely to lag behind since if they have to wait for the best moment to ask for help and if the help is not adequate, they have to try and understand the material themselves. Their low English proficiency levels further complicate their endeavor to understand course content by themselves. These students’ comments about refraining from interrupting the teachers during the lesson did not seem to be tied to cultural belief in some cultures where it is considered

rude to question or interrupt the teachers. Their resigned attitude to the way they learn, therefore, seems to suggest a low self-esteem which made them to perceive themselves as “second class” students who, if they kept interrupting the teacher to ask questions, would be taking up time for the other students. They, therefore, preferred to wait until the teachers had ended the class to ask for help.

Teachers, who try to help ESL students such as these in this study, may be limited in their efforts due to time pressure to cover course content and by the large numbers of students in their classrooms (Derwing et al., 1999). For mainstream teachers to be able to use approaches that accommodate ESL students, planners of education need to provide supportive classroom environments and/or devise alternative ways of teaching curriculum content to ESL students in order to meet their learning needs. Cummins (1994) suggests the use of instructional strategies that take into account students’ academic backgrounds to ensure comprehension of course content. These may include the use of visuals and other strategies such as peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and project-oriented activities that are also appropriate for all students.

Support Systems

The three students indicated that they received support and encouragement to learn English and other school subjects from their families. Fiki’s parents encouraged her to practice speaking English with her siblings at home and with her relatives who have been in Canada longer and, who, therefore, spoke English well. She also had help with homework in subjects about which her parents were knowledgeable. Juan also reported practicing speaking English with his family members. He found his home environment to be conducive for his studying: “There is advantages of staying here at home...I have enough time for project or

school, I have enough time to study my lessons.” Camille indicated that her family encouraged her and she worked hard in school for her own sake as well as to make her family proud. She said: “They encourage me a lot, like they would say I am so proud of you...so they are expecting something from me like I don’t wanna disappoint them either...so it’s better for me and my family and they will feel happy if I do it.”

Parents gave practical and moral support to ensure that their children were comfortable in and benefiting from school. Edem encouraged his child to work hard not only in English but in all other school subjects in order for his child to pursue a good career after school. Edem indicated that he had some knowledge in English grammar and writing and he used it to help his child to improve his/her English. Edem said:

I...open a book and give Fiki a test or homework. I give her dictation of some words, today 20, tomorrow 50...up to 100, 150 words. Sometimes if I don’t have work I can call her, bring your books, open this, what is this? If she didn’t know, I will explain....In the morning there is a newspaper, I can tell her can you read this passage for me.

Natalia encouraged her child to always ask for help on whatever the child did not understand in school. She said: “First of all I give him motherly advice and moral support; I told him if you don’t really understand the way your teacher is talking English, don’t feel shy to ask...or if you have classmates you can ask him or her about the subjects that you don’t understand.” She also encouraged Juan to read English print materials in order to improve his English: “I always remind him to read more, read more books in English, read magazines...I also buy him a Canadian English dictionary...it helps and like he doesn’t understand a word he checks it.” Nadia encouraged Camille to practice using English in real life situations such as during shopping, banking, and in government offices. She tried to have her to read instructions and explain them to her.

Several participants reported that the community around them offered support for learning English and assisted in the adjustment of the ESL students. Nadia said that learning English can be difficult unless one is part of a group or has English-speaking friends in the community. She indicated that her church community provided socialization and an opportunity for her child to learn English. She observed: “Camille try to learn English with the Canadian people in church because I go to church.” Natalia noted that Juan had an opportunity to practice English and to socialize with members of an Immigrant Association to which her family belongs. Camille reported having opportunities for socialization and English practice in her part time job. She said:

I work. When I go to work, a lot of people talk to me so you have to say hi. They are chatting with you...like a hundred people come by you and they talk different things; they are different people; you learn different things from every single person. You learn how to express yourself to all the people so they can understand what you are saying.

Although the three students reported that the school provided them with the opportunity to meet others and make friends, only Camille spoke in detail about the numerous opportunities that her school provided for interaction and learning English. She perceived every activity in school as a socializing and English learning opportunity, and she found that helped her a great deal in learning English. Camille was involved in several school teams because she thought they were opportunities to meet and talk to other students. Her different blocks every school day were opportunities to talk to many students. She observed: “Your classes are different too ...not everyone is gonna be in everybody’s class all the time so you are gonna be seeing like 100 people a day only in your classes and if you talk to three people around you in every class, [that makes] at least 20 people everyday.” Camille’s comments portray her as an outgoing and determined student, enabling her to get by more

easily. For ESL students with different personalities, however, whatever class and extra-curricular activities that schools may provide may go unnoticed, especially if they are not sensitive to these students' cultural and linguistic differences.

Time

According to the participants, time was a factor in learning by ESL students in various ways. The most discussed issue regarding time was that ESL students need more time to develop English proficiency that will enable them to learn curriculum content successfully. Subject area teachers, Wayne and Kathy, observed that ESL students need more time to develop English for academic purposes than they do for basic interpersonal communication skills. According to them, the latter form of English develops quickly and relatively effortlessly. According to Wayne, "They can learn to speak [English] and they can pick up and mimic their friends...but I think the technical part of the language is the hardest." Kathy indicated that although ESL students may not be proficient with academic English by the time they graduate, "usually their conversation English will be quite good by the time they have been here two or three years."

Edem, a parent, indicated that it takes time to learn a new language. He expressed concern that because his child started learning English in high school, the child will not attain a high level of English language proficiency suitable for a well-paying job and a good future career, by the time his child graduates from high school. Edem noted: "If you tell somebody here to learn my language, he cannot learn [it] in one year. Any language you must learn it after six years, to be correct. Six years you have to write a letter, to write an application...to put every word in correct sentence." Another parent, Nadia, also expressed the importance of giving ESL support to students for a long time because English is important not only in high

school but also when they go to university. She said: “but [it] needs time because for example one semester is short time.” These participants’ observations echo Cummin’s (1994) findings that for ESL students, interpersonal communication skills develop much faster than the language skills required for academic learning. However, in English-speaking countries especially, English has been found to be a powerful tool of including people into, or excluding them not only from further education, but also from well-paying jobs, and social settings (Valdes, 1998). Based on this knowledge, educators should reconsider the ESL funding policy and make a long-term commitment to supporting the English acquisition needs of ESL students, whether they need English for further education, for employment, or for fostering their social relations.

ESL teachers expressed concern that the time allocated for ESL teaching was inadequate to meet the needs of all ESL students. They found one or two ESL blocks each day enabled them to help some ESL students while others, whose timetables could not allow them to attend ESL class when it was offered, went without ESL support. Jason pointed out: “You know last semester...I had one ESL block and that was it to work with all kids and you can’t timetable everybody into that so some of the kids you never see them.” Cindy expressed the same experience and the sacrifice she had to make to create time to help students,

When I was working just in the morning, I had a bunch of students who needed help in block C. I stayed and helped the kids and I would leave at two o’clock...I am thinking...I can help the students if they have an exam in block A or B, but that’s not fair to students in block C if they need help.

These teachers suggested that more ESL time should be allocated so that all ESL students can have equal access to ESL support.

Cindy and Kathy discussed the concept of time with reference to the duration it takes ESL students to achieve their desired academic goals. From their comments, it is evident that ESL students whose goals are to go to university have to either spend more time trying to pass academic English in order to get university admission or take a longer route (upgrading after high school) to university. Kathy gave an example of a student who got excellent grades in math and courses that were less language oriented but was still trying to pass English 12 in order to get university admission. According to Kathy, “he says that if he doesn’t pass his English he will take it again because he is determined he is going to university.” Although Kathy and Cindy indicated that students could still upgrade after high school and attain university admission, Kathy commented that even with such attempts, some students may still not achieve their goals. She commented: “There’s always opportunity later to go back and take academic English but if you put someone in academic English and they can’t get through it then what? They take it over and over and at what point do they stop taking it?” These comments indicate the frustrations that ESL students may have to go through trying to achieve their goals but sometimes their English proficiency levels may stand on their way, resulting in a waste of time. More alternative, and probably, less rigid, routes to university admission may be necessary in order to accommodate brilliant and motivated ESL students.

One student, Camille, indicated the need for extra time to complete assignments. Although she seemed to be doing quite well in her courses, she said that time was still a factor for her in writing tests, and completing assignments. She found writing essays to be the most challenging. She said: “Sometimes I take double time or one and a half doing my tests or homework, yeah, it still takes me longer time, doing essays and stuff like that. Doing an essay takes me forever.” She said writing essays took her long because she had to find the

right vocabulary and sometimes go to the internet to find word translations from her native language to English. Camille expressed appreciation that some teachers allowed ESL students more time to complete tasks because, according to her, “[ESL] students definitely need extra time.”

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed six overarching themes namely: Language barrier, Cultural conflict, Learning ESL, Mainstream classroom learning, Support systems, and Time. The themes highlighted the students’ perceptions of their social and learning experiences as well as the parents’ and teachers’ views on the students’ experiences. ESL students in this study perceived a language barrier to exist between them and their native English-speaking peers. This barrier resulted in a feeling of isolation for these students, which, in effect, impacted their socialization and learning of English. Language barrier also affected their academic work negatively, which would hinder direct admission to university, pursuance of careers of their choice, as well as well-paying jobs after school.

Differences in ESL students’ home and school cultures also had implications not only for their social adjustment but also for their academic work. School routines and schedules, codes of behavior, as well as school curriculum that adhered to the mainstream culture posed the dual challenge of adjusting to the school environment and succeeding in academic work by these students. The fact that they had to adjust to the schools’ cultural environments as well as maintain their home cultures further complicated these students’ adjustment processes.

English was perceived to be important by all participants in helping the students to adjust and to learn school subjects. The ESL class was a comfort zone for the students where

their socialization and belonging needs were met. The ESL programs aimed at helping these students to learn English were perceived by the teachers to be defective because they did not provide for the grouping of students depending on their language proficiency levels.

However, few numbers of ESL students enabled continuous ESL support for these students, hence, preventing them from dropping out of school.

Subject area teachers in this study indicated that inclusion of ESL students in the mainstream classrooms fostered multicultural understanding and acceptance through the inclusion of teaching materials with different cultural perspectives. ESL students who were willing to share their experiences provided different perspectives to the class. Although subject area teachers pointed out that they adapted their teaching to accommodate ESL students, the students indicated that such adjustments were not made for them in most of their other mainstream classes. The students resolved not to ask for help at the point they needed it, opting instead to ask for help after classes. This behavior may be interpreted to mean that they had developed a negative self perception. As teacher and student participants observed, most ESL students' mainstream course selection consisted mainly of non-academic courses because of their low levels of English proficiency and the age at which they joined high schools in Canada. These subjects would hinder direct admission to university and may lead to careers in practical fields and low-paying jobs later in life.

Support systems for ESL students in this study included family members, society, and their schools. However, schools were not widely perceived to be offering much help in adjusting socially and in academic pursuits by these students. Although social interaction opportunities seemed to exist in the schools, they may have not been designed with ESL

students' cultural and linguistic differences in mind and these students, therefore, did not take advantage of them.

Time was an important focus of the participants' discussion. Teachers, students, and parents found that ESL students take a longer time to learn English needed for academic learning than for communication. They, therefore, indicated the need for allocation of more ESL time as well as continuous ESL support for the students in order for them to succeed academically. Observations that it takes ESL students a longer time than their native English-speaking peers to complete assignments and also to attain their academic goals were also made by participants in this study.

These participants' observations indicate that ESL students encounter numerous challenges as they go through adjustment processes to schools in their adopted countries. These challenges have implications for their social and academic lives. Findings in this study have implications for practice that need to be addressed in order to support ESL students in adjusting to their new school environments and to succeed academically. Suggestions for addressing implications for practice are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the implications that findings in this study have for the practice of teaching ESL high school students, it is important to re-examine the perceptions that ESL students, teachers, and parents of ESL students hold about the students' ESL learning experiences. Parent and student participants were appreciative of the students' opportunity to be in Canadian schools and learning English. They perceived English to be important in the students' high school and post-secondary education, as well as a determinant of their future careers. The parents, however, indicated that learning English was challenging for their children, especially because they were starting to learn the language at an older age. Parents', teachers', and the students' comments indicated that the students faced difficult social and academic situations as a result of their low English proficiency levels. Because these students spoke languages other than English and held cultural beliefs and values that were different from those of the mainstream Canadian society, they faced the challenge of learning English and the culture that goes with it, while at the same time retaining their cultural beliefs.

Comments from student and teacher participants indicated that the students' lack of English language knowledge when they first came to Canada and a feeling of discomfort with the amount of English language they had learned by the time I interviewed them resulted in isolation from their English-speaking peers. The students indicated that they avoided interacting with their English-speaking peers because they were afraid of not being understood. The teachers observed that ESL students grouped together because they did not know English and they, therefore, felt comfortable with each other. This precluded them from learning more English from their peers as one teacher, Kathy, pointed out:

All they hear is very limited English or broken English. They may hear broken English from different languages. They tend to pick up the language of the hallway in the school and it tends to be very slang and colloquial and often they learn swear words before they learn the proper words for something.

All parent and student participants reported a decline in the students' academic performance on coming to Canada because of the students' low English proficiency level. They observed that learning English and course content concurrently was challenging to the students, making it difficult for them to understand the curriculum content. This resulted in poor grades in their courses. One student, Camille, indicated that her performance was improving through hard work and determination. She, however, observed that she still needs more time to complete her assignments because of her low English language knowledge. The other students seemed to be struggling with their studies, despite their hard work. Fiki, for example, expressed frustration and anxiety about her performance. One subject area teacher, Wayne, attributed the lack of motivation to work hard by one ESL student in his class to the difficulties the student had with English, and the subsequent failure to understand the course content. The low grades attained by these students, and for some, advice from their teachers, steered them to select courses that were considered to be non-academic and which demanded less English. One of the consequences of selecting such courses is that these students become tracked into careers in practical fields. The lack of academic coursework in high school prevents direct admission to university for students aspiring to go to university, and may deny them access to well-paying professional jobs later in life. One parent, for example, feared for his child's future career if the child's English knowledge had not improved significantly by the time the child graduated from high school. All parents indicated that they supported and encouraged their children in various ways to learn English, and advocated for more time to be allocated to teaching ESL in schools.

ESL students in this study reported that they experienced difficulties in understanding the academic course content in the mainstream classrooms which they attended. This was because the language level and teaching strategies used by teachers suited the English-speaking students, who formed the majority of the classroom population. Although these students expressed the need for teachers to adapt their teaching for them, they did not expect this to happen in classrooms with one or two ESL students. They had, therefore, to devise strategies that would help them to understand the course content. Such strategies included asking for teachers' help after lessons, and trying to understand the course material by themselves. In my view, and as the students' comments implied, these strategies were not sufficient in enabling them to understand the course content. It seems that the students' sense of helplessness resigned them to self-devised learning strategies, even though they were not very effective.

Subject area teachers interviewed in this study stated that they employed teaching strategies to accommodate ESL students such as providing background information on the topic being studied, explaining course content in different ways, and pairing up students. From the students' observations, however, it seems that the teachers' strategies were not meeting their needs in the mainstream classrooms and the strategies were not, therefore, recognized as geared towards helping them. From the students' accounts of their difficult experiences in the mainstream classrooms, it was apparent that most mainstream teachers did not adapt their teaching in ways that were effective for them. Subject area teachers interviewed in this study had previous experience with cultural and language diversity, which may have contributed to their attempts to help ESL students to understand the course content. It is likely that the teachers who did not make this attempt lacked this experience, and,

therefore, lacked a clear understanding of the needs of ESL students in the mainstream classrooms.

Teacher participants reported that they found it sometimes challenging to meet the needs of ESL students because of their varied linguistic and educational backgrounds. They found it difficult, for example, to help students who came to Canada with minimal academic preparedness to succeed in their age- appropriate grade levels, given the dual challenge of learning English and filling course content gaps. Cindy, for example, attributed the difficulties that many ESL students were facing in performing well in school to their education and linguistic backgrounds. She pointed out:

It depends on their backgrounds. Some of them have big learning gaps; their education has been hit and miss. Some students come knowing different amounts of English; some come with no English. Some come knowing a little English like the spoken or even the reading and writing but a lot of them come from languages where they don't use our alphabet. If they have had no instruction in English, they have to learn our alphabet.

Kathy also indicated that ESL students' success in learning English and performing well in school partly depended on their education background. She observed:

[The students' success] depends partly on the students themselves. The more successful ones are who are well educated in their own language and so often some of our students come with very little schooling from their country. If they are not literate in their own language, they may have much more difficult time becoming literate in English. If they are already literate in their own language, they often can use a dictionary; they have different kinds of study skills that they know.

These teachers' observation is supported by a study by Olshtain, Shohamy, Kemp, and Chatow (1990) in which they found that students' academic proficiency in their first language plays an important role in predicting their success in a second language within a school situation.

Apart from the linguistic and educational gaps that these teacher participants found posed a challenge in meeting the needs of ESL students, research has shown that cultural differences in what is valued as knowledge, as well as what are considered to be valid approaches to teaching and learning may affect the teaching of, and learning by ESL students. Research by Anderson and Gunderson (1997), Ogbu (1992), and Cairney (1999), for example, has shown that the academic difficulties experienced by students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in schools result from differences in teaching and learning styles. Ogbu found other factors affecting these students to include the different cultural assumptions about the world and human interaction that the students bring to school; a possible lack of knowledge of some concepts/skills (e.g., critical thinking) because their own cultures do not have or value such concepts, and also their lack of knowledge of English language.

In my study, a mismatch between home and school's beliefs in what was valued as ways of teaching and learning was evident. Nadia, a parent, compared learning in her home country schools and her child's school in Canada. She commented: "I think learning is easy in Canada. The students don't have a lot of homework. I think the children have too much free time. In [her country], students have more homework which makes them work hard". Immigrant parents in Anderson's and Gunderson's (1997) study expressed the same sentiment by commenting that teachers in North American schools do not give enough homework and that they let the students talk too much. These parents and students also valued memorization as a way of learning by the students and criticized Canadian schools for not encouraging it. Like Nadia, they commented: "Canadian schools are too easy; you don't have to work hard" (p. 48). Although Nadia acknowledged that knowledge acquisition in

schools in her country involves teachers communicating the knowledge and students memorizing it, she preferred the learning style in Canadian schools, which involves students in their learning and provides them with the opportunity to construct their own meanings. From these parents' observations, the students' experiences, and the research literature on cultural beliefs on what constitutes school knowledge and how it is acquired, I argue that culturally and linguistically different students are likely to experience learning difficulties in classrooms that value different types of knowledge and employ different strategies to acquire knowledge. Likewise, mainstream teachers of such students may find it challenging to help them to succeed in their studies.

All of the participants were appreciative of ESL programs provided in their schools to help ESL students to learn English and to offer support for their other courses. They perceived the programs as offering opportunities for the students to learn English and to get help with their school subjects. According to Cindy, an ESL teacher, "If we didn't have this program here these kids wouldn't be graduating. You can just imagine if they come here at age 15, can't speak English; I don't think they would be successful." Despite the importance of the ESL programs in the students' learning, teacher participants observed that the way the programs were designed made them inadequate in meeting the students' language needs. Among the shortcomings of the ESL programs cited by the teachers were the practice of grouping ESL students from various grade levels and with different English proficiency levels all together in one ESL class; the high ratio of students per teacher; and the low allocation of time for ESL classes as compared to other school subjects. Implications of these shortcomings for students' learning are that it is difficult for ESL teachers to use particular teaching methods such as small group sessions; opportunities for one-on-one teaching are

circumscribed by the high student numbers per teacher, and teachers are not able to provide ESL support to all students, respectively.

Implications for Practice

This section addresses the implications that findings in this study have for ESL teaching practice. I also suggest ways of addressing those implications. The implications and my suggestions for improvement are addressed in four key areas: provision of in-class interaction opportunities, increasing participation in extra-curricular activities, improvements on ESL support, and enhancing access to academic courses.

In-class Interaction Opportunities

It is clear from findings in this study that low English language proficiency levels of ESL students in this study hindered their interaction with their English-speaking peers, inhibited their participation in the mainstream classroom, and negatively affected their academic performance. Teachers in this study reported that ESL students did not interact with teachers in the mainstream classrooms. The students did not volunteer to answer questions or to take on activities that teachers requested volunteers to do. ESL students' statements indicated that they feared that the teachers and the mainstream students would not understand them. Reasons other researchers have found that prevent ESL students' participation in mainstream classrooms can be explained by the cultural value attached to being quiet in some cultures, and lack of comprehensible input from the teachers, leaving ESL students with little or no idea of what is being discussed in the classrooms (Harklau, 1994; Valdés, 1998; Platt & Troudi, 1997). Harklau and Valdés found that when ESL students constantly received incomprehensible input from a teacher, they lost interest in the lesson and stopped listening to the teacher. Valdés observed that some ESL students

whispered around to their friends, sometimes to inquire what the teacher was saying or to keep themselves busy.

Consistent with what has been identified in research literature on studies on ESL students' experiences, participants in this study underscored the importance of interaction of ESL students with their mainstream teachers and with English-speaking peers. This interaction provides the ESL students with the opportunity to not only practice their spoken English but also to demonstrate their understanding of the course content. Teachers then have the opportunity to correct the students' grammatical mistakes and to assess the students' level of understanding of a particular topic. Cummins (1994) stated:

Access to interaction with English native speakers is a major causal variable underlying both the acquisition of English and ESL students' sense of belonging to the English-speaking society; the entire school is therefore responsible for supporting the learning and need for interaction of ESL students.... (p. 54)

One ESL student, Camille who tried to socialize with English-speaking peers, valued learning English through interacting with others. She observed: "Just interacting with people helps so much coz if you sit at home learning by a book by yourself you are never gonna learn that much. You just have to practice in real life. You have to see how things go in real life and learn from that." Wayne, a subject area teacher, also indicated the importance of learning English through interaction with English speakers. According to him: "It is good for ESL students to socialize because without it, they are not going to learn the language in that meaningful way and they are not going to be able to use it." Edem, a parent, also viewed his child's interaction with English speakers as an opportunity for her to learn English as well as the mainstream culture. He indicated:

Today society is the life of human being. I myself cannot say today to my children don't go with white. What I know they can learn many things in this country through

[white] community. In that area where we are living my children have friends and sometimes they come to my house. They sometimes help them with reading.

I undertook this study with the assumption that ESL students in schools in a small city would interact more with mainstream students given the few numbers of members of their language communities both in and out of school. Two of the three student participants, for example, reported that there were no other students in their schools who spoke their language. I also perceived some teacher participants to assume that putting ESL students in mainstream classrooms would enhance their in-class interaction and participation. However, neither of these assumptions was supported by findings in this study. ESL students reported limited interaction with their English-speaking peers, and that they mostly interacted with other ESL students, even though those students did not speak their language. ESL students' use of English to communicate among themselves may not have aided them much in developing English language proficiency because they heard and used incorrect English. Although one ESL student reported that a number of extra-curricular activities and clubs existed in her school, there was little indication that ESL students typically took part in these activities. The teachers confirmed that ESL students in the mainstream classrooms preferred to sit together and their classroom interaction and participation was limited.

Although schools have been viewed as having the important function of socializing students, Harklau (1994) found that schools have not taken up this responsibility to facilitate socializing between immigrant students and mainstream students. They also do not do a good job in introducing ESL students to the school environment, in general. My study's findings are consistent with Harklau's findings: the schools that ESL students in this study attended did little to assist the students in socializing with the mainstream students or to familiarize them with the schools' operations. The ESL students, for example, indicated that they had

difficulties coping with the new school environment when they first arrived. They reported that they continued to be isolated from their peers mainly due to the language barrier and also due to differences in the way schools operated in Canada compared to their home countries. I argue that it is possible that schools attended by these ESL students did not give them a good start with adjusting and developing strong support networks. Such networks would go a long way in establishing connections with the mainstream students, which would give them confidence to practice English and to increase their linguistic skills.

These findings that ESL students participate in a limited way in mainstream classrooms and interact little with English speaking peers, both during class time and in school- supported extracurricular activities, raise the following questions: Why is interaction between ESL students and their mainstream classroom teachers and peers limited? What can schools with ESL students do to ensure that ESL students get the interaction they need to enhance their language and academic skills? Although teachers and ESL students in this study cited language barrier as a major factor hindering ESL students' interaction with their English-speaking peers, it is possible that additional factors related to adolescents' social dynamics may have contributed to the isolation that ESL students experienced.

Peer group membership is a major aspect of adolescents' lives, and peer group forces have a considerable impact on their academic and social development (Brown, 1989). Many adolescents perceive peer groups to play an important role in providing emotional support, fostering friendships, and facilitating social interaction (Brown, Eicher, & Petrie, 1986). It is clear from this study's findings that ESL students did not hold membership in their English-speaking peers' groups, and, thus, were excluded from the social interaction of those peer groups. Although mainstream English-speaking Canadian students were not interviewed

about their perceptions of their interaction with ESL students and why they did not interact much with them, research literature on adolescents' peer group relations provide likely suggestions why these two groups did not interact much.

Affiliation to a particular adolescent peer group depends on one or a combination of factors that one shares with peers in that group. These factors include, but are not limited to, attitudes, activities, skills, socioeconomic status, and ethnic/racial background (Brown, 1989). Fortman (2003) found adolescents also use both verbal and nonverbal language to include some and exclude others from their groups. According to Fortman, language is an important group marker and use of particular linguistic words/phrases unique to a group identifies one with it. Nonverbal communication such as signs and gestures, and nonverbal behavior as expressed by physical appearance such as dress style, hairstyle, and body adornment all serve to communicate important values of a particular peer group. In addition, adherence to particular aspects of popular culture such as a form of music can be a powerful determining factor of peer group affiliation. Fortman points out that the more similar adolescents' characteristics are, the greater the attraction, and the more likely accommodation into a group will occur.

All the above requirements for inclusion into or exclusion from peer groups may have affected ESL students in this study negatively. Because of their different ethnic/cultural experiences, they are likely to have different attitudes towards school and the world in general, may have different social skills, and may place value on different school and social activities. Also, inclusion of these students into a peer group that uses particular speech acts would require that they understand their meanings. These ESL students' low English language proficiency may have hindered the understanding of such speech acts and,

therefore, prevented their inclusion into that group. Additionally, for ESL students such as these who had been attending Canadian schools for an average of one and a half years, it may take them time to learn the identifying characteristics of adolescents in Canada such as the way of dressing and hairstyles, and the Canadian adolescents' popular culture, in order to be considered for peer group membership. In my view, some of the adolescent Canadians' ways of life may be unacceptable in the ESL students' culture, and, therefore, may not be aspired to or learned by these students. This narrows their chances of getting membership in groups that value such characteristics.

Because interaction among adolescents is determined by a myriad of complex factors, it is not easy to provide clear-cut answers on how their interaction can be increased. Schools and ESL students in different contexts also may have different experiences, requiring different approaches to increase in-class interaction between ESL and mainstream teachers and students. This complexity calls for more research on peer group membership and identity of ESL students. However, I will propose some guidelines that schools, teachers, and ESL students can benefit from. Strategies that school educators could use to initiate and support in-class participation and interaction for ESL students include: buddy system, peer tutoring/counseling, teaching approaches that encourage use of oral communication in classrooms, and a positive classroom and school atmosphere where diversity is acknowledged and celebrated.

Buddy system. Providing buddies to ESL students when they first come to schools in Canada could be a good starting point for orienting ESL students not only to the schools' operations, but also to the language of the school. If available in the school, an immigrant student or a Canadian-born student of immigrant parents who speaks English as well as the

language of the new ESL student well may be a suitable buddy for a newly arrived ESL student. Such a buddy might relate to the experiences of the new students better, especially if he/she had the same experiences when he/she first attended a Canadian school. He/she would also be a source of psychological and emotional comfort for the new student. However, buddying up a new ESL student with a mainstream student also would likely facilitate the ESL student's learning of English, the school's culture, and the general popular culture more quickly. Although some schools "buddy up" new ESL students with others in the school, this process lasts for a few days or the first week of school in most schools. Because the adjustment process of ESL students is ongoing and may take a long time for some students to adjust to some aspects, I suggest that buddies be provided to ESL students for as long as they need them. There are chances that "buddyship" can develop into long-lasting friendships from which ESL students can get an opportunity to practice English. To be effective, the buddies would need training and support.

Peer tutoring/counseling. Subject area teachers in this study stated that they paired up ESL students with mainstream students who would help them with explanations as the lesson progressed. However, there was no indication that any peer tutoring programs that offered academic support to ESL students outside the classroom situation were in place in their schools. Peer tutoring/counseling support systems are important in encouraging not only students' friendship and interaction, but also cooperative learning (Coelho, 1994). Students are a valuable resource in schools. As such, peer tutors, especially at the high school level, can benefit teachers by providing extra help to ESL students. Peer tutoring strategy also supports the sociocultural view of learning as an interactive process with more knowledgeable adults or peers. The advantages of this strategy are fourfold. First, it

recognizes the tutors' abilities; second, the tutors' understanding of the material they are tutoring is reinforced; third, extra academic support is provided to students who need it; and fourth, it reconstructs the whole school as a community of learners.

Oral communication strategies. The way teachers organize curricular activities can either promote or hinder ESL students' classroom participation. Students' access to curriculum content and classroom resources such as peer and teacher interaction play an important role in determining students' participation in classroom activities, and in effect, learning (Toohey, 2000). While direct instruction, which is common in many classrooms has its place in teaching, its teacher-oriented nature will not foster students' participation and interaction. Teaching approaches that encourage use of oral communication in classrooms are likely to encourage students' in-class participation and increase student-student interaction. Co-operative learning in the form of partner and small heterogeneous group sessions can encourage ESL students to interact more with their peers and possibly, learn course content. Partner and small group work have been found to increase talking time for students in the classroom (Coelho, 1994; Toohey, 2000; Parkin, 1992). According to Toohey and Coelho, small group work provides second language learners with an opportunity to practice language in an environment of relative power equality with their mainstream peers. Storch (2001) and Coelho also observe that in partner or group work sessions, students use language in a modified way in that they can ask for clarifications and confirm information. In this context, they also do not feel pressured to provide accurate or grammatically correct answers because meaning is negotiated. This encourages them to interact and engage in meaningful group tasks with their English-speaking peers.

Other learning tasks that encourage oral communication can be organized around strategies such as role-playing, discussions, and presentations of students' individual, partner or group work. Presentation of ESL students' creative writing and project-oriented reports may give them confidence to talk and participate in class because they present what is familiar to them, and within their experience and language level. According to Cummins (1994), use of strategies such as creative-writing and project-oriented activities in classrooms with ESL students is suitable for academic and language development as well as for intercultural understanding. I argue that intercultural understanding and acceptance of differences would foster ESL students' self-image, and, consequently, their in-class participation and interaction with their mainstream teachers and peers.

Positive classroom and school atmosphere. In order to encourage ESL students to interact in the classroom and to enhance their understanding of the curriculum content, teachers need to create a comfortable classroom atmosphere that values, encourages, and celebrates diversity and efforts to use language. During classroom talk, for example, teachers can encourage student talk by focusing on the intended meaning and messages rather than on the form of the utterance. The teacher corrects ESL students' utterances in a non-threatening way such as by re-voicing (re-uttering of a student's contribution) for the benefit of the speaker and to promote understanding for the whole class (O'Connor & Michaels, 1996; Gibbons, 2003). ESL students feel valued if teachers recognize their presence in the classrooms and make efforts to make the course content comprehensible to them. In my study, student participants expressed their frustration with mainstream teachers who talked too fast, did not repeat key points, and used difficult vocabulary. Simple but important teacher strategies such as reducing the speed and complexity of speech, providing task

instructions in writing as well as orally, repeating key points severally, pausing, and frequently checking for comprehension would make ESL students feel valued in the mainstream classrooms, and make them interested in learning. Other useful strategies include the use of visuals such as maps, pictures, and graphs that serve to contextualize abstract concepts, hence, making the information more accessible to ESL students (Cummins, 1994; Harklau, 1994). It is possible that some of these strategies will enhance the understanding of course content by mainstream students as well.

Use of curriculum topics from a wide range of cultural perspectives not only validates diversity but also presents ESL students with familiar topics, which they may feel more comfortable discussing, as they possess relevant prior knowledge. Toohey (2000) observed that ESL students use classroom language when they can speak from desirable and powerful identity positions. Inviting ESL students to contribute their ideas on issues with which they are familiar (e.g., examples from their cultures related to a topic being taught) would be a good opportunity to build ESL students' confidence in classroom participation. Other initiatives for promoting intercultural acceptance and interaction would be encouraging the formation of multicultural clubs and organizing multicultural events where Canadian culture is celebrated along with that of other cultures (Parkin & Sidnell, 1992). Such activities will foster cooperation, respect, and friendship in the school community, and help students to see each other as partners in learning.

Participation in Extra-curricular Activities

Extra-curricular activities and clubs have been identified as strong motivators of ESL students' interaction with their mainstream peers. However, it has become clear that many ESL students do not take part in the social activities available in their schools. Only one

student participant in this study reported participating actively in the schools' activities. Why do ESL students seldom participate in extra-curricular activities? Are the activities relevant to these students' cultural backgrounds? Answers to questions such as these would provide guidance to educators about how to increase ESL students' participation in extra-curricular activities.

As observed by participants in this study, the language barrier experienced by ESL students may have barred them from participating in extracurricular activities provided in their schools. Additionally, it is possible that because of language and coursework demands, these students were spending so much time trying to keep up with their academic work that they had little time for extra-curricular activities. The students indicated that they always reviewed the day's work in order to identify areas in which they needed help. One teacher participant also indicated financial difficulties to be a factor precluding some ESL students' participation. According to this teacher, some ESL students do not take Physical Education 12, a school subject which is a good starting point for ESL students to show their talents in sports and games. A fee is charged to any student who takes this course to cover the costs of the extra-curricular field trip activities such as hiking and canoeing that are involved in this course. Such fees are not affordable for some ESL students because of their families' financial constraints.

Other factors hindering ESL students' participation in schools' extra-curricular activities have been cited in research. Harklau (1994), for example, found cultural differences in the way extra-curricular activities were perceived. She observed that some immigrant families put more emphasis on the academic work of their children, and extra-curriculum activities were seen as a waste of time. Also, immigrant students in Harklau's study found

some extra-curricular activities (e.g., those involving loud noise) that were typical of the mainstream students to be incompatible with their cultural practices. Other factors may include social construction of gender differences in participation in particular extra-curricular activities. For example, in some cultures, some sports and games are reserved for boys and not girls and vice versa. A school with limited extra-curricular activities may, therefore, limit participation by students from such cultures. The dress code prescribed by some communities may also prevent some ESL students from participating in some sports, especially if such sports require that the students dress in a way that is not acceptable in their culture.

Because the above constraints have implications for ESL students' interactions, English language development, and their sense of belonging, schools could provide mentors to ESL students who can, for example, demonstrate that it is possible to perform well in both academic work and out-of-class activities. Canadian-born students of immigrant parents who have grown up with the knowledge and acceptance of both cultures can serve as role models to ESL students whose cultural constraints prevent them from participating in extra-curricular activities. It is also important for educators to be sensitive to the fact that some ESL students come from parts of the world where climatic conditions do not allow for some sports. Snow sports that are available in Canada will not, for example, be familiar to students from tropical countries. Teachers and mainstream students could encourage ESL students to participate by being patient with them when they try to learn new sports and games that are not available in their home countries. In order to ensure that extra-curricular activities are relevant and recognized by ESL students, schools could explore and include a wide range of activities from various cultures represented in schools. Such activities can be taught to all students by volunteer ESL students, their parents, and/or members of the community who

have knowledge of those activities. This last suggestion calls for acceptance and celebration of diversity where the beliefs and values that ESL students bring are accepted and used to enrich learning and socialization for everybody.

ESL Support

ESL programs that address ESL students' language needs are popular in many schools with students with low English language proficiency. In this study, participants perceived ESL programs in schools in Cliftwood to be valuable in supporting ESL students to learn English and other school subjects. However, having ESL students from various grades and with different English proficiency levels all in one class hampered the programs' effectiveness by precluding small group teaching and one-on-one support due to high student - teacher ratio. The nature of ESL programs in these schools, to the extent that they may provide inadequate support for ESL students' learning, may have far-reaching implications for these students. They depend on ESL support not only for their language development, but also in order to access the content of their school subjects, and to learn the learning processes and strategies imbedded in each discipline. As the number of ESL students in these schools is low, it may seem to justify the limited nature of ESL programming being offered. However, I argue that ESL programs are so important to students that ways of providing adequate programming must be found. Putting ESL students into homogenous groups may not always be feasible, but other approaches can be employed to ensure better ESL support for the students. These include providing adequate and stable funding for ESL services, having a supportive school administration, and collaboration among ESL and subject area teachers, parents, as well as the society.

Teacher participants in this study perceived increased funding to have the potential to facilitate the hiring of teachers' aides, increase ESL support time, and to reduce the number of students per teacher. These would improve the quality of ESL support that ESL students received in their schools. Ashworth (2000) observed that when government budget is tight, education is frequently targeted for funding cuts, and that ESL programs in particular seem to be adversely affected by economic changes that affect funding. Ashworth emphasized that funding for ESL programs need to be stable and adequate if they are to help provide sufficient support for students.

The provision of effective ESL support for ESL students requires the collaboration of ESL teachers and subject area teachers (Cummins, 1994; Roessingh, 1995). According to Cummins, "...all content teachers must recognize themselves also as teachers of language" (p.56). Three of the teachers in this study indicated that they worked together with subject area teachers in monitoring the progress of ESL students and, where necessary, deciding instructional directions suitable for particular students. Cindy indicated:

I think I should mention that I have a really good rapport with all teachers and we are always talking about the students' progress. The only way I can know about the students' progress is finding out how they are doing in their regular classes. The regular classroom teachers evaluate them and compare them to everybody else so they know where they are at better than I do. But I have a fairly good idea because we are always talking and I am always looking at all assignments so I know where they have to be.

Similarly, Jason pointed out: "I talk to all the teachers especially about a new ESL student and from time to time so they understand where he/she is so they can have extra time for him/her or maybe sit him/her with other students who may help them." Kathy also said that she consulted with the ESL teacher on ESL students who were struggling in her classroom in order to find ways of helping them. This collaboration did not, however, seem to happen with

all subject area teachers as evidenced by the fourth (subject area) teacher participant who indicated little consultation with the ESL teacher in his school regarding ESL students in his class. He preferred to put responsibility on the students themselves to look for help whenever they needed it. Roessingh stresses the need for teacher partnerships across the subjects for effective support for ESL students. For effective collaboration to occur between ESL and subject area teachers, the time these teachers spend consulting and planning together should be factored into their working hours.

In some schools, ESL support is exclusively viewed to be the duty of ESL teachers (Derwing, et al., 1999; Valdés, 1998). However, effective support for ESL students is a collective effort involving the school, parents, and the society. It requires administrators with an understanding of the needs of ESL students and an interest in ESL. This provides for strong leadership that will advocate for acceptance of diversity in schools, sufficient funding, resources, and qualified ESL teachers to work with the students. The level of public acceptance of ESL programs in schools also determines how well the programs are supported (Ashworth, 2000). Schools can encourage members of society to understand and value diversity by inviting them to participate in school activities with all students, and with ESL students, in particular. Community organizations such as multicultural societies may also be invited to engage in activities that will foster multicultural understanding and acceptance in the school and by the outside community. A team effort in which school administrators, ESL teachers, subject area teachers, parents, and members of the society work together would, therefore, be a good starting point towards providing effective support for ESL students.

Access to Academic Courses

Teacher and student participants' remarks in this study revealed that many ESL students in their schools were following a general, less academically-oriented track that is characterized by studying "easy" courses. Unlike the academic track that leads to university education, the general track leads to immediate entry to the workforce, or to non-academic postsecondary training and jobs such as culinary arts and metal/wood work. Although the main factor for ESL students choosing to take the non-academic courses was their low English proficiency levels, it became apparent from these participants that others factors such as the age cap of 19 for high school attendance, the age at which an ESL student joined a Canadian school, and the five-year ESL funding policy also contributed to these students' decisions about what subjects to take. Such circumstances are unfortunate because there is no doubt that many ESL students have aspirations for university education and professional careers. Given this information, one wonders whether ESL students are being provided with equal opportunities to their mainstream peers to reach their full academic potential.

Among the courses required in the academic track, academic English is particularly critical because it is a universal requirement for university admission in BC. Without adequate support for English language development for ESL students, it may seem that attempting to study academic English may be an unattainable goal for many ESL students. However, this need not be the case if schools adopt strategies for ensuring that ESL students continue to develop their English language proficiency while at the same time mastering academic content.

Roessingh and Field (2000) have suggested strategies for ensuring that ESL students with aspirations for university education and professional careers take and succeed in

academic courses. These include introducing the students to academic courses when they have acquired a relatively comfortable English language level, sequencing of courses, and distribution of workload over a whole year. Using these strategies, ESL students, teachers, and counselors would sequence academic courses in such a way that ESL students would start in grade 10 with academic courses for which English knowledge is less critical, such as academic math, chemistry, and physics. Also, courses, such as Math 11, that are prerequisites for other courses, such as grade 11 science courses, are taken first. After the students' English proficiency levels have improved, they can enroll in more linguistically demanding courses such as social studies and academic English 10, preferably in grade 11. Alongside these courses, students continue to enroll in the ESL class for continued support in their language development.

Regular school terms will not suffice for the sequencing and workload distribution strategy discussed above. Summer classes are a good opportunity for ESL students taking academic courses to take more linguistically demanding courses, and those that they did not take during the regular school term because of their language proficiency level. Enrolling in summer classes also would help to reduce the students' workload during the regular school terms by distributing it over a whole year. This will enable them to work at a comfortable pace on the subjects while at the same time developing their English proficiency. Participants in my study did not mention that a summer school program existed in their schools as an option for helping ESL students to offload their regular workload, for teaching new courses, or for additional tutoring in subjects taught previously. Because ESL students indicated that they always felt pressured by time to work on materials from their courses, summer classes would offer them additional time to work on areas/courses in which they felt they needed

more help. They will be more likely to master and graduate with the academic courses that they need for direct university admission.

While summer school seems to be one way of helping ESL students graduate with academic courses, it has financial implications for these students and their families. Information from Cliftwood school district indicates that the Continuing Education program offers summer classes three hours per day from Monday to Friday for one month, from which ESL students from the high schools can benefit. However, the cost of such classes is \$200 per course, which might be unaffordable to parents of these students who were unemployed at the time of the interviews. These financial constraints also precluded parents of these students from hiring private tutors for their children. Although this section of the thesis provides conclusions of the study, the words of one parent, Edem, better illustrates these parents' constraints with regard to providing extra tutoring for their children:

I want my kids to have something good for the future. Later if I find a job, I can bring them a teacher, private teacher at home because I know many people who have graduated here. I can give them \$200 or \$300 a month to teach them language. This is during the schools close. If they open, I think it will do the help for them. But as I told you, I don't have choice now because I don't have work. I have to also improve my English to find good job.

The development of English language skills needed for academic learning takes between five to eight years. The five-year ESL funding policy has implications for the length of time that ESL students can get ESL support and, therefore, assistance with other school courses. Given the financial constraints of many parents of ESL students, I propose that the government include the summer semester within the five-year ESL funding plan for students who need it. This will provide the students with more time to develop their English language proficiency and to learn the required course content within the funding time limit. Another alternative would be for schools to explore reasonable cost-sharing options with

parents/students in meeting the cost of the students' summer classes. Students may have the opportunity to work in the summer and they can, therefore, meet part of the cost of summer classes. Despite these parents' financial constraints, their determination to support their children was depicted in the words of one parent:

If you have children in high school, the problem of helping them is with the families now. If you want something, nothing is impossible because you can work hard. If my child wants to learn more English and they want to charge her/him money, I can pay; she/he can pay something. She/he can work part time. She/he can give me half of this money and I can pay half the money. Not impossible.

Also, schools can organize fundraising activities to support a summer bursary program for ESL students. In addition, private and community organizations/agencies that sponsor/assist immigrant families may also be invited to assist with meeting some of these costs if schools put a summer school program in place for ESL students.

The age cap of 19 years of high school attendance has implications for immigrant students who join Canadian high schools at age 17, 18, or 19. They may not have the time required to develop their English proficiency, to prepare adequately for the courses that they need for postsecondary education, and may also affect their high school completion, for the following reasons. First, the Continuing Education program under which these students are expected to complete their high school diploma may not provide the social and academic interaction that has been identified as essential for language and classroom learning. This program consists mainly of secondary graduates who are upgrading their education in order to attain college admission, or high school drop-outs who are trying to complete high school after being out of school for some time. These students may, therefore, not necessarily be age-peers with the ESL students. In addition, the mode of learning is either self-directed and/or drop in classes for students who need teachers' support with the courses they are

taking. This may mean more individual learning and limited classroom interaction among students. Second, the mode of learning and the flexible schedules in the Continuing Education program may provide ESL students with a false sense of freedom resulting in a lack of balance between school and work. Given the financial constraints of most immigrant families, some students may choose to work most of the time and concentrate less on their schoolwork. Consequences of such a pattern may include taking much longer to complete their high school diploma, hence, continuing to be a burden to the system, or they may eventually drop out.

In my role as a teacher-researcher, I recommend that planners of education provide ESL students who reach the age of 19 with the option to complete their high school diploma in the regular school, or leave for the Continuing Education program. Some students may not find the age factor and fitting in with younger classmates to be problematic and, depending on their academic goals, may choose to stay and complete their high education in the school setting. Others may opt to leave depending on their academic and/or other personal needs. Funding for those students who opt to complete their high school education in a school setting could be transferred from the adult learning institution to the school. The option will take away the undue pressure that may discourage some ESL students from exploiting their full academic potential.

In summary, I have addressed in this section the implications that findings in this study have for ESL teaching practice. I have suggested strategies for providing in-class interaction opportunities between ESL students and the mainstream teachers and students. In addition, I have provided guidelines for increasing participation in extra-curricular activities by ESL students. Increased in-class and out-of-class interaction between ESL students and

mainstream teachers and students will not only facilitate ESL students' adjustment to their new environment but will also present them with opportunities for developing their English language proficiencies. Improved ESL support for ESL students, and access to academic courses suggested in this section have the potential of improving these students' academic achievement and prospects for future careers.

Limitations of the Study

I felt that this study was limited in four ways. First, parent and student participants in the study had limited English proficiency. Although I provided them with the option of using translators, they felt confident about their abilities to express themselves in English, and they, therefore, did not use translators' services. Although the information they provided was comprehensible, it is possible that their English language proficiencies made it difficult for them to express their ideas completely. Therefore, it hindered the depth to which I could pursue ideas. Second, the sample of ESL teacher and student participants was drawn from high schools in a small city with few ESL students and one ESL teacher per school. Despite assurance of their anonymity and confidentiality of the information they provided, it is possible that these teachers and students still withheld some sensitive but important information for fear of loss of anonymity or retribution. Third, this study was based on a small sample of teachers, parents, and ESL students in a small city with schools with few ESL students. As a result, findings in this study are not representative of the experiences of all ESL students in schools in small cities since other small cities may have high schools with many ESL students. This study's findings cannot be generalized to ESL students in large urban areas either. Four, for purposes of obtaining in-depth information regarding ESL students' English learning experiences, I limited interviews to four groups of people namely,

ESL students and their parents, ESL and subject area teachers. However, interviewing other groups of people such as school administrators and English-speaking students may have provided additional insights on ESL students' experiences, although it may also have affected the depth with which I would have sought this information.

Suggestions for Further Research

Conclusions about ESL learning experiences of ESL students in this study were reached by analyzing one-time interview responses by teacher participants, and two-time interview responses by student and parent participants, which were approximately one-and-a-half weeks apart. In further research, I would take a longitudinal approach in which participants would be interviewed at different stages. I would also employ a method such as observation in order to follow teachers' and ESL students' behavior in different school activities. Such an approach would provide me as the researcher with first-hand information on how activities are organized and carried out in ESL and mainstream classrooms, as well as in the schools' social settings, such as the cafeteria, gym, and sports field. The information would enhance knowledge of issues that affect ESL students such as their adjustment, integration, and learning strategies.

In this study, I selected participants from among ESL students, their parents, and ESL and mainstream teachers for their in-depth knowledge of and experience with issues facing ESL students. However, future research on ESL learning experiences of immigrant students would benefit from seeking the views and attitudes of non-ESL students and their parents towards diversity in general, and ESL students in particular. Their perceptions would provide more information on the various experiences of ESL students. For example, interviews with non-ESL students would shed light on the socialization dynamics between them and ESL

students, and possibly suggest ways of increasing in-class and out-of-class interaction between the two groups. Parents of mainstream students would present the community's views on diversity and ESL students in schools. If the community's views are positive, schools could explore ways of forming a partnership in supporting ESL students in schools. If the views are negative, ways of educating people on the importance of diversity can be explored for the benefit of all students.

Some of the studies on ESL students' experiences carried out in schools in large urban areas have focused on former ESL students to investigate their ESL experiences retrospectively, and to examine how those experiences have influenced their lives after high school graduation. Tracking and investigating former ESL students in high schools in a small urban area would be important in determining the trend in the provision of ESL support over the years, and its effects on ESL students' post-secondary and career lives. An added advantage of investigating former ESL students would be that their English language proficiency may have improved, making it easier to interview them. Findings from such a study would inform policy makers, education planners, school administrators, as well as teachers on the possible need for new directions in the provision of ESL support in schools in a small city.

I would like to conduct additional research employing a quantitative approach, to obtain and analyze statistics on the average age of children of immigrant families who choose to settle in small cities, in order to determine how they are likely to change the demographic landscapes of high schools in these cities. Although Statistics Canada provides information on the numbers and ages of immigrants coming into the country each year, this information is reported on immigrants who settle in large cities. Knowledge of similar statistics for small

cities would be helpful in predicting the ESL scenario in the high schools, and enable educators to make informed decisions regarding meeting the needs of ESL students. In addition, in this study, I did not, obtain and analyze statistical information regarding enrolment, drop-out and completion rates of ESL students in the high schools in this and other small cities, over a period of time. A quantitative study that utilizes such statistical data would complement findings from this study by indicating the effects that ESL students' learning experiences have on their high school completion.

Final Remarks

In this study, I investigated the ESL learning experiences of immigrant students in high schools in a small city. The information provided by the participants was useful in understanding the various factors that contributed to the students' school experiences. Findings in this study indicate that although the ESL students considered themselves fortunate to have the opportunity to be in Canada and to study English, they faced numerous challenges in their social and academic lives due to their low English proficiency levels. Limited English proficiency hampered interaction with their mainstream teachers and peers, their understanding of course content, and their selection of academic courses. These factors further hindered the learning of English by these students, their good academic performance, and their potential for direct university admission, respectively. Although continued ESL support was possible in these schools because of low numbers of ESL students, the nature of these ESL programs may have been of questionable effectiveness for learning the English language, as well for learning other school subjects. People's voices are powerful in expressing their lived experiences. As such, I hope that planners of education and teachers in high schools in Cliftwood will use these participants' perceptions about ESL students'

learning experiences as a beginning of a journey towards improving the means through which the needs of ESL students are met.

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions for students

- Tell me your memory of your experiences attending a Canadian school for the first time?
- Describe to me some ways in which you find Canadian schools to be different from schools in your home country.
- Think of some difficulties that you face as an ESL student and tell me about them.
- In your opinion, what are the advantages of being in an ESL class?
- What are the disadvantages of being in an ESL class?
- Give me some examples of how ESL class is different from your other classes.
- Can you describe to me ways in which you find the ESL program helps you to learn English?
- Can you give me suggestions on how you think the ESL program can be improved?
- Think of what you really like about being in the company of your fellow students that speak English well. Tell me about it.

Questions for ESL teachers

- Describe to me a typical day in an ESL classroom
- Could you relate to me some positive experiences that stand out to you in your career working with ESL students?
- Can you relate to me some challenges that you face in your career working with ESL students?
- Give me examples of ways you find ESL students to be different from students in the mainstream community
- In your opinion, what are the strengths of the ESL program in the school?
- Describe ways in which you try to ensure that the ESL program helps the students learn English?
- In what ways do you think the program can be improved?

Questions for the subject area teachers

- Describe to me your experiences working with ESL students

- Tell me about what you consider to be advantages of having ESL student(s) in your class
- What are the disadvantages?
- Describe to me ways in which you find having an ESL student in your class has impacted your teaching practices
- How can you describe the academic achievement of ESL students compared to their English-speaking peers?
- In your opinion, what are some specific ways you find the ESL program helps the students to understand the materials in the subject that you teach?
- In your view, in what ways can the ESL program in the school be improved?

Questions for parents

- In what ways do you find your child's school here in Canada to be different from his/her school in your home country?
- Tell me one thing you like about your child being in a Canadian school
- Think of school experiences that you find have helped your child to adjust to the new environment and tell me about them.
- What experiences have made the adjustment of your child difficult?
- Describe to me ways in which you feel you get involved with your child's English learning and the school progress
- Give me examples of ways you think your child's learning has been affected by his/her lack of English language knowledge?
- Suggest ways in which you think your child's social life has changed since coming to Canada
- In your view, do you find that the ESL program helps your child to learn English?
- In which ways do you think the ESL program can be improved?

APPENDIX B: LETTERS TO PARTICIPANTS

Student Participants: Letter of Parental Permission

Dear Parent/ Guardian:

Your son/daughter has volunteered to participate in my study on English as a Second Language (ESL) learning experiences of immigrant students in high schools in a small city. By examining the views of ESL teachers, subject area teachers, ESL students, and parents of ESL students on ESL students and programs, I hope to establish how the choice and delivery of ESL services in schools with few ESL students affect the teaching of, and learning by ESL students, and subsequently, their academic achievement. This letter explains the nature of my study and what participation involves, if you choose to allow your child to participate.

The purpose of this study is to find out school and out-of-school experiences and challenges of immigrant students, and especially their views about ESL programs, and being in an ESL class. These experiences are important in understanding their school performances, and may point towards possible support systems for these students. I will also seek the views of the parents and teachers since they are important in determining the kind of support that ESL students receive from them. This study is part of my university work towards a Master's degree in Education.

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw him/her from participating at any time. Your child may also withdraw his/her participation at any time. If you do withdraw your child, or he/she chooses to withdraw, his or her contributions will not be used for this study. I will meet your child for two interview sessions each lasting for about 30 minutes. Interview dates, time, and place will be agreed upon by your child, and me. We shall, however, involve you in the decisions regarding the interview dates, time, and place. I have translators available during the interview should your child volunteer to participate but feels uncomfortable communicating in English. I will discuss the importance of confidentiality of information that your child will give with the translator, who will then sign an agreement of confidentiality. My study focuses only on the ESL school experiences of your child and I do not, therefore, anticipate any risks from the study. However, your child may choose to relate past experiences with current ones that he/she feels connect to his/her ESL school experiences. In case this happens, and should these past experiences cause

anxiety to your child, I have contacted the school's counselor who will provide counseling, if needed. Your child is, however, free to refuse to answer questions that he/she may feel uncomfortable with. I will meet with your child after the interviews to ensure that the information that he/she gave was interpreted correctly, and only information that he/she is comfortable with will be reported in my study. I shall tape-record both interview sessions, transcribe, and analyze the information for purposes of my thesis. The tape-recorded information and transcriptions will be used by myself only and will be locked up in a safe place during the study period. Strict confidentiality will be maintained in the handling of data and reporting of results. False names will be used in all transcripts and reports of this study to ensure your child's anonymity and that of his/her school. After completing this project, I will keep the tapes for about two years after which I will destroy them. Findings from the study will be presented to my thesis committee members as part of the assignment and the completed thesis report will be available in the university's library for access by members of the public. The report may also be published, observing the same guidelines on your child's anonymity and that of his/her school, as well as confidentiality in handling his/her data. If required, I can provide you with a summary/copy of the study findings. I have obtained permission from the school district and the school principal to conduct this study. I have also obtained approval for this study from the University of Northern British Columbia Research Ethics Board, which ensures that research is conducted within the university's research guidelines.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me at

my thesis supervisor, Dr. Judith Lapadat at . Complaints may be directed to Dr. Max Blouw, UNBC Vice President Research, at

Please check the box if you wish to receive a summary copy of the study's findings ☐

Sincerely,

Lucy Karanja

M.Ed. Candidate.

Student Participants: Letter of Student Assent

Dear Student:

Thank-you for volunteering to participate in this study on English as a Second Language (ESL) learning experiences of immigrant students in high schools in a small city. By examining ESL views of ESL teachers, subject area teachers, ESL students, and parents of ESL students on ESL students and programs, I hope to establish how the choice and delivery of ESL services in schools with few ESL students affect the teaching of, and learning by ESL students, and subsequently, their academic achievement.

The purpose of this study is to find out school and out-of-school experiences and challenges of immigrant students, and especially their views about ESL programs, and being in an ESL class. These experiences are important in understanding their school performances, and may point towards possible support systems for these students. I will also seek the views of parents and teachers since they are important in determining the kind of support that ESL students receive from them. This study is part of my university work towards a Master's degree in Education.

I will conduct two interviews with you each lasting 30 minutes. You and I will agree on the date, time, and place for the interviews. We shall also consult your parent/guardian regarding the suitability of the interview date, time, and place. During the interviews, I will ask you to describe your school experiences especially those regarding being in an ESL class and learning English and using it to learn other school subjects. I have translators available during the interview should you feel uncomfortable communicating in English. I will discuss the importance of confidentiality of information that you will give with the translator, who will then sign an agreement of confidentiality. I will tape-record both interview sessions for transcription and analysis. During the second interview, I will bring the written out notes from the tape in the first interview and you and I will review them so you can make sure that I interpreted your information correctly. We shall modify or remove information that you may not feel comfortable with. My study focuses only on your ESL school experiences. However, you may choose to relate past experiences with current ones that you feel connect to your ESL school experiences. In case this happens, and should these past experiences cause you anxiety, I have contacted the school's counselor, who will provide counseling,

should you need it. However, you are free to refuse to answer questions that you may feel uncomfortable with.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can stop participating at any time. If you do, any information you will have given will not be used in my study.

In order to protect your privacy, I will use false names in the interviews, transcription, and reporting of the information in order to protect your privacy and that of your school. The tape-recorded information will be accessed only by myself and will be locked up in a secure place during this study. After the study, I will keep the tapes for about two years and then destroy them. Findings from the study will be presented to my thesis committee members as part of the assignment. Report of the findings will be put together in form of a thesis and it will be put in the university's library for anybody who would like to find the results. The report may also be published, observing the same guidelines on your anonymity and that of your school, as well as confidentiality in handling your data. However, I can give you a summary copy of the report if you require it.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me at

, or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Judith Lapadat at . Complaints may be directed to Dr. Max Blouw, UNBC Vice President Research, at

Please check the box if you wish to receive a summary copy of the study's findings ☐

Yours sincerely,
Lucy Karanja,
M.Ed. Candidate.

Parent Participants

Dear Parent/ Guardian:

Thank-you for your interest in this study on English as a Second Language (ESL) learning experiences of immigrant students in high schools in a small city. By examining the views of ESL teachers, subject area teachers, ESL students, and parents of ESL students on ESL students and programs, I hope to establish how the choice and delivery of ESL services in schools with few ESL students affect the teaching of, and learning by ESL students, and subsequently, their academic achievement. This letter explains the nature of the study and what participation involves, should you choose to participate.

The purpose of this study is to find out school and out-of-school experiences and challenges of immigrant students, and especially their views about ESL programs, and being in an ESL class. These experiences are important in understanding their school performances. I will also seek the views of parents and teachers since they are important in determining the kind of support that ESL students receive from them. This study is part of my university work towards a Master's degree in Education.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw your participation at any time. If you do, your earlier contributions will not be used for this study. I will meet with you for two interview sessions each going for about 30 minutes. Interview dates, time, and location will be agreed upon by you, and me. I have translators available during the interview should you volunteer to participate but feel uncomfortable communicating in English. Although it is not the intention of this study, you may choose to relate current experiences with previous ones that you may find relevant. Should the previous experiences cause you anxiety, a counselor at the local immigrant support agency in the city will be available for counseling services. I will meet with you after the interviews so you can confirm the information that you provided, and also to ensure that only information you are comfortable with is reported in my study.

I shall tape-record the whole interview session and later transcribe, and analyze the recorded information for purposes of my thesis. The tape-recorded information will be used by myself only and will be locked up in a safe place during the study period. Strict confidentiality will be maintained in the handling of data and reporting of results, and false names will be used in all transcripts and reports of the study's findings to ensure your anonymity. After completing this project, I will keep the tapes for about two years after which I will destroy them. Findings from the study will be presented to my thesis committee members as part of the assignment and the completed thesis report will be available in the university's library for access by members of the public. You can, however, obtain a summary/copy of the results from me, if required. I have obtained permission from the school district and the school principal to conduct this study. I have also obtained approval for this study from the University of Northern British Columbia Research Ethics Board, which ensures that research is conducted within the university's research guidelines.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me at :

, or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Judith Lapadat at . Complaints may be directed to Dr. Max Blouw, UNBC Vice President Research, at

Sincerely,

Lucy Karanja

M.Ed. Candidate.

Teacher Participants

Dear Teacher:

Thank-you for your interest in this study on English as a Second Language (ESL) learning experiences of immigrant students in high schools in a small city. By examining the perceptions of ESL teachers, subject area teachers, ESL students, and parents of ESL students on ESL students and programs, I hope to describe how the choice and delivery of ESL services in schools with few ESL students impact on teaching of, and learning by ESL students, and subsequently, their academic achievement. This letter explains the nature of the study and what participation involves, should you choose to participate.

Research indicates that immigrant children who join high schools in their adopted countries face language, social, and emotional challenges in adjusting to the new environment. Schools provide ESL programs to help these students learn English and use it to learn other school subjects. These students' experiences in schools during the adjustment process may either promote or hinder learning, resulting in success or failure in their academic work. The purpose of this study is to give parents, students, and their teachers an opportunity to voice their experiences and challenges within learning and teaching frameworks. The effects of these experiences have implications for the students' performance in their schoolwork. Benefits of the study include exposing the experiences of ESL students which may point to ways of helping them experience success in their social and academic lives. This study is part of my university work towards a Master's degree in Education.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw your participation at any time. Should you decide to withdraw, your earlier contributions will not be used for this study. I will meet with you for an interview session that will run for about 45 minutes. Interview date, time, and location will be mutually agreed upon by you, and me. I

shall tape-record the whole interview session and later transcribe, and analyze the recorded information for purposes of my thesis. The tape-recorded information will be accessed by myself only and will be locked up in a safe place during the study period. Strict confidentiality will be maintained in the handling of data and reporting of results. Code names will be used in all transcripts and reports of the study's findings to ensure your anonymity. Upon the completion of the project, I will keep the tapes for about two years after which I will destroy them. Findings from the study will be presented to my thesis committee members as part of the assignment and the completed thesis report will be available at the University's library for access by members of the public. You can, however, obtain a summary/copy of the results from me, if required. I have obtained permission from the school district and the school principal to conduct this study. I have also obtained approval for this study from the University of Northern British Columbia Research Ethics Board, which ensures that research is conducted within the University's research guidelines.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me at

, or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Judith Lapadat at . Complaints may be directed to Dr. Max Blouw, UNBC Vice President Research, at

Sincerely,

Lucy Karanja

M.Ed. Candidate.

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORMS

Parental Consent Form

I _____ do give my permission for my child _____ to participate in the study on the views that ESL teachers, subject area teachers, ESL students and parents of ESL students hold about ESL learning experiences of the students, and how these experiences affect the academic performance of ESL students. The information in the attached letter concerning the nature of the study and participation responsibilities was (choose one):

read by myself ☐ read to me ☐ translated for me ☐.

I have understood the information and my signature below indicates my permission for my child to participate in the study and for these data to be used towards the completion of Lucy Karanja's thesis report for a Master's degree in education, as described in the attached letter.

Signature _____ date _____

Parents' Consent Form

I _____, do agree to participate in the study on the views that ESL teachers, subject area teachers, ESL students and parents of ESL students hold about ESL learning experiences of the students, and how these experiences affect the academic performance of ESL students. The information in the attached letter concerning the nature of the study and participation responsibilities was (choose one):

read by myself ☐ read to me ☐ translated for me ☐.

I have understood the information and my signature below indicates that I agree to participate in the study and give permission for these data to be used towards the completion of Lucy Karanja's thesis report for a Master's degree in education, as described in the attached letter.

Signature _____ date _____

Student Assent Form

I have had the study explained to me and I agree to participate.

Signature _____ date _____

Teachers' Consent Form

I _____, do consent to participate in the study on the perceptions that ESL teachers, subject area teachers, ESL students and parents of ESL students hold about ESL learning experiences of the students, and how these experiences affect the academic performance of ESL students. I have read and understood the information in the attached letter concerning the nature of the study and participation responsibilities.

My signature below indicates my agreement to participate in the study and permission for these data to be used towards the completion of Lucy Karanja's thesis report for a Master's degree in education, as described in the attached letter.

Signature _____ date _____

APPENDIX D: LETTER TO THE DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION,
SCHOOL DISTRICT IN CLIFTWOOD

RE: Research in Cliftwood High Schools

Dear Administrator,

I am a graduate student in the Education Program at the University of Northern British Columbia. I am in the process of conducting research for my thesis the focus of which is English as a Second Language (ESL) learning experiences of immigrant students in high schools in a small urban area. I am writing to request your permission to approach students and teachers from secondary schools in Cliftwood where ESL services are provided, to invite their participation in this study.

Research indicates that immigrant students face language, social, and emotional challenges in adjusting to their adopted countries. Schools in English-speaking countries offer ESL programs to these students to enable them integrate into the society and learn school subjects. The purpose of my study is to investigate how such programs, ESL teachers, subject area teachers, and the general school environment relate to and support the adjustment process of immigrant students, and how these affect their academic achievement. I will also examine the views of ESL students and their parents in order to understand how home and school factors interact to contribute to ESL students' academic achievement. I will interview two ESL teachers, three ESL students, two subject area teachers, three parents of ESL students. The students and the parents will be interviewed in two sessions for about 30 minutes each while teachers will be interviewed for one session lasting 45 minutes. All sessions will be tape-recorded for later transcription and analysis. The students, their parents, and I will agree upon an interview venue, day and time.

I will follow formal procedures in obtaining permission and written consent for students who will participate in this study from their parents. The proposal for my study will be submitted to UNBC Research Ethics Board for approval, and to ensure that research is conducted according to the university's ethical regulations. Only after the Board's approval will I proceed with the collection of data. In case students will need translation services during the interviews, I have arranged to find translators through the local immigrant support agency in Cliftwood. I have also contacted counselors in the respective schools so they can help any student participating in this study who may need counseling.

Findings from this study will have policy and pedagogical implications for the school district and the schools.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me at _____, or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Judith Lapadat at _____. Complaints may be directed to Dr. Max Blouw, UNBC Vice President Research, at _____.

Yours sincerely,

Lucy Karanja,

M.Ed. Candidate.