UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

ESL Students' Perceptions of Their High School

Learning Experiences

by

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the perceptions of English as a second language students regarding their high school learning experiences. Motivated by the dearth of studies conducted in Canada surrounding this topic, and the need to deepen our understanding of ESL students' lifeworlds, this study captures the students' voice around the central research question: How do ESL students perceive their high school learning experiences?

A purposive sample of ten students was selected for the study including a representation of ESL students from the Asian Pacific Rim countries who have been under-represented in the historical picture of immigration and education.

The research adhered to the qualitative methodology of Grounded Theory Construction, generating a theory upon analysis of the data.

The following theory emerged from the data and is supported by the students' own words, taken from transcribed interviews. The quality of ESL students' high school experiences is determined by their perceived level of English language proficiency. The factors of time, instructional support, socio- cultural influences and personal motivation directly influence their English language proficiency and thus the quality of their education.

The findings and implications of this study are intended to allow educators to use the students' insight in order to plan in a more informed and grounded manner for an enhanced quality of education for ESL students, in the Canadian educational context.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the last ten years, the number of new arrivals who speak a first language other than English has risen significantly. This has not only changed Canada's demographic landscape but has also brought attention to our schools and how they provide equitable access to quality education for students who speak English as a Second Language. Although the topic of ESL students and schooling is a nationally recognized topic for researchers, few studies have captured a deeper understanding of the perceptions of English as a Second Language students regarding their learning experiences in Canadian schools. This study has focused on ESL students and their perceptions about their educational experiences in high school. The research takes a deeper look into the school lives of these students and how ESL students perceive what is happening as they experience the phenomenon of schooling. It is a topic that I felt needed further exploration to help educators better meet the needs of ESL learners and to deepen our understanding of these students' life worlds.

This chapter will provide the background and context for this study, in order to understand the significance and urgency of this topic that needs to be recognized by our nation's schools, educators and students.

1.1 Background

According to 1996 Census Nation Tables from Statistics Canada, the total immigrant population in Canada was 4,971,070 people (Statistics Canada, 1996). Canada accepts close to 200,000 immigrants each year. In 1998, Canada accepted a total

of 174, 100 immigrants. Eleven thousand of these immigrants of whom came to Alberta.

Figure 1.1 below illustrates the immigration trends from 1860- 1998 in Canada.

Canada's immigration program remains strong, as it accepts more immigrants and

refugees in proportion to its population than any other country. (Citizenship and

Immigration Canada.1999).

Figure 1.1 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1998).

IMMIGRATION – HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES (1860-1998)

Immigrants are accepted either for their economic contribution to Canada or for

family reunification. A certain number of refugees are also accepted each year to fulfill

humanitarian commitments (Citizenship and Immigration Canada). As was noted

earlier, 174,100 immigrants and refugees entered Canada in 1998. 151, 192 of these

applicants were accepted in the total immigrant category, which includes family class and

independent immigrants. The independent class serves as an umbrella for skilled and

business immigrants. Under the refugee category, a total of 22,644 were accepted in

1998. Influenced by the federal government's 1985 initiative to recruit business

immigrants, who would increase capital formation and job creation, there has been a

significant shift from refugee class to independent class in the last decade.

Canada's immigration plan for 1999 indicated a projected 195,000 immigrants and approximately 30,000 refugees entering Canada. This plan not only reiterates the shift in immigrant class, but these figures are important in understanding that Canada's demographic landscape has changed and will continue to change as immigration steadily continues into the new millenium.

Our student profiles in our educational systems are deeply impacted by immigration. In 1997 forty- two percent of the principal applicants and their dependents did not speak English or French when immigrating to Canada. Almost half of the total immigrant population spoke a first language other than English upon immigrating to Canada and approximately 50% of the immigrating population were school aged. Eighty-four thousand of these immigrants are from Asian Pacific Rim countries, making up 48.2% of the total immigration population in 1998 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1998). The People's Republic of China was ranked as the top source country for immigration to Canada with over 19,000 immigrants in 1998. These numbers help us understand that the linguistic background of our students has changed in our Canadian schools and will continue to change in the future. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that educational philosophy and practice seems to be something that requires a fairly long historical gestation. Therefore, it is understandable how a sudden shift in a population's demographics, even within the make-up of an immigrant group, could cause educational institutions to be left with educational questions for which there is no historical lineage for response.

The immigration by source area for the years 1996- 1998 is shown in figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2 Taken from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1998

IMMIGRATION SUMMARY BY SOURCE AREA

1.2 Educational Trends

As I started to immerse myself in the ESL literature and acquaint myself with the various issues pertaining to ESL students and education. I was particularly interested in the field of secondary education (grades ten to twelve) and ESL. My readings and teaching experiences with various ESL classes at the senior high level sparked many questions related to the perceived lived experiences of immigrants in our educational system. The literature in the field reinforced the need to look at ESL secondary education from the student's perspective in order to enrich the present body of literature in this area.

Of the approximately 11.000 immigrants to Alberta in 1998. Alberta Education defines some 6.400 students as eligible for ESL funding in the large public board pertaining to this study. in that school year. These numbers raise the issue of the provision of effective equitable service to students who speak a language other than English from a policy perspective. Alberta Education's policy on English as a Second Language states:

"To facilitate the integration of the student into the regular classroom at the earliest possible opportunity, Alberta Education will assist school boards in providing English as a Second Language programs to Alberta students who were born in Canada but who are not fluent in English, and to those who have recently arrived in Canada and whose first language is not English" (Alberta Learning, 1997,p.1)

This policy addresses both foreign and Canadian born students. Foreign-born students are eligible for funding if they have recently immigrated to Canada, are non-English speaking and are receiving ESL services. Canadian born students are eligible for funding if they have homes in which the primary spoken language is not English, are non – English speaking and are receiving ESL services. According to Alberta Learning, the government of Alberta has allocated 9.2 million each year for ESL funding. This works out to $657 per student allocated to ESL funding per year.

School jurisdictions are required to provide identifiable and quantifiable ESL services. These services are to be based on the student's age level and needs and could include special classes, pull- out instruction or modified programs in the regular classroom. The goal of ESL instruction is to enable students to integrate into the regular classroom as quickly as possible (Alberta Learning, 1997).

At the secondary level, there is an ESL program of studies for senior high ESL students to bridge the language gap. Although the ESL programs vary in Alberta, it is common for schools to offer beginner, intermediate and advanced courses in ESL. The ESL programs are organized into five levels. Level 1 is for students who are acquiring literacy for the first time or have significant gaps in previous schooling progressing to level five where the focus is on subject specific language development serviced in a

variety of ways such as teacher assistance and peer coaching (Alberta Learning, 1997).

All high schools follow a model of proportional integration, though the speed and support

during the integrative process may vary widely.

Blocks of time are allocated in the first year, so that beginning students can

spend time in ESL courses to develop their Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills

(BICS) and enroll in courses such as physical education, and food preparation that offer

more context rich environments. Student's move towards more cognitively demanding

and context reduced courses, which are reflective of Cognitive Academic Language

Proficiency (CALP). Courses such as English and Social Studies are excellent examples

of settings where CALP is essential.

Most secondary ESL programs operate as dedicated- pull out programs.

Following a principle of proportional integration model, students are placed into

mainstream classes, as they become proficient enough to experience success in various

mainstream settings. There has been controversy over the last ten years as to when ESL

students have the language gains needed to experience success in mainstream settings.

While there is no sure answer as to when students are ready to exit out of ESL programs,

it is clear that ESL students need transitional support in mainstream settings as they

continue to develop their Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency.

Alberta Learning states students are eligible to receive the Alberta High School

Diploma, the High School Equivalency Diploma or the Certificate of Achievement upon

completion of specific course requirements.   Students must earn a minimum of 100

credits (56 of these are specified – 44 are student choice) to satisfy high school

graduation requirements (Alberta Learning, 1999). Only fifteen credits from ESL

instruction may be applied to the total. As with all students, the courses that have classically fulfilled the concept of matriculation (i.e. courses needed to enter university such as English, 30/33 and Social 30/33) are mandatory.

Compounding the problem for new immigrants, is the policy of an age cap of 19 years of age, limiting the time available in senior high schools in Alberta. After the age of nineteen, students must complete any remaining high school requirements through other continuing education institutions. Furthermore, those who do not complete requirements, face the usually array of psychological and physical barriers to adult participation in adult education described in the work of Hayes and Darkenwald, 1990.

Many studies have indicated between six to eight years is required to acquire Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency commensurate with age group peers (Collier, 1987, 1989a, 1989b:Klesmer, 1993). This means that while ESL students may reach (BICS) proficiency in some subjects in as little as two years, it is projected that four to eight years may be required for all ages of ESL students to reach the national level norms of their native speaking classmates in the general subject areas. Depending on their age of arrival and level of English language proficiency, these students are faced with the incredible challenge of graduation.

A number of researchers have focused on the high school drop out rates of ESL high school students in Canada and Alberta (Karp, 1988:Radawinski, 1988:Watt &Roessingh, 1994a). This nationally recognized phenomenon, has been analyzed at a quantitative level by many researchers who have educated the public about the frightening realities of immigration and education surrounding ESL students over the last

ten years. What is more unfortunate is the future awaiting many of these high school

dropouts as they search for jobs in our highly skilled and educated society.

This thesis was motivated by the need to look beyond the statistical profile and

into the perceptions of students who live out that reality. More quantitatively oriented

studies such as Watt and Roessingh's (1996) began to bring students' voice into the

picture as they explored the process of cultural adjustment in relationship with academic

success and failure.

There was clearly a need to investigate further the perceptions of students about

their own schooling experiences. What did they think about high school? What were

their beliefs and assumptions about their education? What did they perceive as effective

and helpful in terms of instruction? What challenges did they face in the classroom?

What were their perceptions about their educational experiences? What were their

experiences and how were we using that information to inform our decisions as educators

parents and researchers? As I started to look for answers to these questions, it became

evident that little had been written that responded specifically to the instructional

perceptions of ESL high school students in Canada. I had the opportunity to explore a

topic that would allow me to incorporate the students' voice into the emerging

understanding of immigration and education.

With the shift in the immigrant demographics, I found a new and distinct

population of ESL students synonymous with the recent immigrant profile: a highly

educated and educationally motivated population of ESL students. As indicated earlier,

more skilled and educated immigrants are entering Canada in search of a better quality of

life for themselves and their children. These children are typically very different from

the refugee profile of student who once was highly represented in the immigrant demographics. On average, these students come from middle to high socio- economic status. They have had the opportunity to learn some basic beginning English in their home countries, giving them a significant advantage over their refugee classmates. I wanted to learn more about the educational journeys of this group as they engaged with high school requirements. By gaining a deeper understanding of the perceptions of these students regarding their high school learning experiences, we can make sense of earlier quantitative findings, as well as use the insight to better meet the educational needs of a new profile of ESL students who have been under- represented in the historical picture of immigration and education.

1.3 Establishing the Context

The study took place in an urban junior/senior high school of thirteen hundred students. There are an equal number of junior and senior high students. Both academic, students who are academically inclined and plan to continue education at the university level and non- academic streams, students who want to pursue more technical and skilled positions in the future are offered at the school. A number of programs are also offered catering to students with exceptional needs. Numerous clubs and activities exist as extra-curricular events in the school culture. There is a visible language minority of two hundred students that attend this school. Most of these students are English dominant Canadian born Chinese students.

The ESL program is comprised of eighty-five students primarily from Hong Kong, Korea, and Taiwan. The predominant first language of these students is Cantonese. Most attend heritage language school on the weekends, to maintain and

develop their first language. There is the odd number of students from Yugoslavia, Argentina and Iran. Their average age in the program is between fifteen and sixteen and half years of age. Most of these students have studied some beginning English in their home countries but are still eligible for the three years of funding. It is common for many of these students to come into the ESL program with a grade four reading level. This usually places students in a level two/ three class, which is a high intermediate ESL class.

In these students' first year, they spend half time in ESL in their first semester and one quarter of their time in their second semester. The remaining of their course load is embedded in non- academic classes of social studies, math, sciences and options. The ESL teachers and guidance counselors' work together to plan a well-sequenced program that allows students to distribute their time towards completing their necessary course work. Students enroll in ESL classes and non- academic classes their first year as they work towards improving their English Language Proficiency. Their second and third years are organized to spread out their workload and acquire the necessary credits and courses they will need for their particular requirements for post- secondary education. These students want to complete high school in three years and need to carefully select their courses to fulfill their requirements. For these students, it means that they need to take summer school after their first year in order to make that three-year goal towards graduation feasible.

Presently there are two ESL teachers who are responsible for the programming, instruction, and assessment for these students within the ESL program but it is important to note that the students' reflections are based on various teachers, both ESL and mainstream that have been part of the school culture. Students are offered ESL courses

according to the new high school ESL program of studies. Depending on the level of students, levels one to five courses are offered to meet the needs of the students. There is a sheltered English 10- Adjunct ESL course to help students bridge the languages gap as they pursue academic English 10. In this sheltered English class, a mainstream English teacher teaches this sheltered class only to ESL students. While English 10 content is still the focus of the class, the teacher is more sensitive to the students' backgrounds and to various ESL teaching strategies to assist the students with the course. Students also receive English adjunct support in their ESL class for English 10. The goal of the adjunct course is to make the language and the concepts of English 10 more accessible to ESL students. Tutorials are also offered for ESL students as they drop in to address certain curriculum problems and issues and receive support to help access the curriculum.

This site was chosen for the primary reason of the ESL profile in the school. The students are primarily from Hong Kong, Korea and Taiwan. Most of their parents have immigrated to Canada under business and skilled class status. This site also includes the minority culture of students from Yugoslavia, Argentina and Iran which I hoped would provide for the variation and richness in this study and would make it more complete. I didn't want this study to focus on the refugee immigrant profile as a number of studies have explored this unique and informative phenomenon, but I wanted the study to capture the recent changing demographics in Canada and the impact it has for our schools. This project was also readily supported by the staff at this school and most importantly by one of the ESL teachers who opened her classroom and exposed me to the world of high school ESL. Her support and willingness to support this study helped make this site an ideal place to undertake the project.

1.4 Establishing the Research Perspective

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of English as a Second Language students regarding their high school learning experiences. I began by taking the role of participant observer in the high school's ESL program in order to develop a positive rapport with these students, to determine who would be interested in participating in the study, and to identify those among the group with the capacity to reflect and articulate their experience. As a participant observer, the researcher " enters the world of the people he or she plans to study, gets to know the participants, be known and trusted by them, and systematically keeps a written record of what is heard and observed"(Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

A purposive sample of ten participants was selected for the study. The prime criterion for participant selection was " ESL students who demonstrated an interest in participating in the study and in sharing their perceptions regarding their high school experiences. Further to this criterion, the attempt was made to balance the group by gender, first language, level of English language proficiency and previous educational experience. The participants were approached by me in a face to face meeting where the letter to the participants and the consent form were carefully and thoroughly discussed before being signed by the participants. Participants under the age of eighteen also required parental/ guardian consent before proceeding with the study.

This research project adhered to the qualitative methodology of Grounded Theory Construction (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory offers a systematic approach focusing on the lived experiences and patterns within the experiences of the participants. Researchers go to the participants in an attempt to understand their perspectives within a

given situation (Hutchinson, 1988). It is also imperative in grounded theory, that the researcher is aware of her own preconceptions, values and beliefs in order to understand the world of others (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

Participants were asked to take part in a semi- structured interview around the central open question, " How do ESL students perceive their high school learning experiences?" I had arranged some loosely structured questions to guide the conversation, but I remained flexible and open so the participants could bring forth their own issues. Students were encouraged to talk openly about the challenges, frustrations and joys they experience as high school students. The underlying goal of these interviews was to see the world as seen through the eyes of these students.

Initial interviews were audio- taped and transcribed, each lasting approximately sixty minutes. A second set of interviews was conducted to allow participants to review the transcript in order to clarify, extend or make changes to the transcripts. These follow up interviews also allowed me the opportunity to purse various themes that emerged from the data as is adhered to in Grounded Theory Methodology.

Data Analysis began from the first interview completed. Emergent theme construction and the constant comparison method (Glassier and Strauss, 1967) were used to analyze the data. I was immersed in a process of coding; categorizing and comparing among the categories to see patterns and themes that emerged from the data. In following closely to grounded theory methodology, once the analysis was complete, I generated a theory based on the behavior patterns observed and then returned again to the literature to find support for the emerging theory (Hutchinson, 1988). The methodology will be further explored in Chapter three: Research Design and Methodology.

1.5 Chapter Summary

It is important to reiterate that the purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of English as a Second Language students regarding their high school learning experiences, so that educators could better meet the educational needs of these students. The interviews serve as a vehicle for students to expose us to their insights about the quality of their educational experiences so that we as educators could somewhat improve our instruction and deepen our understanding of their life worlds. By reflecting on these findings, we as educators should be able to use this knowledge to better meet the needs of ESL learners and to strengthen our practice as professionals. The study has focused on the students' perceptions of their high school learning experiences and formulating a theory as to what factors influence these students' quality of education. It was hoped that this study would allow educators to take the students' insight and help educators in planning in an informed and grounded manner for an enhanced quality of education for ESL students.

1.6 Organization and Structure of the Thesis

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CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter two highlights the research that influenced the researcher's question: How do

ESL students perceive their high school learning experiences?

Figure 2.1

The Literature Review

Second Language Acquisition:
- Length of Time
- BICS
- CALP

Language Learning
- Beliefs and Principles
- Methods
- Restructuring Curriculum

Informed Instructional Practices
- Thematic Organization
- Group Work
- Visual Representations
- Portfolio Assessment

Program Delivery
- Elementary
- Secondary

Academic Success
- Drop Out Statistics

Restating the Problem/ Establishing Research Questions

With Canada's changing demographic landscape and the movement toward

inclusive education, educators have had to re-examine how they provide equitable

learning opportunities for a diverse student population. In order to make sure the needs

of ESL students are being met, we need to consider the ESL literature surrounding

second language acquisition and beliefs about language learning.

2.1 Second Language Acquisition

Contrary to popular belief, learning a second language is a long and complex

process. There have been numerous studies that have tracked the time it takes for second

language speakers to be able to compete academically against their native peers in school

(Collier, 1987,1989a, 1989b:Klesmer, 1993). These studies indicate that ESL students

may reach conversational fluency in some subject areas in as little as two years, but in

academic subject areas, at least four to eight years would be required to reach the national

level norms of native speakers. Cummins (1989), also supports the notion that while it

may take up to two years to achieve age- appropriate conversational fluency, it will take

five- to seven years to achieve academic language proficiency. Figure 2.2 depicts the

length of time required to achieve age- appropriate levels of conversational and academic

language proficiency.

Figure 2.2

Cummins, J. 1989.
Empowering Minority Students.

It is important for educators who have ESL students in mainstream programs to understand the distinction between conversational and academic language skills. Cummins further explores English language proficiency by differentiating between BICS, which stands for Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and CALP, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency. Figure 2.3 illustrates Cummins's Framework.

Figure 2.3

Cummins (1982) Framework for the
Development of Language Proficiency

Context Embedded

BICS is defined as language, which is, used in cognitively undemanding and context- rich situations such as face to face conversations, which are supported by contextual clues such as gestures and facial expression. It is thought that after two years, students have developed their BICS and sound really good. This notion is sometimes

misleading as conversational fluency does not equate to academic proficiency and doesn't account for their overall competence in the language (Klesmer. 1993).

CALP reflects the cognitively demanding and context reduced situations that you would find in textbooks and courses such as English and Social Studies. There are fewer contextual cues and the language is more formal and abstract. Cummin's (1982) framework for the development of language proficiency uses quadrant one and two as indicative of BICS. Quadrant three is considered the transitional phase. Here students would be involved in cognitively demanding activities but would still use materials such as charts and maps to support their language acquisition. Quadrant four represents CALP and is representative of the context reduced and cognitively demanding activities that are found in subject areas such as English.

This framework brings to our attention that the development of language proficiency is a complex process. Educators need to be aware that while native speakers are making progress in their academic skills, ESL students are trying to simultaneously develop their English language proficiency while developing their academic skills to try and catch up to their native speaking peers. This has proven to be an exhausting task for many ESL students. which takes them down many disappointing educational routes. Many times ESL students are placed in non- academic and special education programs. as they are seen to have cognitive deficits when they are not making the same gains as their age- appropriate native peers. More disheartening. are the high school drop –out statistics for ESL students and poor results on provincial exams from high school. which will be discussed in this chapter.

2.2 Language Learning

Over the last twenty- years the ESL field has acknowledged a major shift in the way we believe people learn languages and in the principles that are assumed to guide our learning and teaching. We have seen a paradigm shift in our thinking towards language learning as we recognize the importance of the social construction of knowledge (Brophy, 1992). The role of interpersonal activity in transforming thought processes is essential when learning a second language.

Many researchers have articulated conditions for successful language learning (Krashen, 1982; Cummins, 1989; Enright and McCloskey, 1985; Brown, 1994) that hinge on the quality of interactions and meaning making. The current trends in language learning have been heavily influenced by Vygotsky's (1978) work on the zone of proximal development which is the distance between what a child can do in isolation (actual developmental level) and what the child can do in collaboration with others (proximal level). The distance between these points is the zone of proximal development. The notion that learning proceeds from the social to the individual through active involvement is a more socio- linguistically motivated view, and one that recognizes language both as a code and as a behavior (Halliday, 1985).

Billow's model has also had a profound effect on current second language learning and teaching. He articulated through his four conceptual spheres depicted below, that language and cognitive skills are best developed in an expanding learning environment with the student situated in the center. Billow's simple notion of the learner as central to the learning process and the importance of accessing prior knowledge and the student's lived experiences has become integral to second language teaching and

learning. The implication from Billow's work is that not only is the learner and the

context essential to the development of language as behavior, but also that the

development of language as code requires a systematic expansion of contexts for its

realization.

Figure 2.4

That which is brought into the learner's
mind through speaking or writing only

That which the learner can imagine
through pictures, maps, charts

That which the learner has
experienced

That which the learner can see, hear
and touch directly

Billows, 1961

Enright and McCloskey (1985) have captured a similar notion in their assertions

that language development is a strongly interactive process, which relies not only on

cognitive and linguistic mechanisms but also on active participation in a linguistic

environment, attuned to the child's communicative needs. Attempts to meet the

communication needs of learners have embraced a history of language teaching methods.

Brown defines method as "a generalized set of classroom specifications for

accomplishing linguistic objectives"(Brown, 1994, 51). As the purposes and audiences

for second language learning have evolved, a new method has emerged about every

quarter of a century to address their needs. Each new method arose from the positive

aspects of the previous practices creating a cyclical pattern of priorities in language teaching (Brown, 1994). These methods have included Grammar Translation, The Direct Method, Audiolingual, Community Language Learning, Suggestopedia, Silent Way, Total Physical Response and the Natural Approach.

While these methods will not be elaborated on in this thesis, it is important to acknowledge the historical significance of ESL Methodology in establishing and informing an eclectic approach to language teaching. The methodological eclecticism is at least in part a reaction to the increasing variety of the communicative needs faced by learners who are immigrating to a new land rather than studying a language as a discipline.

Language has become a tool for meaningful communication, rather than a system of rules to memorize and habits to form (Brown, 1994). The current Communicative approach to language teaching, as eclectic as it may be, backs its success on following key assumptions: Students need to be involved in purposeful interaction and meaningful activities, they are constructors of their own knowledge, language and communication require authentic contexts for their development,recognition of the students' diverse backgrounds and learned experiences is essential for the process of new language and behavior and a comfortable, encouraging environment that celebrates the process of learning and provides the support needed to achieve bilingual competence is needed (Brown 1994; Enright and McCloskey, 1985). In order for students to develop language efficiently in communicative contexts, they require exposure to language that is comprehensible. Comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) is considered to be language that is scaffolded to be only slightly beyond the level of ELP of a particular student.

These beliefs and principles surrounding second language learning and teaching have brought to the forefront for researchers and teachers how to restructure curriculum and instructional practice in order to promote the development of academic language proficiency for an immigrant population.

To develop communicative competence and academic language proficiency, there is a need to focus on the interaction of three distinct types of learning: linguistic competence, strategic competence and concept understanding (Adamson, 1993:Chamot &O'Malley, 1993:Oxford, 1990:Richards, 1990. Roessingh, 1995). Present educational thought on the development of academic language proficiency suggests the value of instructional objectives for all three competencies to be integrated in a contextualized learning environment, with equal emphasis on linguistic functions, learner strategies and concept attainment. (Kern, 1989:Davis &Bistodeau, 1993:Oxford, 1993) have led the way in discussing effective learning strategies for second language learners that can be directly taught to them and aid in the development of academic language proficiency.

2.3 Informed Instructional Practices

This leads to the practical aspect when it comes to taking the theory and putting into practice. The research literature surrounding effective instructional interventions for working with second language learners continues to grow (Sinatra, 1981, 1984, 1990: Mohan 1986: Early, 1989. Jones, 1989: Tang, 1991: Garcia, 1991:Brophy, 1992:Hansen, 1992: Sharan and Sharan, 1992 Dempster, 1993: Gardner, 1993:Short, 1993). Roessingh (1995) has summarized many of the instructional practices within four larger elements for informed instructional practice: Thematic organization, group work, visual input and portfolio assessment.

Thematic organization refers to the use of themes or generative topics that can be used to organize curricular engagement for students. Many researchers (Garcia, 1991;Brophy, 1992; Dempster, 1993;and Gardner, 1993) would agree that by using thematic organization, the key concepts of a discipline can be studied from multiple perspectives and can be made comprehensible and accessible to ESL students by varying the reading levels of materials and by structuring assignments at individual student levels. By revisiting key concepts from a different perspective within the same theme structure and altering the difficulty level by using slightly more challenging materials (spiral approach) the conceptual objectives and the content become more accessible to students.

By promoting active collaboration with native speaking peers, group work is seen as an effective strategy for incorporating interaction and communication in the classroom while focusing on academic tasks (Sharan and Sharan, 1992). Small, heterogeneous groupings can facilitate high student to student interaction but as Watt and Roessingh's research suggests ESL students are often embarrassed and ashamed at their level of English compared to that of their native English-speaking classmates. This reluctance to participate in unstructured group work can lead to minimal participation and communication on the part of ESL students (Watt, Roesssingh & Bosetti, 1996). This reinforces the need for teachers to carefully monitor group work and to structure it in such as way that group collaboration is fostered.

The use of visual and graphic representations reflects the principle of comprehensible input. By using diagrams, it allows more accessibility to the content, and can mediate the linguistic demands by representing information in a text-reduced manner. Researchers in the area of content and language teaching (Early, 1989; Jones, 1989;

Mohan. 1986.1990: Sinatra. 1981.1984.1990) have noted the potential of graphic

representations of knowledge structures in advancing the language development of ESL

learners. Despite the potential for comprehensible input. there is a danger that "key

visuals" can separate the need for language development from the process of accessing

information and therefore one of the instructional challenges we face is the development

of strategies to maintain a language focus in content learning.

Lastly. portfolio assessment has become a popular form of assessment alternative

to traditional assessment. Portfolios connect assessment to the teaching and learning

process. This type of responsive assessment allows teachers and students the opportunity

to respond to a variety and complexity of language. It considers a wide range of possible

signs of learning demonstrated in both processes and outcomes. in which students and

teachers have the chance to reflect on the learning process (Mcgreggor and Meiers.

1991). Portfolios allow students and teachers to track the students' individual

development and growth over a period of time. Students actively take part in this process

as they choose authentic samples of their work to include in the portfolio as well as set

future goals and reflect on the extent to which they have achieved these goals.

The use of portfolios and self- assessment. allows students and teachers to be

involved in a collaborative process where the focus is not only on the teacher assuming

control over assessment. but rather turning the spot- light on the students by having then

control and speak out about their work (Shraeder. 96). Portfolios encourage students to

take an active role in the assessment of their learning. thus allowing students to keep

track of their individual development. Teachers are facilitating a process where students

are able to discover empowerment. They will be able to further reflect on their

perceptions of academic success and achievement in an environment where they feel empowered to continue their learning and set individual learning goals.

2.4 Program Delivery

ESL delivery of programs and the role of ESL teachers are distinctly different between the elementary to secondary school divisions. Differences in delivery reflect the differences in educational philosophies between elementary and secondary. There is also recognition of the urgency for high school students on the one hand and the presumed natural acquisition for the young on the other.

At the elementary level, most of the day for an ESL student is spent in the mainstream classroom, with occasional pull- out programs to meet students' needs. Beginning elementary students are offered some ESL pull- out service to learn beginning concepts and vocabulary in English. A pull- out program typically takes the student out of their mainstream classroom for a short part of the day where they can receive more intense assistance individually or in a small group scenario. For the rest of the day, the student participates in classroom processes with scaffolding of activities to meet their language needs. Intermediate and advanced students may receive some pull out instruction if seen necessary by teachers to work on particular concerns, but for the most part, ESL students are immersed in the mainstream classroom. There is no system wide school consistency in delivery models in terms of who can deliver the ESL service, so different schools offer ESL program delivery through ESL teachers, aides, assistants and parents.

At the secondary level, most programs are dedicated course based programs following a model of proportional integration, which was discussed in chapter one. ESL

students start with ESL classes delivered mostly by ESL teachers and context enriched

mainstream courses such as physical education as they develop their English language

proficiency and then are integrated into context reduced courses such as English and

Social Studies. There has been some debate as to what the role of the ESL teacher should

be. Roessingh discusses the need to continue to run strong ESL programs as well as the

need for ESL teachers to work more effectively with mainstream teachers to meet the

needs of transitional ESL students (Roessingh, 1995). Other researchers such as Snow,

Met and Genese (1989) support the notion of the ESL teacher as pedagogical resource

working with the mainstream teacher to isolate the linguistic needs of ESL learners and to

help in planning to meet them. Other initiatives have promoted the ESL teacher as an

adjunct teacher or tutor supporting the language demands of the mainstream class in a

block of ESL time that would be programmed for this purpose.

It was important for me to distinguish the commonly held views on English

language proficiency and the common curricular and instructional interventions in the

ESL field in order to make the connection to the bigger picture when discussing ESL

students' perceptions about their learning experiences. The next three sections in the

literature review discuss the Canadian literature on the drop out of high school language

minority students, student perception literature, the gap in the secondary literature

regarding changing demographics and how it led to the research question.

2.5 Academic Success

It is important to acknowledge the literature on ESL high school drop out if we

are to understand the complexity of ESL secondary education and the challenges ESL

students face as they attempt high school graduation. While presenting these findings, it

is vital to keep in mind that there is variation in the terminology that is used when defining what is an ESL student and what constitutes drop- out. Usually, drop out is defined as any student who leaves school before fulfilling graduation requirements. In 1990, Santos and Ramos recorded rates in the United States varying from 40 –80% of language minority students who drop out from high school. In Canada, Radawinski (1987) found a consistent increase in ESL dropout among Ontario high school students with a 53% dropout. At a local level, Alberta Education found a 61% drop out rate among ESL immigrant students in grades eight to twelve based on a sample of 165 students taken from 1987 funding lists (Alberta Education, 1993). Watt and Roessingh found an even more disheartening figure in their five year tracking study (1988-1993) based on 388 ESL students where they found an overall drop out rate of 74% for ESL students (Watt and Roessingh, 1994). They further broke it down into drop- out based on English language proficiency upon entry into high school. Beginners dropped out at a rate of 95%; intermediates dropped out a rate of 70% and advanced students dropped out at the rate of 50%. Only students who received ESL support in high school were included in the study. It is to be noted that this sample is a subset of what may be called the larger language minority student (LMS) population of the school. Most highly represented among those who graduated were older arriving students who were academically competent in their first language. It took these students an average of 4.5 years to complete the three-year high school requirements (Watt and Roessingh, 1994a). These findings speak not only to the incredible challenge ESL students endure as they face high school graduation, but also to the urgency for further investigation of ESL student education.

The drop out statistics brought forth more questions in terms of the students. What did this mean for them? How did they feel and why? What were their stories about success and failure in high school? Watt and Roessingh explored these questions as they explored the qualitative side to their drop- out study. ESL students were invited to share their stories of success and failure in the school system and their perceptions of the adjustment process to high school. Watt and Roessingh identified a boom and bust model to encapsulate the students' educational and cultural adjustment to high school. They move through a predictable pattern of ups and downs and are more vulnerable to dropping out at certain, identifiable times. Students view learning English as the most difficult thing that they have to do to make the adjustment to the culture of the school. They perceive many barriers to equitable participation and involvement in the education system.

This particular article had a deep impact on me and confirmed the focus of the current study. It was pertinent in emphasizing the importance of student voice and the invaluable insight that can be gained from listening to the students. By focusing on the perceptions of ESL students, we could become more informed about the way these students experience the phenomenon of school.

As Singer points out, "Perceptions are the windows through which a person experiences the world. They also determine the ways in which we behave toward it. That world includes symbols, things, people, groups of people, ideas, events, ideologies and even faith. We experience everything in the world not "as it is"- because there is no way that we can know the world as it is-but only as the world comes to us through our sensory receptors" (Singer, 1998,p.11).

This lead me to look further into the literature and determine what the field had published on students' perceptions of their learning experiences. It became evident that few studies had been published on ESL student perceptions in Canada. The next section of the literature review will elaborate on studies focusing on student perceptions conducted in the United States. Canada and the gaps in the literature that motivated a deeper look into the perceptions of ESL students about high school learning experiences.

A significant body of research has been published in North America in the area of ESL college / university students and their perceptions regarding academic study (Kim & Eckerman, 1997, Nunan & Keobke, 1995; Christison &Krahnke, 1986; Blanton, 1987). These studies provide insight into how ESL students perceive academic language study at the university and college level but given the ESL high school drop out statistics in Alberta, it is arguable that this population of ESL students is distinct from those proposed for this study.

A number of ethnographic studies have also been done in the United States in respect to specific ethnic groups of students and their perspectives, opinions and experiences in high school (Lucas, 97; Masahiko, 1995; Shaw, 1994; Harklau, 1994; Grafton, 1992; Davis and McDaid, 1992). More than half a million immigrants enter the United States every year, most of them speaking languages other than English (Crawford, 1989; Hakuta, 1986). Their second language learners are referred to as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Minorities as constructed in the US based literature do not neatly translate into the fabric of the Canadian cultural context. This is distinguished by a greater plurality and a focus on language and immigrant status in Canada over second

generation status and ethnicity in the United States. However, there were certain ideas from these studies that influenced the direction of this thesis.

Masahiko interviewed 30 newly arrived Asian high school students representing a variety of nationalities and educational backgrounds. They were in U.S. schools for a variety of reasons including extended visits to families of relatives and attending school exchanges. The students were from Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Japan and Korea. The interviews were conducted in their native language regarding their perspectives on ESL instruction and bilingual classrooms. This study suggests that ESL classes offer a haven to relax and relieve some of the tension these students feel in other classes, and they also provide students with more opportunities for active collaboration. Students were very sensitive about being understood and expressed the need for teachers to create classrooms that maximize participation by students who lack proficiency in English. There were feelings of isolation and lack of incentive to learn and they preferred an environment in which the teacher provides good instruction, is sensitive to their needs, and tries hard to engage them in the ongoing life of the classroom, school and culture (Masahiko, 1995).

Although this study tapped into the students' perceptions of the educational experiences, many of the students had not immigrated to the U.S. and were not planning to stay in the U.S. ESL students who immigrate to Canada and make a commitment to stay in Canada may perceive their experiences in a different manner than foreign exchange students or students in other temporary situations. Furthermore, their level of English language proficiency upon arrival was not discussed in the paper, which may have provided more significant insight regarding the effect on their educational experiences.

Harklau has also lead the way in the U.S. literature with her contributions

regarding the contrast between mainstream and ESL classrooms and what do ESL

students lose and gain in their transition from ESL to the mainstream. Harklau conducted

an ethnographic study in which four Chinese ethnic immigrant students were followed

over a 3-½ year study, as they made the transition from ESL to mainstream. The study

was conducted at a high school of approximately 1600 students of various socio-

economic backgrounds. The population make-up consisted of 50% African American,

30% Asian American, 20% White and 2-3% Hispanic. The Limited English Proficient

(LEP) population consisted of fewer than 100 students.

Harklau's findings suggest that the mainstream classroom did offer many social

opportunities for language use and interaction with native speakers but at a closer glance,

the LEP students seldom took advantage of these opportunities and perceived a barrier

between them and their U.S. peers. Furthermore, second language learners seldom

received explicit feedback or instruction on the target language, leaving them with little

guidance about language form (Harklau, 1994).

In the ESL classes, there was an emphasis on productive use of both written and

spoken language. Students were given explicit feedback on their linguistic production

and there were opportunities for counseling and peer social interaction. Students

perceived ESL as easy and remedial because the focus was not only on academic

language needed for the transition to mainstream language, but they were also instructed

on language used in everyday situations. Harklau summarizes her findings by

emphasizing that the students' educational experience was a "makeshift response of a

system fundamentally geared towards the instruction of native speakers of the language" (Harklau, 1994, 267).

This study was important in highlighting and contrasting the mainstream classroom versus the ESL classroom and the way schools respond to meeting the needs of second language learners by providing them with ESL or bilingual education on an unchanged mainstream curriculum. It is important to acknowledge the students' perceptions around ESL instruction and the way they perceived a barrier between themselves and their U.S. born peers.

Although this U.S. ethnographic study was conducted over a long period of time, considering multiple perspectives from teachers, students and administrators, it also confirmed for me the importance of the students' voice about their educational experiences in a "Canadian" context.

As of the time of writing this paper, I was able to locate only three other published papers regarding ESL students' perceptions of their experiences in Canada.

Researchers such as Gentry, 1988; Early, 1992; and Kanno and Applebaum, 1995 have acknowledged the importance of exploring ways of incorporating student experiences into ESL research. Early (1992) states " ESL students' perceptions about their educational experiences are an enormously rich, untapped source of data which will provide not only a better understanding of the process of their socialization into Canadian schools but possible answers to many of the problems they encounter" (Early, 1992, 274).

In 1988, Gentry investigated, through semi- structured interviews, the perceptions of twenty-five ESL students who were identified by their teacher as "academically successful". This meant that they had to have a minimum of a C average in their regular

courses. Topics covered in the interviews included: students' perceptions of their educational experiences in their home country as compared to Canada, their ESL and content classroom experiences, their role as students, and their strategies for success. They were also asked to reflect upon what advice they might give to their fellow students or teachers to help other ESL students achieve success.

Gentry's findings suggest that ESL students found value in their ESL classroom learning experiences. They were highly disciplined and held high aspirations for the future. They built on their academic work from their home countries and many found that they continued to use their first language in understanding content information. Although they recognized the value of friends, they had little involvement with native – English speaking peers (Gentry, 1988).

Early in 1992 decided to build on Gentry's findings and target not only the highly successful ESL students as did Gentry, but also at the students who were less successful and did not have a "C" average.   Early wanted to answer the question " What are ESL learners' perceptions of the factors which may contribute to or accompany their ability to achieve in school?"   Early took a case- study approach and conducted semi- structured interviews with twenty-six immigrant high school students who had been in Canada no less than two years and no more than five- years and who had little English to begin with. The students represented various native countries with eight different first languages.

Fifteen of the students had an average grade of C or better and were primarily mainstreamed,while eleven of the students were still attending ESL classes as a result of not being able to cope with the demands of the content classes and had an average grade lower than "C" in their content classes. Being categorized into successful and less

successful ESL students, the interviews were broad in scope and covered themes such as students' perceptions about the move to Canada, self as student, ESL experience, study strategies and home situation (Early, 1992). Fifteen high school teachers working at seven different schools conducted the interviews. The themes, which arose from the data, included the domain of time, help, strategies, purpose and power.

Time is considered from different perspectives. Students in the less successful category were fourteen years of age or younger when they arrived in Canada. The average age of the more successful students was 15.2 years. Early relates these figures to Collier's 1987 findings that " arrivals between the ages of 12-15 years old, experience the greatest difficulty and were projected to require as long as 6-8 years to reach grade level norms in academic achievement" (1987,p.617). Time is also considered in terms of time spent studying with successful students spending more time on average on homework assignments and disciplined study.

The second theme of help related to the source of help and type of help sought by students. All students reported they sought help from someone but a higher percentage of the more successful students reported asking course and ESL teachers for additional help, compared with the majority of the less successful students who turned to friends and family. Many of the successful students believed that they were helped by their parent's high expectations for them. Many successful students also spoke of the advantages of being disciplined in their work habits in their home countries, and being advanced in their knowledge in some content courses for example math. Both groups perceived the need to change their strategies for learning when they came to Canada. They discussed the need to learn research skills and feeling comfortable to ask teachers questions when they didn't

understand as this was not a common act in their home countries. The students also stated strongly to be successful in school you need to be confident and have a high self-esteem.

Less successful students spoke of many coping strategies such as memorizing everything, reading things over and over again, while more successful students emphasized a learning strategy " based on getting to grips with a real understanding of information" (Early, 1992,p.272).

The final findings captured the themes of purpose and power. The more successful students spoke of future goals such as going on to university or future careers they were decided on. Less successful students did not have clear goals for the future. Early suggests that more successful students feel in control of their circumstance and destiny.

Early's study captured a picture of what ESL students perceive as factors that contribute to becoming an academically successful ESL student. Although the study did focus on Canadian content and student voice, I believe it was limited by what constituted academic success and in this case a grade of C was an operational measure of academic success. Academic success has been defined differently by various stakeholders in different countries and is difficult to consistently measure academic success.

This study brought me one step closer to the students' perceptions about their educational experiences but it still didn't provide a deeper understanding of their life worlds and what ESL students feel is working for them and not working for them in their educational experiences. What insight can they give to us as educators about the quality of their educational experiences that could improve our instruction and deepen our

understanding of their life worlds? This is the gap that was missing in the literature. It was more about the quality of their experiences rather than just the aspect of academic success. How did they feel about what was happening in and out of the classroom and why? What were the challenges, accomplishments, frustrations and joys they experience as high school students? While academic success is an important aspect for many ESL students, it is only one part to the mysterious ESL puzzle. A deeper look into the lives and stories of ESL students was needed. Not only about their cultural and social adjustment to high school but to their perceptions about the quality of their learning experiences and what it was like to be an ESL high school student?

In addition to the deeper look into the instructional perceptions of ESL students, a modicum of research has been published in the area of ESL students from the Pacific Rim countries, who represent the recent changing demographic landscape of Canada, and their perceptions around their educational experiences in high school.

Kanno and Applebaum conducted a study surrounding the stories of three Japanese secondary- level students who experienced various ESL programs in Toronto. The researchers stated the importance of adding ESL students' views of their experiences as an important part of the ESL literature field. The study explored the ESL curriculum as experienced by students. The students were in grade 12 and were children of Japanese businessman who were on temporary overseas assignment in Canada. All three returned to Japan when completing secondary school. The researchers of the study distinguish that these students did not intend to stay in Canada permanently and for this reason they constitute a different group from immigrant students in terms of language. They do believe that a number of the issues experienced by their sample would be relevant to

immigrant students. All of the interviews were conducted in Japanese and were later translated in English. The findings suggest that there was a strong connection between the learner's peer searching and their English learning. For the two students who wanted to befriend Canadian speakers, learning English was very important to them, but for the student, who wished to make friends with other Japanese students, learning English did not become a priority. Findings also concluded that ESL students' motivation to continue their English learning is affected by whether or not entry into a native- English speaking students' peer group is deemed feasible (Kanno and Applebaum, 1995).

All three students underwent different ESL programs in Canada consisting of pull- out ESL classes and regular mainstream classes. Participants perceived a lack of connection between ESL and general programs. They felt their ESL program was not useful in their mainstream classes. There was a gap between what they needed to learn and what was taught. For the two students who wanted to make Canadian friends, they saw the ESL program as an impediment to their integration. They described the Canadian schools as more relaxed and process oriented compared to Japanese education. One participant felt that her high marks were not deserved but was given the credits due to her great efforts. There was the perception of ESL classes as remedial and ESL students as learning disabled.

The researchers concluded that learning English for these students had to do with negotiating their identities in a new environment. The current ESL program at that time may not have been providing enough support to help them integrate into the school community. They believe without school support, students run the risk of perpetuating their marginality in the school and prematurely reaching a plateau in their English

acquisition. Kanno and Applebaum strongly advocate for reassessing the notion that by putting children of all ethnic/ linguistic backgrounds in one place with no attempts by the school to bring language majority and minority students together, will not bring about the development of true cross-cultural understanding (Kanno and Applebaum, 1995).

This study was evident of the marganilization that ESL students feel when attempting to learn a second language and become part of their Canadian peer groups. This study provided insight from students who did not to intend to stay in Canada permanently and may have had less motivation to approach learning English as a lifetime commitment than immigrant students who have made the decision to stay in Canada on a more permanent basis.

The literature was essential in determining the need to add to the modicum of Canadian literature surrounding ESL students' perceptions of their high school learning experiences. The number of qualitative studies in the ESL field also brought forth the importance of bringing more attention to the human experience in ESL education. These factors contributed to my decision to explore the richness and diversity of ESL high school experience by looking at the perceived quality of the educational experiences of ESL high school students and more specifically at students from Pacific Rim countries. It is hoped that this research will make a unique contribution to the present ESL literature surrounding student voice and experience.

2.6 Chapter Summary

Over the last twenty years, ESL researchers have been instrumental in providing insight into second language acquisition and the factors that are essential in learning a second language. Many quantitative studies have tracked the length of time it takes for

second language speakers to be able to compete academically against their native speaking peers and the distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). It has become conventional wisdom that BICS must be in place if CALP is to be apparent. While it may take up to two years to achieve age- appropriate conversational fluency, it will take five to seven years to achieve academic language proficiency. Researchers have noted the importance of CALP in order to ensure academic success.

The ESL field has embraced many teaching methods and strategies throughout the history of second language learning and teaching. Not only have we come to view language development as an interactive and meaningful process, but the methodological eclecticism has tried to address the variety of communicative needs faced by second language learners. In order to develop communicative competence and academic language proficiency, instructional practices have been informed by the interaction of three types of learning: linguistic competence, strategic competence and concept understanding.

Researchers have taken a real interest in exploring academic success for ESL students. Previous studies have focused on high school graduation as a prime indicator of academic success and the challenges ESL students face as they attempt to complete high school requirements. The staggering ESL high school drop- out statistics also encapsulated the students' voice as they shared their stories of success and failure in the school system and their perceptions of the adjustment process to high school. Academic success for the students in Watt and Roessingh's study was a continuous struggle as even

students with an advanced level of English language proficiency upon entry to high school had a 50% chance of high school graduation.

Upon further looking into other research focusing on student perceptions of their learning experiences, there were few studies cited. Many of the studies again chose to focus on the differentiation between academically successful or unsuccessful and the factors students perceived influenced this academic success. Although these studies capture the students' views about academic success, the studies fell short of creating a picture of what it was like to be an ESL student in high school without the sole emphasis only on academic success. The students' voice also needed to be heard about the quality of their learning experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of their life- worlds.

Other studies such as Kanno and Applebaum's study highlighted the mix of immigrant and international students in Canada and the similarities and differences that students perceive as they learn a second language. International students also perceived themselves as marginalized when attempting to learn a second language but the motivation factors differ between international students who are in a more temporary situation compared to immigrant students who need to make more of a life- time commitment to developing academic language proficiency and communicative competence.

The previous research has also been based on a demographic profile that fits into the theory proposed by ESL researchers. Most of the research based on the last twenty years has focused more on a refugee demographic profile. Most of these students in this profile immigrated to Canada with little or no English. While trying to experience academic success, these students seem to experience a predictable pattern of ups and

downs as they try to develop their academic language proficiency and attain enough credits to graduate from high school. They seem to pick up BICS quite easily as they become conversationally fluent with other students and teachers, but face the challenges of CALP as they struggle with content classes. Most of these students are not fluent in their first language and don't continue to develop their first language skills while in Canada.

With a shift in immigrant demographics, a new student profile has emerged that has been under- represented in the historical picture of immigration and education. This population is highly educated and educationally motivated. These students are experiencing success in content classes and are motivated to graduate from high school. Most of the students have studied English in their home countries and are considered to be at an intermediate or advanced level of English language proficiency upon arrival to high school. This profile has at least a fifty- percent chance of meeting high school requirements and is motivated to do so. Taking these characteristics into consideration, this profile represents a population that we know very little about. The perceptions of this unique group of ESL students can add great value to the overall understanding of the dynamism of ESL. How do these students perceive their high school learning experiences? What factors influence the quality of their learning experiences and how does this profile of students contribute to the richness and diversity of ESL education?

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to present the way the research was designed and the method of research that provided the guidance to gather and analyze the data.

Figure 3.1

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Research Design
• Methodology: Qualitative Research – Grounded Theory
• Participants
• Researcher as Participant
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Data Collection
• Interviews
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Data Analysis
• The Core Variable
• Microanalysis
• Coding- Concepts. Categories. Constructs
• Theoretical Sensitivity
• Quality Grounded Theory
• Limitations and Strengths of the Study
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Based on qualitative research. more broadly defined as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). this research study adhered to the qualitative methodology of Grounded Theory Construction (Glaser &Strauss. 1967).

Grounded theory offers a systematic approach focusing on the lived experiences and patterns within the experiences of the participants. Researchers go to the participants in the attempt to understand their perspectives within a given situation (Hutchinson. 1988).

It is on the basis of time and quality of interaction that the researcher becomes warranted by the participants. By using the procedures and techniques that guide Grounded Theory, I spent approximately three half days a week over the span of six months observing, interacting with students and teachers, and interviewing students. The following is a detailed description of the way the research was designed to address the question: How do ESL students perceive the quality of their high school learning experiences?

3.1 Qualitative Research

Stauss and Corbin refer to Qualitative research as a nonmathematical analytic procedure that results in findings derived from data gathered by a variety of means including observations, interviews, documents, books and videotapes. Bogdan and Biklen use five characteristics to define Qualitative Research:

1. "Qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument".

The researcher enters and spends considerable time in the research setting in order to understand what is being observed in the setting in which it occurs. Researchers collect data and use their insight as a key instrument to analysis. The assumption that human behavior is influenced by the setting in which it occurs, guides qualitative researchers.

2. "Qualitative research is descriptive".

The data in qualitative research may include interview transcripts, field notes, photographs, videotapes, memos and other official records. The collected data is in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers. Researchers stay close to the recorded or transcribed forms of data during analysis. Quotations from the data are used to illustrate and substantiate written results.

3. "Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes

   or products"

Questions such as How do people negotiate meaning? and What is the natural history of

the activities or events under study?, guide researchers in focusing on the day to day

process of interaction by the participants rather than looking towards the final outcomes

of the study.

4. "Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively".

The role of the researcher is not to prove or disprove hypothesis by searching out the

data, but to build abstractions as the data is gathered and grouped together. A researcher

begins to develop a theory about what is being studied after considerable time is spent

with participants and data begins to be collected. This grounded theory (Glaser and

Strauss, 1967) emerges from the bottom up rather from top down as many pieces of

collected evidence are interconnected.

5. "Meaning is of essential concern to the qualitative approach".

Researchers are concerned with the perspectives of the participants. They are interested

in the ways people make sense of their lives in order to shed light on the inner dynamics

of different situations. Interviewers structure various strategies and procedures in order

to consider the informants' perspectives of their experiences (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

There are many types of qualitative research and different ways of handling

qualitative data (Tesch, 1990). There are many common questions surrounding

qualitative research including whether it is really scientific. The word scientific has been

synonymous with quantitative research that is deductive and hypothesis testing.

Researchers such as Bogdan and Biklen advocate that scientific research also includes rigorous and systematic empirical inquiry that is data based (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Qualitative research does meet these requirements and Tesch describes ten principles and practices that hold true for qualitative analysis.

1. " Analysis is not the last phase in the research process, it is concurrent with data collection or cyclic".

2. " The analysis process is systematic and comprehensive, but not rigid".

3. " Attending to data includes a reflective activity that results in a set of analytical notes that guide the process". These analytical notes are called memos.

4. " Data are segmented, divided into meaningful and relevant units yet the connection to the whole is maintained".

5. " The data segments are categorized according to an ongoing system that is predominately derived form the data themselves".

6. " The main intellectual tool is comparison: the method of comparing and contrasting is used during the analysis of data".

7. "Categories for sorting segments are tentative and preliminary in the beginning and remain flexible".

8. "Manipulating data during analysis is an eclectic activity; there is no one right away". It is possible to analyze any phenomenon in more than one way (Spradley, 1979,p.92).

9. "The procedures are neither scientific nor mechanistic". Methodological knowledge and intellectual competence guides researchers in their procedures, which are neither limitlessly inventive nor strictly followed.

10. "The result of the analysis is some type of higher level synthesis". The goal of the analysis is a larger consolidated picture that may include a composite summary. a description of patterns and themes or an identification of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon studied.

Qualitative research is a powerful tool in uncovering the nature of persons' experiences. It can help us understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known. or it can provide new insight about things that we know quite a bit about (Strauss and Corbin. 1990). Grounded theory allowed me to use a qualitative methodology to explore the phenomenon of schooling for ESL high school students. This type of methodology involves systematic empirical inquiry that is data- based and adheres to the principles of qualitative research.

3.2 Study Participants

The participants are a key component in Grounded theory. Different researchers choose to refer to the people involved in a study as subjects. informants or participants. Seidman concludes that the word a researcher chooses to refer to the person being interviewed can communicate important information about the researcher's purpose and his or her view of the relationship (Seidman. 1991). The term subject may imply a more hierarchical relationship and that the person being interviewed can be subjugated even though some researchers may see the term more positive as the interviewee turns form an object to a subject. The term informant is a common anthropological term as the people that are interviewed inform researchers about a culture (Ellen. 1984). I agree with Seidman's notions about the term participant. as it reflects a sense of equity that a

researcher tries to establish in an interviewing relationship and a sense of involvement that occurs in- depth interviewing (Seidman, 1991).

The participants are a key component in grounded theory. In order to discover the world as seen through the eyes of the participants, which is fundamental to Grounded Theory. The researcher selected ten participants who were in attendance in a large urban Senior High public school. The prime criterion for participant selection was "ESL students who demonstrated an interest in participating in the study and sharing their high school learning experiences." The researcher "enters the world of the people he or she plans to study, gets to know them, be known and trusted by them, and systematically keeps a record of what is heard and observed" (Borden &Biklen, 1992). During these visits, I observed and interacted with over fifty ESL beginners to advanced students in different settings inside and outside of scheduled class time. As participant observer, it was imperative for me to develop a positive rapport with the students in the high school's ESL program. This was vital in determining who would be interested in participating in the study, and to identify those among the group with the capacity to reflect and articulate their experience. Attempts were made to balance the group by gender, first language and previous educational experience. The participants were approached by me in a face to face meeting where the letter to the participants and the consent form were carefully and thoroughly discussed before being signed by the participants. Participants under the age of eighteen required parental or guardian consent.

The participants will be referred from this point on in this paper by the pseudonyms chosen by the students themselves. I felt that the purposive sample should reflect students from various levels and grades in the ESL program in order to enrich the

study and provide for variation from different student perspectives. It is important to

reiterate that the study site purposely chosen for this study reflects an ESL population

with the majority of the ESL students enrolled in the program from Pacific Rim

countries. The minority of the ESL population came from various countries such as Iraq,

Yugoslavia and Somalia. This population is indicative of Canada's changing

demographics and it was hoped that this sample of students would provide valuable

insight in addressing the research question.

The chart below captures the sample of students who participated in the study by gender,

home country, grade, years in Canada, first language, age, current English language

proficiency.

Figure 3.2

Profile of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Home Country	Grade	Years in Canada	First Language	Age	Current ELP
Jesse	M	Taiwan	10	2	Chinese	15	Beginner
Yaca	F	Yugoslavia	10	1.5	Yugoslavian	15	Beginner
Laura	F	Taiwan	10	2	Mandarin	15	Intermediate
Sean	M	Hong Kong	11	1.5	Cantonese	17	Intermediate
Jacki	F	Taiwan	11	2	Mandarin	16	Intermediate
Nikki	F	Iraq	11	1.5	Arabic	16	Intermediate
Michael	M	Taiwan	11	1.5	Mandarin	17	Intermediate
John	M	Hong Kong	12	5	Cantonese	18	Advanced
Ray	M	Hong Kong	12	3	Cantonese	19	Intermediate
Derrick	M	Taiwan	12	2.5	Mandarin	18	Advanced

As was indicated in the introduction, this sample was taken from the ESL

program at the study site, which is comprised of eighty-five students primarily from

Hong Kong, Korea and Taiwan. Most of these students have studied some beginning

English in their home countries and come into the ESL program with approximately a grade four reading level. This places the students in a level two/ three ESL class, which is an intermediate ESL class. They are above average in their educational preparation in their first language and are used to a rigorous and disciplined work ethic when it comes to school. A high priority on the role of education in determining future success is evident in their determination to finish high school and their future aspirations to attend university. While this sample represents a range of English language proficiency levels, all of the students are experiencing success or high success in content classes. Math and science courses are very accessible to these students where as English still seems to be a greater challenge. Highly supportive families and socio-economic privilege also characterize this profile of students.

The students in this sample with the exception of Yaca from Yugoslavia can speak their first language fluently and attend heritage first language schools on the weekends to maintain and develop their first language. All of the students were still involved in some form of ESL programming whether it was an adjunct English block or a drop in tutorial class. With the students being in different grades, their timetables consisted of various mainstream classes in pursuit of high school graduation. These students also had or discussed taking summer school in order to make the three-year goal toward graduation feasible.

3.3 The Researcher as Participant: Participant Observation, Remaining Marginal, Memos

The primary source of the data for this study was the interviews conducted with the ten participants. It was important to begin the fieldwork as a participant observer to

gain the respect and trust from potential participants for the interviews. Pertinent to the latter was the importance for the interview questions to be connected to the known behavior, in order for their answers to be better-interpreted (Glesne &Peshkin, 1992). **Participant observation** allows the researcher the opportunity to attain the status of a trusted person, see patterns of behavior, and learn how the actions of the participants correspond to their words. The main outcome of participant observation is to understand the research setting, its participants and their behavior (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Over the six-month period, I was immersed at the study site as a participant observer to gain the trust and respect from my participants and to conduct the interviews, which formed the primary source of data for the study. During this time, I was able to observe the students in various settings inside and outside of the classroom. The primary focus was to establish a positive rapport with the students and become trusted by them in their environment. While the researcher participants and I interacted freely, I was also cautious to maintain a frame of guarded intimacy to ensure that I was not the focus of attention yet still free to observe and be part of each environment without fully participating in the setting. As Horowitz puts it: " **Remaining marginal** allows one to continue to spend time with groups when they are no longer friendly" (Horowitz 1986,426).

Extensive field notes were recorded as I moved through the day with the participants in various ESL classes, during lunch breaks and after school. I had the opportunity to interact with about twenty- five ESL students who formed the extended group of individuals who were socially connected to the ten participants. When the ten participants were chosen for the interviews, the study began to focus in more detail on

these participants in order to enrich the interviews conducted with the ten participants. The field notes also became a place to record down analytic memos, which gave me a chance to reflect on the observations. It was an opportunity to write **memos** (Glaser &Strauss, 1967) to myself about what I thought was going on in the data, to write down feelings and clarify earlier interpretations. It also became a place for exploring my own biases. While I reflected in my field journal about my own biases throughout the duration of the study it was also important for me to reflect on my own preconceptions and values coming into the study.

By taking the role of participant observer, the researcher needs to be aware of her own preconceptions, values and beliefs in order to be able to understand the world of others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Before beginning the fieldwork, an honest effort was made to reflect on what values and beliefs I held in order to acknowledge the influence it had on the choice of research topics. It also allowed me to approach the research with a new perspective.

Being born in Canada to immigrant parents who immigrated to Canada in the sixties, I was raised learning two languages. English was not spoken at home, and the challenges of learning a second language while maintaining the first language became part of everyday life. Accompanying the language challenges, came feelings of frustration, confusion, and resentment as I tried to traverse the issues of identity, belonging, personal values and the distinctness of difference. These feelings were not short lived and the weight of cultural adjustment provided few answers. As I still search for insight into many of the life-long questions that belong to the immigrant reality, I

acknowledge my ability to speak two languages fluently and the strength of my identity, which guides the cause of my decisions.

Being a Canadian born ESL student myself. I bring with me years of experiences that allow me a deeper understanding and more insight into the lives of ESL students. I am also a teacher who has been dedicated to meeting the needs of diverse learners for the last five years. This research was guided by my sense that ESL was not being seriously addressed in my teaching experiences. Through my teaching experiences. I felt that teaching ESL students was more complicated and intricate than was first thought and explored in university preparation programs. Few quality resources were available and overall. I felt quite unprepared to meet the needs of these students. These feelings of guilt and frustration were also accompanied by my personal experiences as a speaker of a second language and the personal connection that I felt to my students.

The belief that all students including ESL students have the right to a quality education and it is the responsibility of all educators to ensure that the needs of these students are being met, guides my teaching philosophy and practice. The right to student voice and allowing students to be heard is the essence of this study, which I firmly believe in and hold close to my heart.

Going back to university as a graduate student has allowed me a deeper exploration into the various facets of second language education. It has reinforced the complexity of ESL education and the numerous issues that surround this area. By acknowledging my beliefs and values before beginning the study, it allowed me to feel confident about approaching the study with a fresh look at what the students had to say without bias, yet allowing past experiences as a second language student, teacher and

researcher to inform what was seen, heard and bring more insight into the analysis of the data. As Strauss and Corbin point out, " a qualitative researcher requires theoretical and social sensitivity, the ability to maintain analytical distance while at the same time drawing upon past experience and theoretical knowledge to interpret what is seen, astute powers of observation and good interactional skills" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990,p.18).

3.4 The Process to Gathering and analyzing the Data: Grounded Theory, Substantive Theories

3.4.1 Grounded theory

Grounded theory is firmly rooted in the work of Herbert Blumer and symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionists believe that people interact with each other through meaningful symbols. Human reality is socially and symbolically constructed, always emerging and relative to other facts of social life. This philosophy guides grounded theory research especially in the data collection strategies of participant observation and interviewing (Hutchinson, 1988).

As the founders of Grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss, emphasized that the methodology is based on a systematic approach for generating middle range or **substantive theories** that explain a specific area of empirical inquiry. These theories help explain the real world as seen through the eyes of the participants. The theories are themselves guided by the assumption that people pattern their experience and that the patterns derive from their shared social and symbolic interactions (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). It is often the purpose of Grounded theory to act as a form of social criticism, making judgments about identified patterns of social interaction. Grounded theory also

provides a new perspective on a given situation by offering new ways to explain and predict educational phenomenon (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Hutchinson highlights the relevance of Grounded Theory methodology to education. She describes the need for middle- range data based theory that explains the everyday world of teachers, students, administrators and the school beauracracy. With a focus on the lived experience, patterns of experience and judging and appraising the experience, grounded theory offers a systematic way to "study the richness and diversity of human experience and to generate relevant, plausible theory which can be used to understand the contextual reality of social behavior" (Hutchinson, 1988, p.127).

3.4.2 Data Collection: Interviews

The primary source of data came from the **interviews** with the students. "Interviews permit researchers to verify, clarify, or alter what they thought happened, to achieve a full understanding of an incident, and to take into account the lived experiences of participants (Hutchinson, 1988). Additional field notes as participant observer and samples of students' work also accounted as secondary sources of data, which informed the findings.

The overall purpose of Grounded theory is to develop an inductively grounded theory about a phenomenon that it represents. It is discovered and verified through systematic data collection and analysis pertinent o the phenomenon. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The semi- structured interviews were focused around the central open- ended question, " How do ESL students perceive their high school learning experiences?" There were some loosely structured questions to guide the conversation. The topics included students' high school impressions, perceptions about mainstream classes, ESL

classes, peer support, ESL programming and satisfaction with high school. I was flexible

in pursuing the issues that participants brought forth.

The initial interviews were conducted one at a time with each participant. Each

interview was audio- taped and lasted approximately one hour. The initial interviews did

not begin until the middle of December allowing me the opportunity to develop rapport

with the participants and to establish a sense of comfort and respect between researcher

and participants. Part of the trustworthiness of interview data is based on the trust that

has accrued between the interviewer and the participant. Part is based on the

interviewer's sense of the participant as a person. These are developed through informal

interactions and observations that precede the interview. The interview per se is merely a

time when the two people can explore ideas face to face. Interviews that are devoid of

any pre-existing relationships are more difficult to triangulate and are more prone to

misinterpretation and shallower exploration.

3.4.3 Data Analysis: Emergent Theme Construction, Constant Comparison Method, Coding, Concepts, Categories, Constructs

Figure 3.3 illustrates the processes of Grounded Theory Analysis taken from Figure 9.2
Grounded Theory- Education and Grounded Theory (Hutchinson, 1988).

THEORETICAL
SENSITIVITY

SELECTIVE
CODING

LITERATURE
REVIEW

SORTING

THEORETICAL
SAMPLING

MEMOING

CODING
LEVEL III

CODING
LEVEL II

W
R
I
T
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N
G

S
A
T
U
R
A
T
I
O
N

PUBLISH

CODING LEVEL I

Grounded Theory

Process	Product
Constant comparative method	Level I codes- called in vivo
Constant comparative method	Level II codes- called categories
Constant comparative method	Level III codes- called theoretical Constructs
Memoing	Theoretical Ideas
Theoretical Sampling	Dense data which leads to the Illumination and expansion of Theoretical constructs
Sorting	Core Variable- a central theme
Selective Coding Based on Core Variable	Theory delimited to a few theoretical constructs. their categories and properties
Saturation of Codes. categories and constructs	A dense theory covering behavioral variation: a sense of closure
Literature Review	Discovering literature that supports Illuminates or extends proposed Theory
Writing the theory	A piece of publishable research

Following grounded theory procedures, once the first interview was completed, formal data analysis began. What follows is my attempt to describe in a more simplified manner the steps that were taken to reliably analyze the data according to some of the suggested procedures and techniques, relevant to the methodology. Grounded Theory offers an extensive collection of procedures and techniques when analyzing data, including different procedures such as constant comparison, theoretical comparison, micro- analysis including techniques such as flip flop, systematic comparison, waving the red flag, and asking questions when analyzing words, phrases and sentences. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on all of the techniques and procedures, the next section in this chapter will focus on the formal procedures undertaken in the analysis of the data.

The two formal procedures that were undertaken in the analysis were **emergent theme construction** and the **constant comparison method** (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). A procedure allows the researcher to make comparisons and ask questions. A large aspect of the process of analysis is the coding of data from the first day in the field. **Coding** is the analytic process through which the data is fractured, conceptualized and integrated to form a theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This requires the researcher to change focus and pursue leads revealed by the ongoing data analysis. By the constant comparison method, the researcher compares incident with incident, incident with category, category with category or construct with construct. The researcher is continuously looking for patterns as the data is coded and analyzed.

Three levels of coding were used. Level one coding uses the actual words that the participants use in the description of the action in the setting. They are called

substantive codes or **concepts**. An observation, a sentence, or a paragraph is taken apart

and given a name. This concept name represents a mnemonic token for the phenomenon.

Concept names fix attention on the data and draw similar data into groups from which the

initial interpretation of the data emerges. Questions are asked and the concepts are

classified and subclassified in different ways according to their properties and

dimensions. The properties of concepts can be thought of as attributes or characteristics

of a phenomenon. Some are unique and defining, while others are more constative and

co- occurring. Each property can be dimensionalized by degree along a continuum. The

vast array of resulting concepts is then organized into coherent categories.

Level two codes or **categories** arise from condensing level one codes. Concepts

are grouped together that pertain to the same phenomenon. The researcher at this point

asks questions from the data such as "What does this incident indicate?" Similarities and

differences are distinguished among incidents and similar events define a category while

differences between incidents establish coding boundaries and that is how relationships

among categories are gradually defined. Researchers look for the concepts that fit

together and how they fit together.

Level three codes represent the **theoretical constructs** "which weave the

fractured data back again" (Glaser, 1978,p.116) and demonstrate the existing

relationships among the three level of codes. There is a relationship between the

concepts in terms of how they relate to one another and how they integrate to form a

whole. The constructs are grounded in categorical codes, which preclude the possibility

of abstract theorizing.

The relationship between the concepts in terms of how they relate to each other (syntagmatic structure) and how they integrate to form a whole (paradigmatic structure) is a theoretical one. Grounding the constructs in categorical codes minimizes abstract theorizing, according to Glaser.

3.4.4 The Core Variable

The data can then be further sorted at a more theoretical level by identifying a central "theme" or more specifically, what the literature refers to as either **the core variable** or basic social psychological process. The core variable illuminates the main theme of the participants' behavior and explains what underlies the data, making it a coherent representation of reality. The core variable recurs frequently in the data, links the data together and explains much of the variation in the data. It becomes the basis for the generation of the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Like most theories in the social sciences, grounded theory subscribes to the notion that a theory should aim at achieving simplicity, elegance, utility and parsimony; as a result, a grounded theory ends up including a few theoretical constructs, their categories and properties. This pattern through saturation (completeness of all levels of codes) is said to produce a grounded theory: a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

In this research study, the methodology for arriving at a grounded theory, began with coding the data from the first interview conducted. Memos were consistently added throughout the interviews in order to record the emergence of my thinking process, surrounding the data. " The researcher quickly and spontaneously records his ideas in

order to capture the initially elusive and shifting connections with the data (Hutchinson, 1988,p.126).

Microanalysis: Flip- flop, Red Flag

The process described above was applied to all ten interviews. In grounded theory it is imperative to constantly ask comparative questions of the data. These questions are pertinent in the exploration of the data and to the direction of sampling, and interviewing. To start thinking at a more theoretical level grounded theory methodology advocates for theoretical comparison through **microanalysis.** This is a detailed line by line analysis at the beginning of a study in order to generate initial categories with their assumed properties and dimensions. This process was conducted on the first couple of interviews in the current study. There are a variety of recognized techniques that can be used by an analyst to gain microanalytic insight into the data. The techniques that were used in this study included the **flip-flop** technique (turning the concepts upside down and imagining the opposite) and a **red flag technique** (increasing the awareness of respondent bias by identifying key frequency adverbs like never, always etc.). These techniques are meant to promote greater sensitivity towards the topic being explored. Through this micro- analysis a number of concepts and categories develop, which are further explored as the relationships among the categories begin to establish.

Once the initial interviews were conducted and transcribed, a second set of interviews was arranged. These interviews allowed the participants the opportunity to review the transcript in order to clarify, extend or make changes to the transcripts. It also provided the opportunity to ask the participants significant guiding questions that emerged from the comparative analysis of the first few interviews. These questions are a

means of probing for potential significance with the participants. Responses to these questions manifest variations among participants and as general patterns across the analysis of the second interviews.

3.5 Theoretical Sensitivity

One of the most qualitative aspects of grounded theory is its reliance on theoretical sensitivity. This is a term used to refer to the personal intellectual acumen of the researcher. It is a blend of the attributes of insight, insight (the ability to know the data as if it were your own) and intuition (something Bruner has eloquently described as synonymous with paradigmatic imagination- the ability to extrapolate possible scenarios within a frame) (Bruner, 1962). These two attributes underlie the capacity to understand and separate the pertinent from the non. The sources for theoretical sensitivity come from professional experience, personal experience and literature. My personal experiences and my reflections as an educator allowed me to utilize theoretical sensitivity and recognize what was important in the data and give it meaning.

Once the second interviews were analyzed, I was closer to purposing a theory to address the question: How do ESL students perceive the quality of their high school learning experiences? According to grounded theory methodology, once there is completeness of all level codes and no new conceptual information is available, then the researcher looks towards the literature to find support for the emergent theory. The literature that extends the proposed theory is interwoven with the actual corpus of data.

The theory is articulated with the core variable (main theme) as its central focus. The phases of the core variable serve as subheadings for the elaboration of the study. It is an inductive process that requires the researcher to live with the data. The resulting

theory will be presented in Chapter four, but before delving into its detail, it is worth

considering the means by which the quality of such theories can be evaluated.

3.6 A Quality Grounded Theory: Relevance, Theoretical Sensitivity

A quality grounded theory is evaluated by how it explains major behavioral and

interactional variation in the data. It should be able to predict what will happen under

certain conditions and with given variables; it must also possess **relevance**, which is

related to the core variable and its ability to explain the ongoing processes.

Relevance is clear when the participants recognize the researchers constructs. This means

the participants in the setting immediately recognize and accept the meta language of the

researcher's constructs. **Theoretical sensitivity** and the methodology of allowing the

core variable to emerge out of the data without imposing preconceived ideas are factors

that are thought to engender the relevance of the theory. While substantive theories may

be valid for the studied population, relevance is assumed to pertain to people in similar

situations, allowing for a more generalizeable outcome.

3.7 Limitations and Strengths of the Study

To obtain the richness and depth of understanding, I chose to work with a small

number of participants. As I coded and analyzed the data rather than computer coding

software, (e.g., NUDIST) the sample needed to remain small enough to ensure a thorough

process. While a small sample may limit the generalizability of the findings, the purpose

of this research was to capture a deeper understanding of ESL students' perceptions of

their high school experiences while focusing on profile of participants that reflect a new

aspect of Canada's changing demographics. Despite the sample size, my theoretical

sensitivity suggests that the findings are relevant to other students in different settings

who are in similar situations. The findings are generalizeable to other ESL students overall who are faced with the similar challenges and opportunities as they learn a second language. Validation checks were consistently part of the research process as data was constantly compared and contrasted through a search for unusual circumstances and negative cases.

During the process of theoretical sampling, the researcher makes decisions that limit the breadth of a study by purposefully seeking depth. The choice in favor of depth rather than looking towards other participants from the study site or perhaps from other study sites limits the comparability but enhances the feasibility of a methodologically sound study. Due to the age of the students in the sample and the ethical approval that needs to be obtained before beginning a study, selecting students at various stages of the study would have been difficult. To obtain the richness and depth from the interviews, which formed the primary source of data collection, it was also important for me to spend as much time as possible with the ten participants in order to be trusted and respected before conducting the interviews. This relationship would not have been established if the research was spread over a number of schools.

It is important to acknowledge that I wanted to disrupt the lives of the students as little as possible. Due to the students' varying school timetables and participants from various grades and levels, interacting with the ten participants was a time consuming process. The interviews took longer than anticipated since the communicative ability of the participants was usually much less that their CALP. Given these limitations, the depth of understanding would have suffered if I had chosen multiple sites to conduct the interviews.

This particular study focused on the students and their perceptions about their learning experiences. The participants were the students and the methodology focused on was grounded theory. The students provided the primary source of data and this data was not open to the interpretation from other students, teachers or administrators. While I spent considerable time with one of the ESL teachers, the teacher was fundamental in helping the researcher arrange interviews, providing samples of students' work and allowing me access to her classes and classroom. The interviews were systematically analyzed and interpreted following grounded theory methodology closely.

While the validity and reliability of the study may be questioned by not including multiple perspectives from various stakeholders in the study site. I felt that would have changed the essence of the study and would have been a completely different study altogether. Perhaps a follow up to a study such as this one would be to interview other teachers, administrators and students to identify the perceptions of the other interested parties and examine the relationship between their perspectives and the data provided by the students. I feel confident that through participant observation, the close connection to the students and the data, and the consistent effort to follow grounded theory methodology, there were consistent checks on the validity of the study.

One difficulty that I was not anticipating when I began the study and became clearer as I spent more time with the students in the ESL program was their level of English language proficiency and their ability to articulate their experiences. As articulation was one of the criterions when choosing the participants, it became a challenge to ensure that interested students in the study were also able to share and reflect on their experiences. Although I expected the struggles from beginner learners. I was

surprised by the difficulty that many intermediate and advanced learners had in carrying on a conversation. I felt that it was important to conduct the interviews in English because it provided different insight and a different relationship that could have not been captured with an interpreter translating every word. Nevertheless, some of the depth and emotion in the students' responses was lost due to the inability to clearly articulate their thoughts and feelings in words but the emotion and body language that was conveyed during the interviews appeared as a receiving aspect of the interview memos, and became an integral part of the analytic process.

While this was a small study relative to other research in the field, I feel confident in the thorough approach that was taken throughout the study to ensure that ethical standards were met and that the methodology chosen was closely followed and adhered to. The theory that emerged was an effort to answer the research question and provide more insight into ESL students and education. Chapter four will present and interpret the findings through the presentation of the theory and its theoretical constructs.

One final note, the quality of the research study itself lies in its methodology. More often then not, it is the case with qualitative studies that the methodological rigor is left under articulated. From the onset, this study set a priority on articulating its methodological rigor in order to warrant its grounded theory. The methodological rigor limits the scope of interpretations, but equally limits unfounded inventiveness, one of the dangers of qualitative research that has been identified by Tesch (1990).

CHAPTER 4

THE FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The initial research question that informed this work was: How do ESL students perceive their high school learning experiences? Throughout the study, this question became more focused through the interviews. The data upon analysis indicated a core variable and four categories that ESL students perceived as influencing their high school learning experiences and their overall quality of education.

As discussed in chapter three, the basis of grounded theory is to discover the core variable or main theme. This core variable describes what is going on in the data. It recurs frequently in the data, it links the data together and it explains much of the variation in the data. This core variable becomes the basis for the generation of the theory (Hutchinson, 1988).

The core variable that emerged in this study was the importance of English language proficiency (ELP) to the students. The students perceive that their ELP affects the quality of their high school learning experiences every day. The findings indicate that perceptions of ELP are characterized by the same features as assessment based studies (Klesmer, Collier, etc) have identified. Time, instructional support, socio-cultural influences and personal motivation are seen as key factors, though these elements are more subjectively articulated. For example: This sample of students, while facing many challenges, were also experiencing academic success in content class. Their definition of success was not only academic but also cultural. The importance of ELP to the lives of these students was not only in terms of CALP but also in terms of the role BICS played in

the quality of their learning experiences. This study challenges conventional wisdom in regard to the length of time it takes to develop English language proficiency and the order that BICS and CALP develops for these participants. It was important for this sample of students to develop their basic interpersonal communication skills in order to effectively communicate with native speaking peers and teachers. While students acknowledged the struggles associated with content classes and the need to continue to develop CALP, BICS is where most of the participants fell short of feeling successful.

While the four factors of time, instructional support, socio cultural factors and personal motivation have been identified in quantitative studies, this study is unique in presenting the students' voice and what they perceive as factors that influence their ELP and overall quality of education. The students' voice is powerful in presenting these factors according to their schooling experiences and the way these factors influence their ability to communicate effectively, complete their course requirements and ensure a quality education.

4.2 The Theory

The quality of ESL student's high school learning experiences is determined by their perceived level of English language proficiency. The factors of time, instructional support, socio- cultural influences and personal motivation directly influence their English language proficiency and thus the quality of their education.

The theory is supported by the students' own words taken form the transcribed interviews to enrich the proposed theory. The following chapter will elaborate on the proposed theory by looking at the students' words to support and clarify each factor in more detail to obtain a clearer understanding of the factors that ESL students perceive

influence the quality of their high school experiences. References will also be made to the ESL literature that supports or in some cases contradicts the findings of the researcher.

4.3 The Core Variable -English Language Proficiency

The participants perceived that their level of English language proficiency affects every aspect of their daily lives as students experience the phenomenon of schooling. English language proficiency was defined in great detail in chapter two according to the literature in the field. Collier and Klesmer have lead the way in tracking the development of second language acquisition against the time it takes to compete academically with age peers in the second language (Collier. 1987.1989a, 1989b:Klesmer. 1993). Cummins has developed a framework for the development of language proficiency from BICS to CALP (Cummins. 1981.1982). These findings have influenced the ESL field dramatically and perhaps it has become conventional wisdom for most ESL educators. Many researchers as vital to ESL students' cultural adjustment and educational success, have acknowledged the role of English language proficiency. Watt. Roessingh and Bosetti discussed the essential and determining feature to educational and positive cultural adjustment is the attainment of English language proficiency (1996).

English language proficiency has also been broken down into levels of proficiency according to the definition of an ESL learner as a beginner, intermediate or advanced student. There are various assessment strategies across the country to determine a student's level of English language proficiency. These include standardized testing and more broad based assessments. The participants in this study are assessed using various assessment strategies including a Gates MacGinitie standardized reading

test. Students are placed into a level between one to five, which correlates with the ESL high school curriculum. These levels are broken down from beginner to advanced with level five being a transition into mainstream.

Most of the participants in the study came to Canada with a reading grade level of 4.5 according to the Gates MacGinitie reading test. All of the participants have studied English in their home countries. Their receptive skills, listening and reading, are stronger than their writing and speaking skills. Most of these students were placed in intermediate ESL classes upon arrival to Canada where the focus was more on CALP type instruction focusing on developing academic language proficiency rather than Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS).

All of the participants viewed ELP as essential to their quality of education. The following comments illustrate the importance of ELP to their lives.

Researcher: What do you enjoy about school?

Sean: *Making with friends with others?*

Researcher: Like Whom?

Sean: ESL friends, my English is not good enough for Canadian

Researcher: You don't think you're English is good enough to make friends with Canadians?

Sean: Not really –no- maybe later!

Researcher: When do you think it will happen?

Sean: Maybe about a year- I try speak more English and not in Cantonese

Michael's comments also convey importance of ELP to his daily life.

Researcher: Are you enjoying high school?

Michael: After one year

Researcher: Can you explain that?

Michael: Because of the language problem. And because my language problem makes not friends and you can't be satisfied. You look at teacher and don't know what talking about. When people are talking, you can't understand all words.

Derrick, a participant in grade twelve reflects on his biggest accomplishment and his biggest challenge in high school.

Researcher: What have you accomplished in high school so far that you are the most proud of?

Derrick: Learning English. If you don't have English, you don't know the math questions; you can't make friends, not even watch t.v. programs.

Researcher: What has been the most challenging part of high school?

Derrick: It is still my English!

ELP in this case is mostly related to the students' Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) as they talk about their friends, t.v. and classroom talk.

The theory that the quality of ESL students' high school learning experiences is determined by their perceived level of English language proficiency is influenced by four categories which interrelate and influence one another. The factors of time, instructional support, socio- cultural influences and personal motivation will be elaborated on in the following section.

4.4 Structure of Categories and Constructs

Time affects the level of English language proficiency (ELP) and success in high school

a- All students perceived needing more time to be successful in school

b- Students perceived needing time to develop ELP and complete high school

c- Students' who speak the same language as their ESL peers perceived BICS as a major struggle

d- Students who did not have the same first language peers perceive stronger ties with native English speaking peers and are able to articulate their experiences more clearly.

e- Students resent the concept of time as defined in a school setting

Effective Instructional Support is needed to develop ELP and provide quality education for ESL students

a- Mainstream teachers have not made a paradigm shift to a multilingual- multicultural audience

b- ESL support is perceived as essential to their success and provides a comfort zone for ESL students

c- ESL is seen as temporary and remedial not as a route to achieving bilingualism

Socio- Cultural factors impact relationship with peers and teachers

a- Students who have first language peers depend on their first language peers for comfort and security

b- Students who do not have first language peers express taking more risks

c- Feelings of isolation, frustration, minimal interaction- common perception among students

d- Parental pressure influences motivation to do well in school

e- BICS is a determining factor in establishing relationships with native speaking peers

f- Students want to be understood by teachers and peers

Personal Motivation is a powerful force for students

a- Hard work determines educational progress

b- All students perceive a personal responsibility to do well in school

c- Sacrifices now in school will reap rewards in the future

d- Hopes and beliefs about outcomes of actions keeps them going

4.5 Time affects the level of ELP and success in high school

4.5.1 All students perceived needing more time to be successful in school

Time was defined in various ways in the study. Other researchers such as Early

1992: Watt, Roessingh and Bosetti, 1996b have acknowledged time as a central theme in

the literature. Early discusses time in terms of developing English language proficiency

and the time successful students spent on studying and completing homework (Early,

1992). In the current study, the students were quick to realize that time for them was

essential. As they worked toward bridging the language gap while competing against

their native speaking peers academically in mainstream classes, students discussed the

need for time to develop their English language proficiency. Students viewed learning

English as one of the most difficult things for them to do in high school. They recognized

that learning English took time. It wasn't going to happen over night and that in time

things would be easier for them because they would know more English. This would help them in their classes, making friends, and in their future aspirations.

In the following vignette, Yaca points out the importance of more time for her to complete assignments and the high expectations of her English teacher.

Researcher: What do you believe are the expectations of your English teacher?

Yaca: He wants a lot. Now we're working on Shakespeare on presenting and I was sure I couldn't finish through the weekend. I just found out on Friday and I had other homework assignments and I tried finishing it and today I asked if I could have fifteen minutes just to finish but I couldn't. He always asks a lot. He always gives us at night three chapters and answers the questions at school. Everyone thinks it is too much all the time. He wants too much. He always thinks that we are advance English and thinks we are Canadians. That we can do it. But it's not that easy for us foreign people. We always ask him for more time but we can never. Mrs. X always gives time. She can understand because she is also from a different country when she came and she knows we need more time so she gives us. Like tomorrow she is going to give us an assignment and we have time to bring back for her Friday so we have all this time to work on it. She gives us time but our English teacher, he doesn't.

Laura explains why learning English is difficult for her and the time it takes.

Researcher: Why is learning English difficult for you?

Laura: English is my second language and we have to do everything that other students do. We have to do the same things and I have only been learning English for two years and we have to catch up like fifteen years.

Researcher: What do you mean by catching up?

Laura: Well you have to catch up to others. It is your responsibility catch up. Marks will drop and you won't go to university if you don't.

4.5.2 Students perceived needing time to develop ELP and complete high school

Time also played a role in the way they perceived the need to complete high school. All ten of the participants were determined in completing high school in three years except for Ray who was nineteen and repeating courses that he had failed. In order for this goal to be a feasible one, the students all took or were going to take summer school in order to make up the needed time to attain the credits. The students discussed the need to make effective time- table choices in order to complete the courses they needed for high school graduation and entrance into university. Time was a determining factor, as they did not want to take continuing education courses or be faced with dealing with the age cap of nineteen that limits the completion of their studies in their home high schools. Ray brought insight about the students who are not as successful in mainstream classes and are struggling to complete high school. A view of resentment shadows his statement as he wished for more time in high school.

Researcher: Tell me about what you are going to do next year?

Ray: I want to finish high school here. The teacher better here but I can't stay.

Researcher: Why do you think you couldn't finish high school here?

Ray: English is the problem. Not enough time to learn. Too much homework in regular classes. Expectations high. My English kept me back. Can't make progress.

The inability to sense language progress because of the pressure for content products exacerbates the anxiety about the shortage of time.

4.5.3 Students who speak the same language as their ESL peers perceived BICS as a major struggle

One of the prime criteria for choosing this particular study site was the majority of ESL students from Pacific Rim countries compared to a more varied cultural school. It became evident to the researcher through participant observation, that use of first language in class and out of class was common among all eight participants from Pacific Rim countries. These students would interact with their first language peers and choose to speak in their first language. This was observed during ESL classes, tutorial support classes and during lunch and after school. While the use of first language is important when learning a second language, the students from Pacific Rim countries spoke of the struggles they had when communicating with target language peers and the comfort they sought when communicating in their first language. While this sentiment was more common with the beginners who had been in Canada for less than two years, the more intermediate/ advanced students in the sample expressed the difficulty they still have in participating in conversations with native speaking peers and feeling part of this social group. While they recognize the importance of trying to speak in English, the following statements express the difficulty they perceive using the second language and belonging to their English native peer groups.

Sean in grade eleven talks about the comfort he has with his ESL friends

Researcher: Do you have many native Canadian friends?

Sean: No just a few

Researcher: Is it easier to be friends with ESL students?

Sean: Yes

Researcher: Why?

Sean: Because they all come from different countries and we can find out a lot from

people from the same county by using first language

Researcher: What do you talk about with your ESL friends?

Sean: We talk about many of things like about our past in Hong Kong

Researcher: So would you say that you talk a lot in your first language at school?

Sean: Yeah

Researcher: Is that a good or bad thing?

Sean: I think it is the best conversation because it is most comfortable.

Laura in grade ten expressed the wish to have more Canadian friends but the difficulties

she encounters

Researcher: Can you tell me more about your friends?

Laura: Well, I don't know cause um I really like to make some friends that are

Canadian, but sometimes it's pretty difficult for me to do that um so I don't know.

Researcher: Why do you think it is difficult to make Canadian friends?

Laura: I don't know, but I think because the language and sometimes it's because they

already have known friends for long, so it's pretty difficult to you know talk to them

Researcher: So what was the other thing you said... it's difficult to talk to them and....

Laura: Well they have friends already and it's hard

John in grade twelve talks about the challenges he still encounters as he tries to

communicate with native English speaking peers

Researcher: So in school, do you speak your first language a lot?

John: Yeah sometimes. Yeah with friends that are from Hong Kong too. And I have to

put a lot of effort into trying to communicate with students who are from Canada.

Researcher: Why is that?

John: I have to try to understand what they are talking about sometimes. During the conversation, I have to try to understand what they are talking about.

Researcher: What makes it difficult for you to understand?

John: The topic they are talking about

Researcher: Can you give me an example?

John: Like baseball or basketball games. Sports. Like talking about people. Talking about bad things about other people.

Researcher: Do you think this will change?

John: I think it might change if I stay in Canada more longer time. I might get used to it.

While it has become conventional wisdom that most ESL students attain Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills in less than two years (Cummins, 1981, 1982) I question whether this is the case for this particular sample of students. Depending on their age of arrival and level of English language proficiency upon arrival, most beginner students arrive in Canada and are immersed in the English language and culture in school. Most beginners begin right away with BICS type of instruction with the primary focus of being able to communicate with other students and teachers. This is typically the case for elementary students who come to school with a less fully matured first culture and are placed in the mainstream classroom, with some ESL support. These students are quick to pick up the social language that is heard in classroom, on the playground and on the bus. This social language makes up BICS and it is common for teachers to overestimate the general ELP based on the fluency of BICS. The next step in their development is to become proficient in CALP. While in typical situations, with

younger, less schooled learners. BICS precedes CALP and is often acquired in less than two years; there may be circumstances such as in this study. that CALP actually precedes BICS and that BICS becomes the major hurdle to achieving ELP.

In this particular study the students from Pacific Rim countries have multiple opportunities at school to speak their first language to satisfy their need for social interaction. Upon arrival to Canada, and based on previous English language learning. they are likely to be placed in more intermediate ESL classes where the language focus has shift to a more CALP type of instruction, in order to prepare students for educational success in mainstream classes. While the students do not object and in most cases expect this type of instruction, it also raised a red flag for the researcher in terms of the impact that the absence of BICS will have on these students. This issue will be explored in more detail in Chapter five, but the question inherent in this observation is: If the focus is on CALP in order to experience success in mainstream classes and graduate from high school, what sacrifices are made in terms of BICS? If these students are not interacting with native speaking peers, how will this impact their social relationships with others, and what future impact will this have for them in university and the work force?

Many students alluded to the social isolation that they feel because they can not communicate effectively with native speaking peers.

Michael's comments illustrate this point.

Michael: I wish I could join the group and just like before in Taiwan and just used to be part of the group. This bothers me.

Researcher: So would you say it is difficult to feel part of a group here?

Michael: Yes. Like in Taiwan there was a group of four or five people and they enjoy work, play together, talking together, doing things. Even go to the washroom together. Like here still can't make enough friends and I think it's because of my dialogue, not enough and vocabulary not enough.

Many students also hoped that this would change in time as they learned more English and became more comfortable with it.

One insight that runs contrary to conventional wisdom is that Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills are acquired not only by having the opportunities to communicate with speakers of the native language, but also by instruction that is targeted at BICS and BICS related content. In contexts which do not parallel the young learner scenario, the typical expectations of acquiring BICS in less than two years become unlikely, and there is no guarantee that university level education will in itself do anything to improve the status of BICS.

Researcher in applied linguistics, Wong Fillmore, has noted the importance of the active use of the target language of extreme importance to the acquisition process. This communicative interaction and the negotiation of meaning between learners and competent users of the target language are central to the second language acquisition process. Wong Fillmore's model suggests three components that are integral to this process. (1) learners who realize they need to speak the second language and are motivated to do so: (2) First language speakers who know the language well enough to provide the learners with access to it and to reinforce the need for learning it: and (3) a social setting that brings learners and first language speakers into sufficiently frequent contact to make language learning possible (Wong Fillmore, 1991).

Fillmore's last component emphasizing the social setting reinforces the importance of social contact for ESL students and especially the students in this sample who are struggling in this area.

4.5.4 Students who do not have same language peers perceive stronger ties with Native English speaking peers.

The two students (Yaka and Nikki) who did not have first language peers were more articulate about their experiences and reported taking more risks to speak with native speakers because they had to. Yaca expressed that she did not have full command of her first language because she had traveled a great deal before coming to Canada and never mastered a first language. While Nikki could speak her first language fluently, she did not have many opportunities to speak her first language with other students. These two students expressed that learning English was a distinct need for them. It was essential in their everyday lives. The primary nature of their need for English enabled them to take more risks in using the second language.

Researcher: What are you enjoying about high school

Yaca: The friends. I like I don't know, the friends, if you have communication with people, then you learn the language and you have the friendships.

Researcher: Would you tell me about your friends

Yaca: Most of my friends are Chinese and Canadian. I don't have any friends from my country. There is one person I know from my country and that's all I know. When I came here, I didn't know much. I had to communicate with people and learn the language. I had to communicate and that's how I learned English. In one year I learned too much and if my friend's weren't there I don't think I'd have much English.

4.5.5 Students resent the concept of time

In the data, the students also conveyed resentment towards the concept of time. Most students reported resentment about the discrete aspects of time: i.e. that more time was needed to complete assignments, courses and exams because of their level of English language proficiency but that the time was not always given to them. Most students turned to their first language peers or ESL teacher to accelerate the speed with which they could complete schoolwork on time. Many students felt they needed more time on standardized exams such as end of unit exams or provincial diploma exams.

Yaca discussed needing more time to finish written exams in her English class.

Researcher: What is it like to be a student in your English class?

Yaca: It is hard. The one thing I don't like about English is that whenever we have a test we have to finish early. In an hour and I don't think I can do it in an hour and I always need time.

Researcher: Why do you feel you need more time on exams?

Yaca: The grammar. The developing of English. When I sit and write first I think what I am going to write and then I mark the grammar and the grammar takes time and imagination. Mostly developing.

Researcher: Developing your thoughts?

Yaca: Yes

Resentment towards the age cap of nineteen to complete high school was echoed by Ray who is most aware of the terminal aspect of educational time because he is repeating courses and will need to take continuing education courses once he reaches the age cap. His feelings of frustration are illustrated in his comments.

Researcher: How do you feel about the age cap in high school?

Ray: I feel bad. Want to finish high school her but can't. I'm too old. Have to finish high school at Viscount. Not fair. English is my problem. English has kept me back.

4.6 Effective Instructional Support is needed to develop ELP and provide quality education for ESL students.

The second category that emerged from the data was instructional support and its importance in developing English language proficiency and providing quality education. Instructional support was defined by the students as support received from mainstream teachers, ESL teachers, other students and the school overall.

4.6.1 Mainstream teachers have not made a paradigm shift towards a multilingual-multicultural audience

The findings brought to the forefront the importance of mainstream instruction to students. This instruction is not only important to their success in mainstream classes but also to the continued development of their English language proficiency. The students overwhelmingly expressed the need to be treated the same as other students while taking into consideration the language that ESL students are bridging. This was important for ESL students, as they did not want to be marked on their perceived effort in the course but on their quality of work just as other students. They did however realize that in some cases they might need time to complete certain assignments or finish writing exams due to their English language proficiency.

The students expressed that many mainstream teachers were trying to change some of their instructional practices to cater to ESL students. These included having notes on the overhead for ESL students to copy, group work, and in some instances providing students with more time to complete assignments or projects. While students

alluded to the efforts mainstream teachers are making, upon more discussion of these instructional practices, students also indicated that there have been many times they have sat in class with little understanding of what was happening in class or of the teachers' expectations, regarding their work and their participation.

Jacki discussed her science class and the instructional practices she has observed from her teacher.

Jacki: I have another science class, and the teacher gives us overhead, and she's explaining while we're copying and it's really hard, well I have to copy and my speed compared to others copying is slower and it's like when I'm copying I can't listen to her. It's a problem. Sometimes we have lab stuff, and I would prefer because I have chemistry and physics. And chemistry teacher always demonstrates before we do a lab and it's favorite, because it helps me understand what we are going to do and what we are going to find out. The results and stuff. And some teachers don't do demonstrations ahead and we're so confused about what we should do.

Researcher: So what do they do instead of demonstrations?

Jacki: They just take the textbook and we are going to do the lab on whatever page and OK and you have to go ahead and do it after you finish the lab, do the questions and analyze and it's just like you don't know what to do for the lab and then you have to answer the questions. It's scary.

Sean who commented on the use of the overhead also echoed this point

Sean: A lot of teachers will put on the overhead and I need to copy and they will speak on and on. This is always and you can't copy when you're listening or you can listen but not

copy. Things are getting better now but the first year because of the language it was hard.

Students expressed that while most of their classes consisted of more lecture type classes, they had several opportunities to participate in-group work. The participants expressed most of the time they were the ones that sat and listened while their native speaking peers did most of the talking. The participants expressed that the main reasons in their minimal participation during group work was their lack of confidence in their English and their fear of being embarrassed.

Researcher: Would you like to do more group work in classes?

Laura: I don't like group work

Researcher: Can you tell me why?

Laura: Cause group work is difficult because you have to work with English speakers and sometimes you feel so bad because you can't do anything at all. Very sad, you can't help them to write or read.

Michael also shed some light on the difficulty of group work for ESL students

Researcher: Do you get a chance in your classes to do group work?

Michael: We do but usually they do most of the work and I just sit beside them and give them some advice.

Researcher: Why do you think that happens?

Michael: Not really sure what the teacher is asking at times.

Upon asking for more help after class, many teachers were eager to help, but the help consisted of repeating the instructions over again in hope of understanding. Most of the beginners in the sample discussed most of their experiences in mainstream classes

with little or no participation as they sat and listened but did not understand. Help came

from the ESL teachers as they went to them for explanations and clarification.

Yaca, a grade 10 beginner explains how she feels in mainstream classes.

Researcher: How do mainstream teachers help you in class?

Yaca: My SS studies teacher last year, she kept on saying stuff but not things that I can I

understand. She wouldn't say it easily, so Mrs. X (the ESL teacher) would keep on

explaining it to me and that's how I knew. For beginners it is the best to explain and

repeat.

The students were quick to come to the teachers' defense in terms of instructional

practices. While they agreed it was important for teachers to be responsible for students,

they believed that it was hard for teachers to make any modifications for ESL students

when there may only be two or three ESL students compared to native speakers of

English.

Researcher: How do you feel in your classes?

Sean: Sometimes you feel bad because of the language. My English is not good enough

and sometimes I can't understand some problems and difficult to ask the teacher.

Researcher: Why is it difficult to ask the teacher?

Sean: If you have a problem and you know what the problem is but you can't explain it

in English.

Researcher: What does the teacher do to try and help you?

Sean: I don't ask the teacher.

Researcher: Could you tell me more about that?

Sean: Sometimes I feel I can solve the problems by myself because it is easier than asking the teacher.

Researcher: Is it hard to understand what the teacher is saying?

Sean: Not really but sometimes the teacher has some new vocabulary or pronounces some words that you can't understand and then you can't understand the whole sentences.

Researcher: When you don't understand what the teacher is saying, what do you do?

Sean: I try to listen. It's hard to ask the teacher to explain it to you again because there aren't the many people who don't understand. Just one or two ESL students. Last year I got a social 10 class and I'm the only ESL student in the class, it is too hard for me.

Researcher: How does that make you feel being the only ESL student?

Sean: I feel really bad

Researcher: So what would you like your teachers to do more of to help you when there are only a few students in the class?

Sean: I don't expect them to help too much. Maybe when teachers are asking questions, don't ask me.

The literature review pointed out the importance of integrating language teaching with the teaching of academic content as ESL students may require five years or more to catch up to their native English speaking peers. Cummins discusses the importance for all content teachers to recognize themselves also as teachers of language and provide modifications to instructional programs that integrate language and content appropriate for ESL students (Cummins, 1994).

The patterns in the students' comments indicated a perceived notion that mainstream teachers were willing and wanted to help ESL students but their capacity to provide for ESL students was limited. While they were trying to implement some instructional strategies, these strategies were not fully monitored or carried through or were not modified to help students develop their English language proficiency. While educators are guided by inclusive education, the participants did not feel fully included in their educational surroundings. The findings suggest that mainstream teachers have not made a paradigm shift to a multilingual- or multicultural audience. While teachers may want to effectively provide for the students in the classroom, the students did not perceive that their needs were being met in a multicultural framework. The problem of isolation is made worse by the communicative strategy of avoidance (Tarone, Cohen & Dumas, 1983) used by students in this situation.

While the teachers were not interviewed in this particular study and the research is uniquely from the student perspective, the literature in the field of mainstream teacher perceptions also identifies barriers to participation. In Harklau's study contrasting ESL and mainstream classes, she found that the mainstream offered many social opportunities for language use and interaction with native speaking peers on the face of it, but a closer examination revealed that US newcomers were seldom able to take advantage of such opportunities and perceived a barrier between themselves and U.S. born peers (Harklau, 1994).

From my personal experiences as a teacher and from the literature, it is worth noting that many teachers feel stretched and overwhelmed by the challenge of meeting the diverse needs of learners in the inclusive classroom. These diverse needs embrace

ESL as well as an array of special needs and learning disabilities. The needs of diverse learners and the capacity to provide for these students must be differentiated.

4.6.2 ESL instruction is perceived as essential to students' overall success

All the participants in the study expressed the need and appreciation for ESL instruction. The ESL classroom was perceived as a safe and comfortable environment where students could go to receive help, interact with ESL friends and take a mental break from their unsupported learning efforts.

Students felt that they could go to their ESL teacher at any time of the day and receive help. They spoke of the importance of the place not only for help but also for time to work on their mainstream courses in a comfortable and safe environment. These opportunities were given to them through tutorial drop- in blocks that were offered to ESL students to attend and receive extra support.

The concept of time appeared again in this category. ESL instruction provided students with more time to work on content courses through language support. This extra time allowed them to fully understand what was expected of them and help them explore more abstract concepts such as the ones found in the English and Social Studies curricula. The students spoke of the assistance adjunct classes provided to them as they tried to compete the requirements of English 10. English would be considered a quadrant four type course according to Cummins model (Cummins, 1989). This type of course is context reduced and content demanding. Students were provided with the opportunity to take English 10 through a sheltered adjunct course. The sheltered aspect consisted of English 10 taught by an English teacher only to ESL students catering to ESL needs

through more awareness to ESL needs. The adjunct portion of the course was taught by the ESL teacher who was responsible for making some of the more abstract concepts of English 10 more accessible to ESL students through language scaffolds and various ESL techniques. Adjunct and sheltered courses are a recent innovation in Alberta, and have yet to become the status quo. The student's comments illustrate their views on this initiative.

Researcher: Tell me about your English class?

Yaca: Well I think it is hard. But the way we get help from ESL and English is a lot better and I hope I can have it throughout the whole time. She helps us do it. Like we do it in English really fast but then in ESL she gives us time to work on it. She helps us to develop it.

Researcher: How do you feel about only having other ESL students in your English class?

Yaca: It's good cause you know what you're doing. You have friends to help you and he explains it sometimes more when he knows that nobody understands. In other classes the teachers will just go by. They think you're understanding English. And here you're all in one and you think that you can experience more. Whatever you know, the other ESL students know. You're going in the same level.

Researcher: So how is the ESL part of English 10 helpful?

Yaca: That helps a lot. In English we don't watch movies. We just read through the play. We just read things through. We never described it. And when I go into ESL, Mrs. X, would draw webs, and describe, we watch movies and we watch movies that are similar to it. And then she can explain it more. She would stop half of the movie or

whenever she thinks she needs to and would explain it. In the movie we don't all

understand what they mean so she would stop and explain it in her own words, what's

going on and what they were saying. In ESL if we don't know, we can ask and she is

always willing to help us.

The other students share similar sentiments about the sheltered/ adjunct English course.

There were suggestions of more consistent marking expectations between the teachers

and more communication about student expectations as ways of improving the course.

The ESL classroom also provided students a comfortable setting to interact with

other ESL students. As a participant observer, I observed students helping each other

with assignments and discussion topics both in English and in their first languages. It

was very common to see most of the ESL students in their ESL classrooms during lunch

rather than in the cafeteria, outside or in the hallways. The student's comments reiterated

the ESL classroom as a comfortable, helpful and safe environment. It was the place for

help.

The following participants expressed their viewpoints regarding their ESL classes and

teachers.

Researcher: Can you describe your ESL teachers to me?

Nikki: They get with the students. Like they are like the students. They laugh and things.

They make us try to understand by talking to us the way we like. For example my last

ESL teacher was sure old but she was really good and made me feel good. I really liked

her and I don't mind if she teaches me ESL anytime she wants.

Researcher: How do you get along with the other students in your ESL classes?

Laura: In ESL class, I think in ESL classes it's pretty easy cause people they talk to you in there. It's different than the other classes. The people behind me are asking questions sometimes so we can talk to each other.

Researcher: Are you satisfied with your high school learning experiences so far?

Yaca: Yeah I like it. I think ESL has helped me the most. I think Mrs. X is always willing to help. Even next semester she told me she would help me whenever I want.

These findings are supported by Masahiko's study (Masahiko, 1995) examining newly- arriving Asian high school students' experiences in ESL classrooms. ESL classes offered a haven to relax and relieve some of the tensions students feel in other classes. ESL classes also provide students with more opportunities for active participation (Masahiko, 1995).

4.6.3 ESL is seen as temporary and remedial

While the students acknowledged the importance of ESL instruction to their overall success in high school, there was also a perceived sentiment of ESL support as temporary and remedial. The students expressed that ESL's goal was to help them transition into mainstream classes and get help for their mainstream classes. There was an appreciation for doing well in mainstream classes and graduating from high school.

Researcher: How long do you think an ESL program should be?

Michael: It depends. Everyone is different. I hope I can quit or leave ESL in two years. I have been through one year and next year I hope I can leave it.

Researcher: Why do you hope you can leave ESL?

Michael: It can make me more time to have more space to work on university stuff.

Researcher: Do you think you still need ESL next year?

Michael: About half a course.

Researcher: What kind of ESL course would you want?

Michael: Grade 12 is quite difficult. And working really hard. Maybe ESL can be a little more relax time so I can get help.

Laura's comments also highlight wanting ESL as more of a drop- in or tutorial class.

Researcher: How long do you think a student should be in ESL?

Laura: Two to three years.

Researcher: Can you explain that?

Laura: If you are in Canada for two years, you should understand English pretty well and maybe you should try other classes.

Researcher: Do you still want ESL in grade 11 and 12?

Laura: I don't want to have this class called ESL but I would like to get help from Teacher X if I have a spare. If I have time to ask her but I don't want to have a course that is in my schedule and would take away six periods a week.

This perception of ESL as temporary and remedial has also been acknowledged in the ESL literature as a mainstream perception (Harklau, 1994, Kanno and Applebaum, 1995). While learning second languages such as French or Spanish are regarded as prestigious endeavors, the learning of English has not been seen as the same educational accomplishment. The intellectual activity of learning English has been perceived in hegemonic terms as something that you need to do in order to progress to the important classes that are valued and recognized. The question as to why the importance of

learning the second language is relegated to a peripheral status will be further taken up more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

4.7 Socio- cultural factors impact relationships with peers and teachers

4.7.1 ESL students, who have first language peers, depend on these peers for comfort and security.

Students in the sample who had the opportunity to speak their first language to other first language peers expressed the comfort they felt speaking in their first language. This comfort zone allowed students to interact and converse on a broader range of social language that they could speak fluently and with ease. The students expressed that they sought opportunities to use their first language in and out of the classroom and they chose to communicate in their first language over practicing their second language. Many students expressed that their choice was largely due to the fatigue of listening to and using the second language.

The following conversation with Sean illustrated the fatigue associated with learning a second language and the relationship he perceives with his native speaking English peers.

Sean: School is hard and when you are listening to English all day you get tired. We listen to the teacher and we translate inside our brain from first to second language.

Researcher: Can you tell me more about how you feel tired?

Sean: I'm so tired the last period and I don't want to work anymore. Just the language problem because I have to pay more attention that anyone else.

Researcher: How do you get along with the other students in your classes?

Sean: If we speak the same language, we usually get along but if other students, I seldom talk to other students.

Researcher: Why is that?

Sean: Maybe I don't want to speak English. I think I am not really good in English and I don't want really want to communicate in the language.

The question of the impact of the use of the first language on the students' English language proficiency is recognized again at this point. While recognizing the importance of maintaining the first language when learning a second language, the question of what influence the consistent use of first language has in the school setting also needs to be asked. What influence does this have on the students' development of their Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills? When students do not take the opportunities to use the second language on a consistent basis, students also take the risk of not advancing their ELP in terms of BICS. To associate the responsibility for the choice uniquely on the ESL student and not on the educational institution as well, misrepresents the complexity of acculturation.

4.7.2 Students who do not have first language peers express taking more risks

The two students who did not have first language peers to converse with expressed that they took more risks on a daily basis to communicate in English and thus had opportunities to meet more students and integrate into a broader social network, where English was the lingua franca. They recognized that their need to communicate and to establish social relations motivated them to take more risks at early stages with other students and teachers.

Susan: I hang out mostly with other cultures. I speak English all the time. Only a few men speak my first language. Friends can help you speak the English language.

Yaca talks about the importance of talking English with friends and trying not to speak in the first language.

Yaca: It can be a bad thing to speak your first language. They speak their own language and they don't learn English. If I had somebody from my own language, yes I would speak my own language, but I wouldn't get enough. We have X this year. Her mother doesn't let her go out with Chinese people. She's here with Chinese. She only has one person that she talks Chinese to. The others she tries to speak English. She mostly sits with me so that she can talk to me. Then she asks me to go downtown shopping or go for coffee. And her English always improved. Everyone's English will improve if they communicate with English.

4.7.3 Feelings of isolation, frustration, minimal interaction is a common perception

The participants' relationship with native speaking peers was clearly a disappointing factor for most of the ten participants. While some of the students acknowledged that no type of a relationship existed with native speakers of English, others referred to their native peers as neighbors. This symbolism was explained, as they have never felt close to them as friends but as neighbors that they may say hello or acknowledge their presence neutrally.

Researcher: How do you get along with the other students in you classes?

Michael: Talk to them only neighbors but not further than that.

Researcher: Could you explain that?

Michael: Talk to them only as classmates not friends. Talk to them only through your

work, small talk, nothing deeper than that. Yeah it's sad!

Jacki reflected on her relationships with other students in her class

Researcher: How do you get along with other students in your class

Jacki: It's like we know each other but we don't talk like close, and when we meet on the

hallways, we don't really say hi. It's not like friends but more like classmates. Oh I'll

tell them what the teacher said in class but that's all. We help each other like that.

Researcher: How do you feel about that?

Jacki: I would like to have more friends in class, but it seems like everyone is working in

class and if they have a problem they usually ask their friends first.

Minimal interaction with native speaking peers was common among all the

students' comments. With little interaction in the mainstream classroom and with no

participation in extracurricular activities or clubs, the opportunities to interact with native

speakers of English was minimal. Most students again turned to their level of English

language proficiency as the determining factor for their limited interaction. Students

viewed their ability to communicate effectively with other students in English as

insufficient. Many students believed that as their English got better: their chances to

make more friends would also improve. There was also the sentiment that many students

were not capable of following and adding to conversations on the themes that young

people their age are interested in discussing. They commented about not having the

background knowledge to contribute to the social discussions. Most ESL students have

limited prior knowledge of pop culture themes and felt uncomfortable contributing to conversations with native speaking peers.

In this vignette, Michael explains that ESL instruction can cater more to teaching topics that younger students are interested in order to help them communicate with others.

Researcher: What can teachers do to help you?

Michael: Talk to me and keep talking to me and maybe I can learn the words and way of the English and talk to others.

Researcher: What do you mean by talking?

Michael: Maybe free speaking or talking about some topics like movie, basketball

Researcher: So you want to be able to speak more English so you can be part of a group?

Michael: Yeah I like music and I don't know how to talk to them about music or movies or something and I don't know what they really like. It's quite different from so may of my Chinese friends. English speaking friends are different.

Researcher: How are they different?

Michael: Sometimes they just don't like what you like. It's actually the popular stuff. It's quite difficult talking to them about that.

Beyond Michael's recognition of the opportunity to discuss pop culture in class lies the notion that pop culture is a viable educational content for those who have not been raised in the Canadian culture. Education systems tend to view such content as outside their academic mandate, but for the students in this study, it was perceived as a highly important addition to their educational experience.

Cummins summarize this student perception by stating " access to interaction with English 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. and ESL provision should integrate students into the social and academic mainstream to whatever extent possible" (1994. p. 54).

4.7.4 Parental Support and Pressure

Students were quick to acknowledge parental support and their own high expectations when it came to school. The students did not resent this pressure but viewed it as a supporting factor to their own motivation to do well in school. There was the expectation that their children would complete high school as quickly as possible and attain post-secondary education. While most of the students believed their parents were supportive of their children's efforts. they also acknowledged that their parents had little communication with the school and teachers. other than what the students told them at home.

Ashworth. Cummins and Handscombe (1989) talk about the importance of establishing collaborative relationships with ESL students that encourages them in participating in furthering their children's academic progress. When parents see themselves and are seen by school staff as coeducators of their children. the academic and linguistic growth of ESL students is significantly increased.

Yaca discusses the expectations of her parents regarding school

Researcher: Tell me about your family.

Yaca: Family is the most important to me. There is pressure to do well in school. If marks under seventy, I can't go out. I had to quit work because they were not satisfied with 70% average.

Researcher: Do you feel your parents understand the school system?

Yaca: No they don't understand, but they support me.

Jesse talks about his parents and the expectations they have of him.

Researcher: Tell me about your parents. How do they feel about school?

Jesse: They support me but a lot pressure. Pressure from parents. They want marks. They ask how many marks you have. It's mostly about marks.

The status awarded to educational success as a predictor of a future quality of life differs by culture and socio- economic status. But for the students in this study, families placed on a high priority on educational attainment. English language learning carries a very limited number of educational credits and subsequently it is not thought of in the same light as other areas of study.

4.7.5 ESL students want to be understood by peers and teachers

The students wanted their teachers and peers to know more about them and understand their personal and cultural differences. By knowing more about their backgrounds and personal and cultural attributes, they believed that others would better understand them.

Students discussed the differences between the education systems in Canada and their home countries. One of these major differences was the common educational practice in Canada of asking teachers questions and participating in-group work. It took time for students to make these educational adjustments and they perceived the need to

become more aggressive in the classroom in terms of asking more questions of teachers and peers and taking the risk to participate in more group work situations. Again the students perceived that their English language proficiency along with the cultural influences of their home countries influenced their daily interactions in the classroom. John talks with the researcher about participating in group work.

Researcher: When you are working in a group, how do you contribute?

John: I think there is an equal chance to contribute. It depends on whether you want to contribute or not. Sometimes you always have a chance to say something but you don't want to. Not being aggressive. It is a cultural thing. Maybe I feel like I'm not like the others in the class. I think teachers should communicate more with the students individually. They need to learn about each student individually. This will help in class.

Researcher: What do they need to know?

John: Know more about students' personalities. Sometimes ESL students don't talk to the teachers or other students. Sometimes they don't talk on purpose. If the teacher doesn't talk to them, they will never talk to the teacher.

Researcher: Why is that?

John: Because they put themselves down a little bit. They feel like they're not as good as others. Not as aggressive. I think there should be things to help you be more aggressive?

Researcher: What do you mean by aggressive?

John: Help them be more participating in class.

Researcher: When you want to participate in class, can you describe to me how you feel in your classroom?

John: Maybe I feel it doesn't make much difference whether I was in that class or not. Because I don't participate that much in class.

The students did not perceive a school wide acknowledgement for cultural diversity. Not one student was able to express how they perceived the school recognized cultural diversity. There was certainly no sense of a value added by cultural and linguistic *diversity.*

Researcher: Tell me how you think the school helps you meet native students?

John: There are a lot of clubs but I don't see any of them are based on the intention for different people from different nations to join together.

Laura expressed she wanted to spread this message to the school overall

Laura: I want the students and teachers to know that there is an ESL program in the school and they should understand that when they are talking to an ESL student they should use simple words and talk slower and things like that. Teachers should understand that we are ESL students and we can't do some of the things they ask from us.

Students' cultural identity and first- language abilities need to be valued and embraced in our schools. They provide the personal and academic foundation for growth in English and integration into a new society (Cummins, 1994). Research suggests that students who are valued by schools that reflect society, succeed to a greater extent than students whose backgrounds are devalued (Ogbu, 1978). Enright and McCloskey (1988) encourage educators to allow students to actively use language to express and share their identity in order to feel a sense of belonging or community within the school environment. This will allow students to feel empowered in learning situations and have confidence in their identity and ability to learn (Cummins, 1986b).

4.8 Personal Motivation is a powerful force for students

While the students acknowledged the importance of their parents support (and at times pressure) and instructional support by teachers and peers, there was also a strong and powerful connection to the student's own personal motivation as a crucial factor influencing their ELP and quality of learning experiences. Finiocchiaro (1982) discusses the importance motivation has in language learning. She argues that motivation is not either extrinsic or intrinsic or in more technical terms instrumental or integrative. It does not solely depend on the learner's aptitude, personality or learning strategies. Motivation stems from positive learner and teacher attitudes, which should permeate every stage of the learning process of this process if it is to lead to pleasure and success in language acquisition (Finocchiaro, 1982).

4.8.1 Hard work determines educational progress

This category became apparent early in the study. From the first interview conducted. I couldn't deny the tone in the students' voices and their motivation to do well in school. All of the students viewed learning English as one of the most difficult tasks in high school and one that they constantly needed to work towards. This hard work was perceived as essential if they were to complete the necessary courses they needed to graduate from high school.

Researcher: So how do you feel about your high school learning experiences so far?

Sean: Well we have to work hard. I feel bad because my marks aren't good enough.

Researcher: Why do you say that?

Sean: I expect to get a higher mark and when I don't, I feel sad. I worry about the

future.

Researcher: Why?

Sean: Because if you want to go to university, you have to get an average of 80% in

grade 12 and I haven't got that yet.

Laura also discusses the hard work that she experiences in high school.

Researcher: What do you find the most frustrating about your classes?

Laura: We have lots of homework, exams and low marks. Sometimes they give us too

much homework, we can't handle it. My marks are very important and sometimes I have

low marks.

4.8.2 All students perceived a personal responsibility to do well in school

While the students acknowledged they were influenced by external factors such as

their parents' expectations, they perceived a personal responsibility to do well in school.

The participants perceived that ultimately it was their responsibility to work towards

improving their English language proficiency and completing their course requirements.

Their success depended on their personal effort that they put into school. Although they

recognized that teachers and the schools system could play a vital role in the quality of

education that is provided to them, the ultimate responsibility for educational success in

their eyes stemmed from them and their efforts.

Jacki summed up the sentiment in the following way:

Jacki: You know why you are at school. You know your parents have spent time and

money on you in school but it is your responsibility to succeed in school. Teachers can

help you in the beginning but you need to rely on yourself. You should be in charge.

4.8.3 Sacrifices now will reap rewards in the future

The hard work and effort the students perceive did not come without many sacrifices. All of the participants communicated many hours of homework per evening to complete assignments and to stay on top of their course load. None of the students spoke of extra- curricular activities or clubs that they were involved in. They acknowledged that these sacrifices were made by personal choice and it was worth it as they hoped it would reap the reward of high school graduation and entrance into university.

All of the students echoed similar remarks as those of Derrick's and David's.

Researcher: Are you involved in any clubs or extra- curricular activities at school?

Derrick: There are lots of clubs but I'm not involved. No time

David: No I don't participate. Time is a factor. Too much homework.

4.8.4 Hopes and beliefs about outcomes of actions keeps them going

This last factor was the driving force for the participants. They all had high hopes and beliefs about their futures. This included post-secondary education for all of them. Their actions and sacrifices were all seen as worthwhile endeavors in hope of making their goals and hopes come true.

Nikki: I want to be a chemist just like my mom. Need to get high marks in sciences.

John: I have high marks so I applied to better university than Calgary to become an engineer.

Jacki: I'll go to university and I'll get some work experience. Maybe then I'll go back to Taiwan and work cause it's easier to get a job.

Undeniably, all the participants were motivated to do well in high school and pursue post- secondary education. This educational motivation was common to all the

participants who spoke of the importance of school and the sacrifices that they were willing to make in hope of a brighter future. While they acknowledged they were influenced by external factors. such as parents and teachers, they believed they were personally responsible to learn English and complete their high school requirements.

4.9 Summary:

The findings in this chapter were presented in the form of a theory grounded in the data from the participants. The initial research question: How do ESL students perceive their high school learning experiences? was the basis for the interviews for the participants. Upon analysis of the data. a core variable and four categories emerged indicating what ESL students perceived as influencing their high school learning experiences and their overall quality of education.

The core variable that emerged was the importance of English language proficiency to the students. Many researchers have sighted the importance of English language proficiency as integral to students' academic success. What differentiated this study from other assessment-based studies was the importance of ELP not only in terms of developing their Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency but developing their English for communicative purposes. The development of Basic Interpersonal Skills was a significant factor for this particular sample of students. This distinction between BICS and CALP added a new twist to what we have regarded as conventional wisdom when it comes to how long it takes to develop English language proficiency and the factors that influence the development of ELP. These ideas will be further explored in Chapter five.

There were four categories that were presented in this chapter using the students' own words to support and clarify the factors they perceived as influencing ELP and the quality of their learning experiences. The categories included time, instructional support, socio- cultural influences and personal motivation.

Students saw time as a limiting factor in the school setting. Time was referred to them as in the amount of time they had to complete course requirements and develop their English to communicate competently with native speaking peers. Students addressed the challenges they face as they try to develop their Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills in order to effectively communicate with native speaking peers and teachers. They are hopeful with more time; they will be able to develop communicative competence. Participants also expressed the need for more time to complete course requirements acknowledging the challenges they face as they continue to develop their English Language Proficiency while at the same time completing content classes successfully.

Effective instructional support was seen as integral from both mainstream and ESL teachers. The participants expressed this support was imperative to their success in high school and to their continued development of their English language proficiency. Although students acknowledged the importance of ESL, the notion of ESL as temporary and remedial was evident in the data. This perception of ESL has become a mainstream perception. The implications of ESL as temporary and remedial and not as a route to achieving bilingualism are disturbing and will be further addressed in Chapter five.

Feelings of isolation, frustration and minimal interaction were a commonly held perception in the socio- cultural factors that influence relationships with peers and

teachers. The participants expressed the challenges they face establishing relationships with native speaking peers and the role of BICS in this endeavor. The variation between the students who have first language peers to speak to compared to students who do not offers insight into the importance of developing English for communicative purposes. Other socio- cultural factors such as the influence of parents and the needs for students to be understood were significant factors in understanding the complexity of ESL education.

The final factor of personal motivation presents the driving force for these students. While acknowledging that they are influenced by other external factors such as parents and teachers. the determining force for them is their personal motivation to do well in school and complete high school. They have made personal sacrifices in order to stay focused on their content classes and continue to develop their English language proficiency.

Chapter five will elaborate on the theory presented in Chapter four and the implications that these findings have on ESL education.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS- SUMMARY

5.1 Introduction:

In chapter one I discussed the importance of the topic in terms of gaining a deeper understanding of the perceptions of English as a Second Language students regarding their high school learning experiences so that educators could better meet the educational needs of these students. It was this practical hope that motivated me to connect the theory and research process to communicate the students' experience. I feel that the research was successful in providing valuable insights about the students' experience through a powerful medium: the students' own words.

Whether it was the discussion about the comfort and support of ESL classes, or about coming to the defense of mainstream teachers and their instructional practices, or the adoring manner in which they talk about the friends who have helped them in school, there is one thing that can't be denied. These students are grateful to be in Canada and to have the opportunity to attend high school to make their hopes and dreams a reality. These students are appreciative of their educational opportunities and only hope to be able to work hard enough to meet the educational expectations of their teachers, their parents and themselves. The study provided us with a deeper look into their lifeworlds as they experience the phenomenon of schooling. Through interviewing and observing these students, I was able to formulate a theory as to what factors have influenced the students' high school learning experiences and thus their quality of education. The question now is how can we as educators use this insight to help us understand and plan

in a more informed and grounded manner for ESL students? Chapter five will provide a brief summary of the research, look at the implications of this study and discuss directions for further research.

5.2 Summary:

To summarize the findings, the researcher proposes that the quality of ESL students' high school learning experiences is determined by their perceived level of English language proficiency, which is influenced by four factors. The factors of time, instructional support, socio- cultural influences and personal motivation interrelate and influence one another. While the importance of ELP to the lives of ESL students has been cited by many ESL researchers. I question whether ELP had been given the special instructional consideration that is necessary at the school level and whether the importance of BICS to the students' development of communicative competence has been acknowledged in the ESL literature.

It is also important to explore the significance of the four factors of time, instructional support, socio- cultural influences and personal motivation from a practical stance in order that we as educators have the opportunity to reflect on our practice and engage in conversations with our colleagues about how to better meet the educational needs of ESL students.

As I discuss the implications of these findings. I will not only be addressing the reader from a researcher's point of view. but also from an educator's point of view as I reflect on my own practice and how to best meet the diverse needs of my students.

The core variable: English Language Proficiency

The core variable in this study was the importance of English Language Proficiency to the students. The students perceived that their level of English language proficiency affects the quality of their high school learning experience everyday.

The integral role of English language proficiency can't be denied. While the ESL field has come to understand the importance of BICS and CALP and the number of years it takes to develop English language proficiency, what does ELP look like in our classrooms? In our inclusive settings, how is that we are planning our lessons around the language that is needed for our students to continue to develop their English as they are also learning about their content classes? What are we doing as educators to make sure that all students' voices are given the opportunity to be heard? How have we planned for differentiated learning to meet the diverse needs of the students in our classrooms? These are difficult questions but the reality is that we are responsible as educators to address these questions.

Alberta Learning points out that we are all responsible for the language needs of our students.

" All teachers are ESL teachers. Research has demonstrated that interaction with teachers and students in all subject areas helps students acquire language skills. For that reason, all teachers, while they do not need to be trained in ESL instruction, are encouraged to be aware of which students are receiving special ESL instruction and of strategies to assist those students in acquiring language skills"

(Alberta Learning, 1997,p. 3)

Well I may question that all teachers are ESL teachers, it is without disagreement that we are all responsible to meet the needs of all our students in our classroom regardless of what their diverse need is. If we are teaching in an inclusive setting, then we have the responsibility to our students to provide a quality learning environment for all our learners. While most teachers would not question the latter point, it is through my teaching experiences and the literature, that I would argue that most teachers feel ill- prepared to meet the diverse needs of their students without support and the expertise to provide the instructional strategies needed for a quality learning environment.

The students' comments confirmed that teachers do want to make a difference. They are trying to incorporate strategies to help ESL students in the classroom, but have we made a paradigm shift in the way that we view our classrooms? It can't be denied that our classrooms have become multi-lingual and multi-cultural. Have we really looked at how we can help our students develop their English language proficiency in our mainstream classrooms? Do we know enough about ESL to do that successfully? Is there a discrepancy between the desire to provide for these students and the capacity to be able to do so successfully? Do educators have the opportunity for more meaningful professional development that can be practically implemented in their classrooms, monitored and celebrated? These are real- life issues that face us as educators.

I am also hoping to appeal to Alberta Learning to re-examine the support that is being provided to educators across Alberta in meeting the needs of ESL students. The students' words reinforce the importance of the development of English language proficiency to their academic, social and personal lives. Have we as educators made a

conscious effort to aid these students in developing one of their biggest challenges that they will face in school?

Time affects the level of ELP and success in high school

The students were united in discussing time as a crucial factor related to their success in their high school experiences. Students perceived time as essential to developing their English language proficiency. Time also affected them in the classroom daily in terms of needing more time to finish assignments and write exams but these students are determined to complete high school in three years. Studies like Watt and Roessingh. 1994a. 1994b show that these students have a 50% chance of graduating from high school and the average number of years for ESL students to complete high school is 4.5 years. How is it that these students have a fighting chance of completing high school in three years and doing so successfully? The students were able to shed light on this question as well as the ESL teachers at the school.

The importance of time tabling for these students can't be understated. The ESL teachers, students and guidance counselor's work together to plan a well- sequenced program that allows students to distribute their time towards completing their necessary course work. This means that the first year students enroll in ESL classes and non-academic classes as they adjust to school expectations and work on their English language proficiency. The second and third years are organized to spread out their workload and acquire the necessary credits and courses they will need for their particular requirements for post- secondary education. After the first year they all attend summer school to make that three- year goal towards graduation feasible. This has proved to be successful for many of the ESL students as the majority of ESL students in this program

have the opportunity to finish high school in three years and attend post- secondary education. Perhaps the time- tabling process needs to be given a closer look in order to make valuable time- tabling decisions that will benefit the students.

Students also indicated that course offerings such as the sheltered/ adjunct English 10 class were successful in providing more time and instructional support that was needed to complete English 10. In the sheltered/ adjunct class, there is a mainstream English teacher who teaches the class only to ESL students. English 10 is still the focus of the course, but the teacher is more sensitive to the students' backgrounds and various ESL strategies to assist the students with the course. Students also receive English adjunct support in their ESL class. The goal of the adjunct course is to make the language and concepts more accessible to the ESL students. The overall focus of this sheltered/ adjunct course is to bridge the language gap as students pursue academic English.

This type of course was identified by the students as helpful as they appreciated the extra time and the instructional strategies that were provided to understand the English 10 curriculum. While students provided suggestions as to how to improve this course offering such as more consistency in marking between the teachers, the students were in great favor of the course. Roessingh discusses ESL adjunct instruction that complements the demands of high school English literature courses resulting in the development of ELP and academic success for ESL learners (Roessingh, 1999). Perhaps a closer look at adjunct offerings at the high school level could become feasible as a way for mainstream content teachers and ESL teachers to work together to meet the educational needs of the students.

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills

Time is crucial to the development of English Language Proficiency. Most ESL educators would agree that ELP is seen in terms of BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). In Chapter four I discussed BICS and the role it played for this sample of students. For these participants BICS is as big a challenge as CALP is. Most of the participants were progressing successfully in most content classes but they spoke of the struggles they had when communicating with native speaking peers and the comfort they sought when communicating in their first language. These questions and reflections became important for me as I analyzed the data surrounding this factor.

It is typical for BICS to be acquired in less than two years when the typical situation is present. For example most beginners begin right away with the BICS type of instruction with the primary focus of being able to communicate with other students and teachers. They are immersed in the social language and are quick to pick up the common phrases and gestures that they are constantly surrounded with. This is the case for most beginner elementary students who are placed in the mainstream classroom and are surrounded with the BICS type language on the playground, in the classroom and on the bus. The next logical step for these students is to start to work on CALP. While I am not arguing that in typical situations this is the case, and most students can pick up BICS in less than two years, there may be cases such as with the students in this sample that BICS may not come that easily and may be a continuous struggle for ESL students.

Most of these students come to Canada with some reading and writing skills. This places them in a more beginner /intermediate ESL class upon arrival. While there is

some BICS type instruction in these classes, the focus begins to quickly capture a more CALP type instruction in order to prepare them for academic classes. This type of instruction is not objected to and is expected by most students: nevertheless, a red flag had been raised. If the focus for these students is on CALP in order to experience success in mainstream classes what sacrifices are made in terms of BICS? Perhaps most of the social language may be picked up in the mainstream classrooms and at lunch while talking to native speaking peers, however for this sample, social interaction is not easily done. These students seldom interact with native speaking peers in their other classrooms. While they may have the opportunity to hear the English language, they are not meaningfully using it to communicate with others. Many of the students commented about the minimal participation in mainstream classrooms and the want to be able to communicate with native speaking peers but feeling ill- prepared to do so.

Students also discussed the comfort they felt in speaking in their first language and the way it allowed them to relate to their first language peers. Jackie also commented about how sometimes it is better to talk in your first language outside of the classroom rather than talking to other ESL students who may be pronouncing the words incorrectly and thus learning the improper forms of the language. While I don't question the importance of the first language in learning a second language, what impact will this have on the future of these students? How will this affect their social relationships with others, and what future impact will this have for them in university and the work force where they may be expected to work in groups, have the confidence to give oral presentations, and be expected to communicate with others effectively? I question whether BICS can continue to develop or whether it fossilizes at some point?

While I acknowledge the importance of CALP to the academic lives of these students, I also hear the sorrow in the students' voices as they talk about the social isolation that is felt as they feel uncomfortable in discussing pop- culture themes, working as active and contributing members in group situations and having the confidence to interact with native- speaking peers. Have we overlooked BICS and the importance it has to the lives of our students?

With the changing demographics, we will have more and more students who will be coming to Canada with some English. We may not consider them beginners and place them in more intermediate classes. Students with reading and writing skills may expect that their ESL instruction be geared more at CALP rather than BICS. Yet the students in this sample do perceive value in the social language that they are missing. Again the question becomes, have we placed enough emphasis on the BICS type of instruction and the value it has on the lives of our ESL students in terms of their cultural adjustment, social relationships, and overall confidence? Do we need to set up more opportunities for students to engage in the BICS type instruction in order to prepare them for everyday life? Does instructional support need to emphasize more BICS?

Socio- Cultural Factors Impact Relationships with Peers and Teachers

This leads to the social isolation that was expressed by the participants in the sample. Almost all the participants alluded to the social isolation and the relationship to their English language proficiency. Most hoped as their English developed, so would their friendships with their native speaking peers. All of the students commented on the difficulty of joining social circles, interacting with native speaking peers and contributing in their mainstream classrooms. Most turn to their first language peers, and ESL teachers

for support and comfort through these trying times. While it is common for students to experience feelings of frustration and isolation as they adjust to their new surroundings, is it necessary for these students to feel like this throughout their educational experiences? Students from grades ten to grade twelve in the sample expressed similar feelings. While all schools have various clubs and extra- curricular activities, do schools plan and provide mentorship program that encourage ESL students to become involved in social activities with the support of a mentor? Are these mentorship programs meaningful and long-term rather than an initial week of orientation and then the students are left on their own? Do we as teachers consistently monitor to see how many of our ESL students contribute in our classroom on a consistent basis? And if not, have we explored why through one on one conferencing?

Do our schools authentically celebrate diversity? Are our celebrations one- day organized events exploring the foods and cultural costumes of our students or do we really make a valid effort to learn about our students' beliefs, values and perceptions? Do we really try to understand our students in terms of their personal and cultural differences?

Effective Instructional Support is needed to develop student's English language proficiency and to provide quality education for ESL students.

We are integral to the success of our students. The students' words are a powerful reminder of the importance that our instructional support plays in their lives. From mainstream teachers, to ESL teachers, the students were quick to offer examples of how their teachers provide instructional support to them in the classroom. The students were consistent in acknowledging the importance of their ESL teachers to their lives and their

success in school. They were also quick to talk about how grateful they were for their ESL classes but they were temporary and needed to move into more academic classes. This perception seems to have become a mainstream perception.

Most students view ESL as temporary and remedial. Its goal is perceived as an enablement vehicle for entering the more academic and valued classes. Learning English is not seen as having the same academic prestige as learning French or Spanish. Why is it that ESL students view ESL classes as secondary to the more mainstream "academic classes"? While all of the students appreciated and articulated the importance of ESL, they wanted ESL to take more drop- in or tutorial form after their first year.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this view of ESL education is that ESL is treated as a temporary transitional vehicle by various educational stakeholders. Alberta Learning's mission statements describe the role of ESL classes as facilitating the integration of the student into the regular classroom at the first possible opportunity. Until recently, there was a three year funding cap that would only allow students three years of funding to develop their English language proficiency, while it is well accepted that it takes 5-7 years to become cognitively academically proficient in English. Our ESL curriculum at the high school level also refers to five levels with level five being transition into mainstream.

The students' comments provided insight into the topic. These students value ESL and want it, but not at the expense of academic classes. These academic classes will get them into university. While this reasoning is understandable from a student's point of view, have we as educators placed enough value on learning a second language? Do we emphasize the importance of learning the English language not only as a means of

attaining academic success, but also as a means of providing a quality of education for every day life? Have we as an educational system created the ESL students perceptions of the value of ESL, by under valuing it in the educational process?

Perhaps we need to use the knowledge that we have about ESL theory and the insights of our students to reinvest ESL with educational value. Decisions such as the ones around the number of years of funding for students, the number of credits that can be applied to a high school diploma, and the arbitrary age- cap of nineteen. All students regardless of their language proficiency need to be reconsidered, in order to open the ground for educational reform. There must be a deeper awareness of the challenges of learning a second language and the intellectual and social value of achieving bilingualism for high school aged students.

Personal Motivation is a powerful force for students

While there are many challenges and uncertainties facing the ESL student in our system, one great strength that was evident in the students in the study was their personal motivation to succeed in school. While they are influenced by parents, teachers, and peer expectations, a deeper inner motivation resides in these students to work hard in school. They perceive it as their personal responsibility to do well and this is clear in their comments. This motivation is admirable from a group of students that have and will face many challenges to their educational success in high school. The students acknowledged the differences between schooling in their home countries and Canada. Overall, they are grateful for the educational experiences that Canada provides them. At present, most students choose to sacrifice participation in extra-curricular activities. We must be

careful as educators to make sure supplemental experiences can play a role in the bigger picture of high school education for ESL students.

In this chapter I have raised several questions for which there may not be immediate answers, but these questions demand a deeper scrutiny of our educational responsibilities. The students' voice has been a wonderful learning resource for myself and hopefully for the reader. From the students' perceptions of their high school learning experiences, we were able to map a lifeworld triangulated by accomplishments, challenges and frustrations. These insights about their learning experiences are not truths in themselves, but rather sharpen the image of ESL education, as we reflect on our practice as teachers. Student voice gives us another perspective to consider when figuring out the ESL puzzle.

I believe questions open up the world to reflection, conversation and action. As educators we do have the power to make significant changes in our classrooms. We can become advocates for our students by being more informed about their lives, their needs and their aspirations. We need to make a paradigm shift in our thinking towards a multi-lingual and multi- cultural audience in our school. Our immigrant population continues to increase in Alberta and we see the impact in our classrooms. Our classrooms are becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse and we need to understand what the role of education is in the new context. Any changes we make need to be long-term. The challenges to change need to be recognized and we need to ensure that all educators feel prepared to address diversity in the classroom. Whether it is looking at more specialized ESL teacher preparation programs at the university level or using our ESL experts in the field to provide support to mainstream teachers through team- teaching models, there

needs to be a reaction to the changes that surround us. While all educators are responsible to meet the needs of ESL learners, we must give teachers the tools to do so successfully.

5.3 Directions for Further Research

This study has captured the students' voice regarding their educational experiences. It was the intention to solely focus on the students' perceptions for this particular study. Follow up studies to include the teacher's voice and other stake-holders' voices when considering ESL students and their experiences would supplement the students' voice and provide a broader look at the overall picture. It might be insightful to conduct a qualitative study around mainstream teachers' perceptions of how they meet the needs of their ESL learners and how prepared they feel to meet the changing demands of their classrooms.

Further studies may delve deeper into the importance of BICS to the lives of ESL students. Many questions were brainstormed as to what impact BICS has on their academic, social and personal aspects of their lives. What do ESL students with similar experiences as the students in this study, experience once they are out of high school in post- secondary environments or in the work force? It would have been interesting to track this particular sample of students or perhaps on of these students into university to capture their experiences around the development of their Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and the impact it has on their lives as they move closer to their professional aspirations.

As the immigrant demographics change, it may be of significance to conduct a quantitative study and track information such as the students home country, first language, age of arrival, level of English language proficiency upon arrival and the type

of ESL class student is placed in with the type of service provided. This statistical information may provide a clearer picture of what our changing immigrant profile looks like and more background as to how to best meet their educational needs.

5.4 Final Note

The researcher was able to use the insights provided by the students to formulate a theory to answer the question: How do ESL students perceive their high school learning experiences? The theory that was elaborated on in Chapter four was articulated in the following manner. The quality of ESL students' high school learning experiences is determined by their level of English language proficiency. The factors of time, instructional support, socio- cultural influences and personal motivation directly influence their English language proficiency and thus the quality of their education. As I step back from this research project, it is my hope that the study provides two opportunities. The first is the exploration of the individual issues that the theory brings forth as a means of contextualizing different ESL educational realities across the province. The second opportunity this research provides is the chance to see the power of human experience in understanding the educational realities we create for our students.

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Appendix A

Letter of Information to Participants

Details regarding the research project titled: " ESL Students' Perceptions of their High School Learning Experiences" being conducted by Dora Foscolos under the supervision of Dr. David Watt in the Graduate Division of Educational Research at the University of Calgary.

Dear: (Student Name),

Thank you for thinking about participating in my research project.

Your participation in this study will help us learn more about how you perceive your high school learning experiences. This knowledge will help educators understand what your experiences are like and how they can best use this information to improve the quality of education for ESL students.

You will be asked to participate in a sixty minute recorded conversation around the central question of How do ESL students perceive their high school learning experiences? You will have the opportunity to talk about what you perceive is happening in and out of your classrooms. It is chance for you to talk about the joys and frustrations that you experience as a high school student. Our sessions will be transcribed (typed up) and you will have an opportunity to change, comment, or elaborate on anything that you have said. One or two follow up interviews may be required to help the researcher understand your ideas.

Your participation in this project is strictly voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw from this study, for any reason, you may do so at any time. Any tape recordings and transcripts will be given back to you.

Your participation is strictly confidential. At no time will your name be used. You will choose a pseudonym (fake name) of your choice, which will be used in all discussions and written materials. All project materials such as tapes, transcripts and notes will be kept in a locked cabinet at the university for one year after the study, at which time they will be destroyed.

The identity of all participants will remain confidential. The name of the school, community and any specific identifying information about the participants will not be used in any material related to the project. This means that your participation will no way affect your position within the school or community. It will not affect your learning experiences at school, as the interview sessions will take place outside of your class time.

Please talk to your parents about the research project and feel free to ask me any questions you like. Your parents have a separate consent form to sign. Your participation in this research project would greatly be appreciated.

Thank you

Sincerely.

Dora Foscolos   Telephone: (403) 220- 7564
Graduate Student
Graduate Division of Educational Research
The University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta

T2N 1N4

You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. David Watt

Dr. David Watt   Telephone: (403) 220- 7353
Professor   .
Faculty of Education
The University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta
T2N 1N4

If you have any questions about the research, you may also call the university.

Chair of the Education Joint Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Education
The University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta
T2N 1N4   Telephone: (403) 220- 5626

You may also contact the Office of the Vice President (Research at the University of Calgary at (403) 220-3381

Appendix B

Student Consent Form

By signing this consent form, I am indicating that I have understood the details of this research project and my involvement in it as a participant.

Please complete both copies of the consent form and keep one copy for your records.

The letter for information is for you to keep

I, _____have read and understood this letter and I agree to participate in the research project described above.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Consent form received by the researcher_____(Date)

By the researcher_____(Signature)

Appendix C

Parent's Letter of Information

Dear Parents,

I would like your son or daughter to participate in a research project this year about how ESL students perceive their high school learning experiences. This research will be used to complete a University thesis.

This research will present an opportunity for students to talk about their experiences in high school. The results will be helpful in understanding what students think is happening in and out of their classrooms and how educators can use this information to improve the quality of education for your children and other ESL students.

Each student who participated in the research will be involved in a sixty – minute interview with me and limited number (1-2) follow up interviews. The interviews will be recorded and typed and shown to your child. At this time, your son or daughter will be able to make any changes to what was initially said.

Your child's name will never be recorded or used in any way. Also, the research will not influence your child's learning experience at school in any way. Interviews will not be held during school time. Again, principals, teachers and other school employees will never know what your child has said. This research has the support of the school, the Calgary Board of Education and the university. It is considered to be an important area that could lead to better service for ESL students.

All the information I collect will be kept in a safe place at the University of Calgary. At the end of the research project, all the information collected will be destroyed, including the cassette tapes.

If you decide at any time during the year that you do not want your child to participate in this research project, just call me at 220-7564 and I will withdraw your son or daughter from the study immediately. I will also give your child back any cassette tapes or transcripts at that time. If you require, you can also call my supervisor, Dr. David Watt of the University of Calgary at 220-7353, or you can contact the office of the Vice President at the University 220-3381.

To approve of your son/ daughter's participation in the research project, please sign below and return the consent form with your child. An additional copy of this letter has been provided for you to keep.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Dora Foscolos- Graduate Student at the University of Calgary

Appendix D

Parent Consent Form

By signing this consent form, I am indicating that I have understood the details of the research project and my son or daughter's participation in it.

Please complete both copies of the consent form and keep one for your records.

The letter of information is for you to keep.

I, _____, have read and understand the letter of information, and I agree to my son/ daughter's participation in the research project described above.

_____   _____

Signature   Date

Parent consent form received_____(date)

By the researcher_____(signed or initialed)

Appendix E

Sample Interview Questions

High School Impressions

- Are you enjoying high school?
- What do you like about it?
- What don't you like about it?

Mainstream Classes

- Tell me about the other classes you are taking this semester
- What is it like to be a student in these classes?
- What helps you learn in your classes?

ESL Classes

- Tell me about your ESL program
- How have your ESL classes helped you with mainstream classes?

Peer Support

-How do you get along with other students in your classes?

ESL Programming

-If you could design a better ESL program, what would it look like?

Satisfaction with high school

- Are you satisfied with your high school learning experiences? Why?
- What do you think helps you do well in your classes?
- What do you find frustrating about high school?
- What have you accomplished in school so far that you are most proud of?
- What has been the most challenging part of high school?
- What do you think you will do after high school?