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# Exploring the Linguistic Profile of Gifted ESL Students

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Exploring the Linguistic Profile of Gifted ESL Students

by

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A THESIS

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## **Abstract**

This study gleaned insights into the linguistic profile of gifted English as second language students (ESL). It explored students', parents', and teachers' views of the gifted ESL journey of linguistic development through discussions on vocabulary development strategies, personal traits, and socio-cultural influences. Exploration used a single case study and gave voice to a purposive sample of four students, two parents, and three teachers. Data consisted of Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test (Martin, & Brownell, 2016), background survey, Duckworth's 12-Item Grit Scale (2016b), Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (1990), focus groups with all participant groups, and interviews with students. The setting was a K-12 school where students (a) were enrolled in the same school, (b) were predominantly taught in English, (c) arrived to school with knowledge of a language other than English, (d) identified by the school as gifted and ESL, and (e) were in Grade 8 or 9. Students' profiles showed that developing academic language is important for school success and should not be limited to determining efficacious linguistic strategies as it is also connected to interest and motivation. Parents' and teachers' data confirmed students' results. Findings suggested that the 'good' gifted language learner consciously deploys (a) linguistic strategies, (b) personal traits, and (c) socio-cultural influences for linguistic development. The study proposed a vocabulary development model that classroom practitioners can adopt and adapt. The purpose is to initiate discussions and invite new research on pedagogies that enable academic vocabulary expansion among gifted ESL students.

*Key words:* English as a second language (ESL), giftedness, gifted ESL students, personal traits, socio-cultural influences

## **Preface**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Hoda Kilani. The data collection as described in Chapter 3 were covered by Ethics Certificate ID number REB16-2323, issued by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board for the project “Exploring the Linguistic Profile of Gifted English as Second Language Students” on March 21, 2017.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The numbers of young English as second language (ESL) learners in elementary school classrooms continue to increase in parallel with the sharp rise in the numbers of immigrants and refugees in Canada (Alberta Education, 2013; Government of Canada, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2017). Increasingly, too, these young learners are the Canadian born children of immigrants who speak another language at home and may still be in the early stages of developing their English language proficiency upon their arrival in school.

These students are often academically capable; however, research shows that Canada's educational system fails to adequately address such students' need to build their academic English language proficiency in either the mainstream classroom setting or through specialized, dedicated ESL programming (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995; Pavlov, 2015; Toohey & Derwing, 2008). Further, some ESL students may manifest gifted potential requiring specialized support that they may not receive as a consequence of unidentified or unrecognized need (National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], 2011; Ford, 2003; Harris, Plucker, Rapp, & Martinez, 2009). In the current study, the participants were identified as both high academically proficient ESL students and gifted: thus, their twice exceptional learner profile.

This case study sought to explore gifted ESL students' experiences and investigate the linguistic strategies they use to advance their English proficiency. It examined the vocabulary levels, personal traits including a focus on what is described as *grit* – passion and perseverance in pursuing a personal goal (Duckworth, 2016a), and the linguistic strategies of intellectually gifted ESL students. The study also invited the perspectives of their parents and teachers to glean additional research insights into the socio-cultural dimensions of second language learning to a high level of proficiency. The study's essential contribution goes beyond giving voice to gifted

ESL students, and pinpointing strategies that they use to expand their English vocabulary. It proposes a vocabulary development model that classroom practitioners can adopt and adapt. The purpose is to initiate discussions and invite new research on pedagogies that enable academic vocabulary expansion among gifted ESL students.

This first chapter begins with an overview of the gifted ESL learner context, followed by the study problem, and then the research purpose and questions. My personal assumptions and positioning of the study are provided next. A discussion of the study's significance along with definitions of key terminology and organization of the thesis, conclude this chapter.

## **Background and Context**

The demographic landscape of Canada's large urban centers is changing at an accelerated rate as a consequence of the Canada's immigration policy that is shaped to address Canada's human resource needs for the future. In addition, Canada accepts refugee status immigrants for humanitarian reasons (Government of Canada, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2017). Most striking is the increasing numbers of Canadian born children of immigrants who are in the early stages of developing English language proficiency upon their arrival in kindergarten (Alberta Education, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Their early years may be spent at home in a conversational language minority milieu within the extended family who often live together in a close cultural community. The first language is largely used for communicative purposes and further, is part of their identity construction, as this study will illuminate.

Educational achievement in the K – 12 all-English contexts is significantly influenced by academic language proficiency which in turn is a strong predictor of both reading and writing outcomes in English (Roessingh & Elgie, 2009; Roessingh, H., & Kover, P. (2003).). Longitudinal studies tracking the educational achievement of students with this learner profile indicate that

achieving academic proficiency commensurate with their learning potential or with native English-speaking peers is an on-going challenge (Gunderson, D'Silva, & Odo, 2012; Kim & Garcia, 2014; Roessingh & Elgie, 2009)

One particular challenge that Canadian born children of immigrants face is having to catch up to native speakers of English (Blackburn, Cornish, & Smith, 2016; Jang, Dunlop, Wagner, Youn-Hee, & Zhimei, 2013; Kieffer, 2008; Kim & Garcia, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013; Roessingh & Elgie, 2009; Toohey & Derwig, 2008), a language proficiency level which is necessary for them in order to advance linguistically (Cummins, 2000; Cummins & Persad, 2014; Kieffer, 2008) and perform academically at a similar level as those native speakers (Dennaoui et al., 2016; Jimerson, Patterson, Stein, & Babcock, 2016; Kim & Garcia, 2014; McGloin, 2011; Pavlov, 2015). The heart of this learning differential significantly impacts the level of academic language they are able to acquire and learn in the English-speaking milieu of school (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013; Pavlov, 2015; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). They are forever chasing a moving target as the demands of engaging with academic curricula in English language accelerates over the school years; each year of educational advancement places increasing linguistic and cognitive demands on them (Chall & Jacobs, 2003; Cummins, 2000; Goldenberg, 2013; Hoff, 2013; Roessingh & Elgie, 2009).

The ESL students who participated in this study were identified by their school as intellectually gifted as part of the entry requirements for the school. To frame the discussion for this study: intellectually gifted students have an outstanding intellectual ability that is significantly higher than average and manifest other above average personal traits (Alberta Education, 2015; National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], n.d., 2010; Tannenbaum, 2003). These personal traits often endow them with an ability to envision a goal and plan for its accomplishment

(Biedroń & Pawlak, 2016; Renzulli, 2003; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002; Tannenbaum, 2003). Similar to non-gifted ESL students, gifted ESL students require special programming in order to develop these personal traits (Rogers, 2002) along with their English proficiency. Intellectually gifted students also need challenging work to develop their potential, since a gift will manifest itself within societal influences that offer an enriched environment (Mendaglio, 2007; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011). Further, intellectually gifted students are often known for the asynchronous development of their cognitive, physical, and social-emotional abilities, thus necessitating a supportive environment which accommodates for such uneven development (Alberta Education, 2000, 2015; Silverman, 2009; Tannenbaum, 2003).

Immigrant families typically value education and further, they have high expectations for their educational achievement both within the K – 12 system and for post-secondary schooling attendance. Many of these young children, as mentioned earlier, arrive at school in the early or beginning stages of developing English language proficiency. Thus, many of these young learners are over-looked as gifted, and their potential may go forever unrecognized and unfulfilled (Ford, 2003; Harris et al., 2009). Some, however, realize their academic potential – they are the focus of the study at hand. In short, who are they as individuals, and what contexts for learning – both at home and at school, help to explain their academic achievement.

While recent research identifies specific strategies for developing L2 proficiency among ESL students (Alberta Education, 2009; Gunning & Oxford, 2014; Roessingh, 2012), and for supporting learning among gifted students in the school environment (Aldred, 2005; Fukuda, 2004), little research is available on how to help this dual-focus special needs group utilize linguistic strategies and personal traits for language development. This paucity of research

highlights the importance of exploring the perspectives of gifted ESL students, as well as, those of their parents, and teachers.

In summary, the number of Canadian born ESL students schooled in an English-speaking milieu is increasing. Many do not have the opportunity to reach and maintain a threshold of English proficiency sufficient to succeed academically (Dennaoui et al., 2016; Jang et al., 2013; Jimerson et al., 2016; Kim & Garcia, 2014; McGloin 2011; Pavlov, 2015; Roessingh, 2018). The situation becomes more complex for gifted ESL students who may require additional educational provisions and interventions in order to: reach their potential; deal with their social-emotional complications; have access to academic challenge; and acquire academic vocabulary (Robinson, 2002; Rogers, 2002; Silverman, 2016; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011; Yunus, Sulaiman, & Embi, 2013). The gap in research regarding the linguistic experiences of Canadian born gifted ESL students who succeed academically suggests a valuable and unique opportunity for researching which language strategies, personal traits and socio-cultural opportunities they do use to expand their vocabulary and achieve academic growth. In particular, little research exists among gifted ESL students in Alberta, where the majority language is English.

### **Research Purpose**

This study sought to glean insights into the linguistic strategies, personal traits, and socio-cultural factors that gifted ESL students utilize to expand their English word knowledge and develop proficiency as learners of English as a second language. The research design allowed for an exploration of this use as perceived by a variety of stakeholders. An emphasis on gifted students' precocious ability to persevere when pursuing a personal goal stemmed from research on personal traits of gifted individuals in general (Gagné, 2003; Robinson, 2002; Tannenbaum,

1983; 2003) and specifically from recent research connecting perseverance and passion to enhanced vocabulary development as evidenced among spelling bee contestants (Duckworth, Kirby, Tsukayama, Bernstein, & Ericsson, 2011).

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore the language learning strategies and personal traits of gifted ESL students attending the Advanced Development Academy (ADA) (a pseudonym chosen by the school). My investigation started with a broad research interest around linguistic strategy use for vocabulary development among gifted ESL students in an English milieu school. This area of inquiry informed the following three research questions:

1. How do gifted ESL students deploy language learning strategies to advance their vocabulary development?
2. How do gifted ESL students utilize personal traits for vocabulary development?
3. How do parents and teachers perceive their role in nurturing the linguistic development of their gifted ESL learners?

### **Researcher**

I am a bilingual parent and volunteer reading partner with young ESL students, who ventured into the fields of gifted and ESL research after raising gifted children who were born in Canada. I wished I had access to resources regarding giftedness and guidance specifically on how to raise my gifted children bilingually. Instead, my husband and I spoke only English to our two sons, believing this would give them an academic advantage upon arrival at school. Our extended family, other than my mother-in-law are all proficient in English, and our social circle is also comprised of English speakers. We have no plans to return to Lebanon. There did not seem to be a good reason to provide an opportunity for our sons to speak Lebanese and in retrospect we have

no regrets. Nevertheless, our choices were uniquely ours, and we are fully cognizant of other immigrant families who choose differently, for reasons that are important to them, including community, identity, culture, and communication within a multi-generational family setting.

### **Positioning the Study**

My paradigms of knowledge kept shifting and choosing one stance was challenging. While I mostly identify with the socio-cultural stance (Vygotsky, 1986), I felt that one choice limited my ability to do the research fully. The resolution to this dilemma is reflected in the framework I chose, which relies on: a model of giftedness that embraces the role of heredity, environment, and opportunity (Tannenbaum, 2003); second language acquisition theories (Cummins, 1979a, 1981b; Krashen, 2009; Oxford, 1990) and a socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1986). It was with this multi-faceted framework in mind that I chose case study, as the methodology for my study.

“Literacy is fundamentally about an individual’s capacity to put his/her skills to work in shaping the course of his or her own life” (Government of Alberta, 2009, p. 2). Thinking of school as a literacy space (Bansel, 2013), my personal experiences in school reinforce the importance of the bonds between the school setting, the home, and the community environment. My schooling, with its many opportunities for enriched academic and non-academic skills, fostered the growth of my identity as a learner. School experiences provided opportunities to use different skills and challenged me to experiment with different abilities and new ideas. These memories now drive my passion to research the experiences that leave ESL students similarly empowered.

My move to a new country revealed new social, cultural, economic, political, geographic, and linguistic realities. Working with immigrant parents and children, I learned that while my home and community background ensured a smooth transition to Canada, this was not the case for everyone. Most immigrant parents today are attached to what they refer to as home language, the

first language (L1) they learned to speak at home. Those who speak English as a second language (L2) do not want to lose their L1 and want their children to learn it as well. For those who are not as comfortable speaking L2, L1 is the only language in which they can communicate, and they strongly aspire for their children to continue to speak it. These concerns challenged me to find ways to support the children in such families and led my research direction.

I left my previous country with a self-identity as a competent learner and a strong sense of personal empowerment. These notions were a result of an interplay of supports I received from my academic, social, and cultural environments. Like Cummins (2015), I reflect on what schools today should teach their immigrant students and what they are doing to ensure students will succeed beyond the school walls. When I think of *The Fairy Who Wouldn't Fly* (Davies, 2005), I know that just like the fairy, my community, including my school, helped develop my identity. In return, I now support ESL students every day as they bridge language gaps; exposing them to the value of developing English while encouraging them to build on their parents' first language so they don't lose it.

## **Rationale**

The rationale for this study emanates from my personal background and my curiosity for exploring the experiences of first generation gifted ESL students. The focus is accessing students' accounts of their experiences utilizing linguistic strategies and personal traits to develop academic vocabulary. Overview of prior literature suggested a gap in research and the potential in studying students' perspectives and the perspectives of those supporting them. Language development practices have long been influenced by theoretical perspectives with rare illustrations of how these theories affect students' firsthand experiences. Exploring the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers and identifying particular strategies used for vocabulary development provided a platform



for the views of three stakeholder groups and revealed practical strategies, pedagogical concerns, policy issues and suggestions for further research.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

- *Gifted* – Tannenbaum’s (2003) definition of giftedness in children is adopted herein and denotes “their potential for becoming critically acclaimed performers or exemplary producers of ideas in spheres of activity that enhance the moral, physical, emotional, social, intellectual, or aesthetic life of humanity” (p. 45).
- *English as Second Language (ESL) students* – whether born in Canada or elsewhere, ESL students “first learned to speak, read and/or write a language(s) other than English and whose level of English language proficiency precludes from full participation in learning experiences provided in Alberta schools” (Alberta Education, 2009, p. 1).
- *Language learning strategies* – “thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalized by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks” (Cohen, 2012, p. 136).
- *Academic vocabulary* – Academic vocabulary is vocabulary that is found in educational textbooks (Cummins, & Man, 2007; DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker, & Rivera, 2014). It is used in educational settings and correlates with academic achievement (Roessingh, 2016). It is vocabulary that is considered “a building block for more advanced conceptual knowledge...conceptual vocabulary with enough precision to scaffold other concepts” (Rasinski, Padak, Newton, & Newton, 2008, p. 17).
- *Academic language proficiency* – “the degree to which an individual has access to and expertise in understanding and using the specific kind of language that is employed in educational contexts and is required to complete academic tasks” (Cummins, 2000, p. 66).

- *Grit* – Duckworth et al.’s (2011) definition of grit, “the tendency to pursue long-term challenging goals with perseverance and passion” (p. 175) reflects student participants’ precocity and tenacity to pursue and achieve personal learning goals.
- *Scaffolding* – Scaffolding is a key term that refers to “the temporary assistance by which a teacher helps a learner know how to do something so that the learner will later be able to complete a similar task alone” (Gibbons, 2015, p. 16).

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The literature review, Chapter 2, assembles the framework of the study, starting with a discussion of giftedness with a focus on the elements of the *Star Model* (Tannenbaum, 1983; 2003). The Second Language Acquisition section elaborates on academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1979a), the strategies students deploy to advance this proficiency (Cohen, 2012; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990) and the notion of providing comprehensible input +1 (Krashen, 2009). This leads to the Socio-cultural theory which is presented with a focus on Vygotsky’s (1997) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Chapter 3, the methodology chapter, elaborates the reasons for choosing case study and introduces the setting and participants. It also details data collection, procedure, and data analysis methods. In the subsequent sections, ethical considerations, delimitations and limitations, as well as measures of trustworthiness are discussed. A summary provides an overview of the study design and reiterates the reasons for the chosen methodology.

Chapter 4 unveils findings from the three stakeholder groups. Data tied to the research questions are discussed in Chapter 5. Finally, Chapter 6 considers conclusions drawn from collected data, implications and recommendations for practice, directions for further research, the significance of results, and final thoughts.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The focus of this study resides squarely on young learners who may be thought of as *twice exceptional* – they are both gifted and achieve academically in their second language (English), the language of their schooling experiences. With student participants being identified as both gifted and ESL, the focus on linguistic development, and the inclusion of adult participants as socio-cultural influencers, this case study is informed/framed by three broad domains of research inquiry: giftedness; second language acquisition (SLA) theory; and socio-cultural theory. Giftedness provides background on the gifted learners' experience. SLA details literature on the journey that ESL students take to develop linguistic proficiency. The third pillar of this study considers the social contexts in which these exceptional young learners are able to thrive and manifest their giftedness, seeking explanatory insights from the students, their parents and their teachers.

### **Giftedness**

For the purpose of this study, Tannenbaum's model of giftedness has been adopted. It is described as a Star Model (1983, 2003). The model is comprised of five key elements that are elaborated in this section. I begin with providing a rationale for choosing this conceptual model from among those available in the literature on giftedness.

Numerous conceptions of giftedness advance the significance of personal traits such as above average abilities, approach behaviours, and creativity, when defining giftedness. Renzulli's (2003) Three Ring Conception of Giftedness explains gifted behaviour using the three factors of above average ability, task commitment, and creativity. The Schoolwide Enrichment Model, created to support the development of this gifted behaviour, presents a unique guide for providing enrichment opportunities within the classroom (Renzulli & Reis, 2003). Sternberg's (2003)

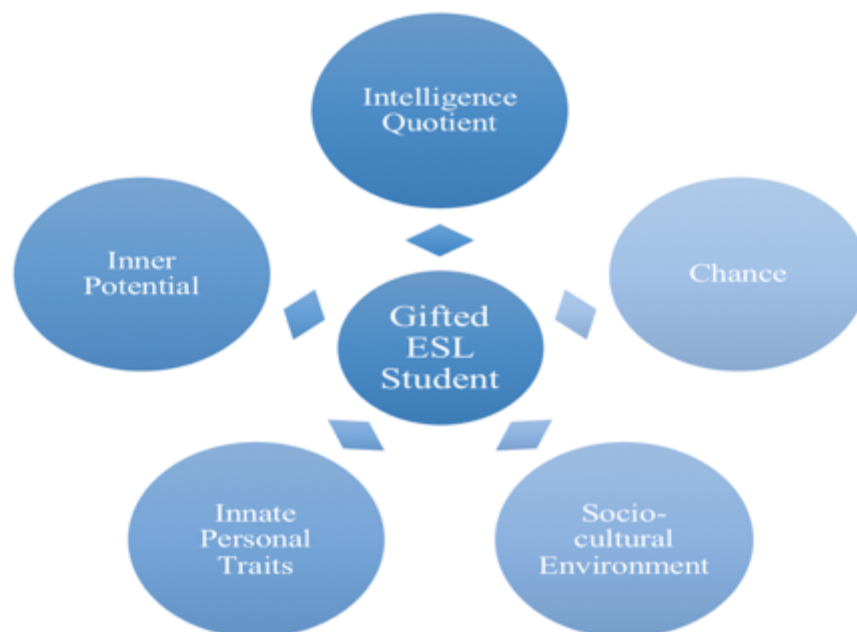
Triarchic Theory of Human Intelligence goes beyond Intelligence Quotient (IQ) and focuses on the three intelligences of analytic giftedness, synthetic giftedness, and practical giftedness. Gardner (2006) takes it further and notes that inborn intelligences can come in many forms including verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical-rhythmic, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist. And finally, Gagné's (2003) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent distinguishes between giftedness as the high potential and talent as the realized potential, and adds intrapersonal catalysts, environmental catalysts, learning and practicing, and chance, as talent development components.

While Renzulli (2003), Sternberg (2003), Gardner (2006), and Gagné (2003) underline the significance of enriched environments in helping gifted students succeed academically, the Star Model gives socio-cultural influences equal status to other factors (Tannenbaum, 2003). Most conceptualizations align with Sternberg's (2003) assertion that gifted students learn better when they are taught "in a way that fits how they think" (p.97), but Tannenbaum (2003) specifically states that "ability alone at an early age is a fair but far from perfect forerunner of eventual success" (p.46). Providing an appropriate environment in and out of school for gift development is an element that the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) (n.d.) highlights as an adult responsibility and it is one that the Star Model portrays as fundamental for students' gift development.

Tannenbaum (2003) also includes chance as part and parcel of the Star Model. The importance of including opportunities for the development of undiscovered potential is also highlighted by many in the field of giftedness (Ford, 2003; Gallagher, 2003; Mendaglio, 2007; Sternberg, 2003) including NAGC (2010): "some gifted children with exceptional aptitude may not demonstrate outstanding levels of achievement due to environmental circumstances such as

limited opportunities to learn as a result of poverty, discrimination, or cultural barriers...” (para. 2). Tannenbaum’s (2003) five components provide a comprehensive model for understanding the process of gift and language development; the focus of this inquiry.

The Star Model (Tannenbaum, 2003) posits that a gift will demonstrate itself if five elements aggregate in a way that contributes not only towards the growth of the coveted potential but also in the development of secondary talents which interact to develop that gift. The concept that gift development occurs through the chance interaction of personal traits and appropriately differentiated environments seems compatible with other conceptions of giftedness, but no others state it as specifically as the Star Model does (see Figure 2.1). The five elements of (a) superior general intellect, (b) potential, (c) personal traits, (d) environment, and (e) chance (Tannenbaum, 2003) are part of the Star Model and are detailed individually in the next section, including how each relates to the study.



*Figure 2.1 Adapted Star Model*

### **Superior general intellect.**

“General intellectual ability, or *g*, may be defined roughly as some kind of mysterious mental strength denoting abstract thinking ability and is shared by a variety of specific competences” (Tannenbaum, 2003, p. 48). It can be measured by an IQ test, thus giving it credibility as a possible predictor of academic and linguistic success (Gardner, 2006). A high IQ score is a sign of superior cognitive abilities common among intellectually gifted students such as heightened awareness, excellent memory, and superior problem-solving skills (Mendaglio, 2007; Tannenbaum, 1983; 2003). IQ is relevant to this study because it is part of the assessment process used to determine attendance at ADA, where an IQ score of 130 +/-5 is required. The assumption is that all students who score at least within this range are gifted and possess superior cognitive abilities.

### **Potential.**

Potential among gifted students is described by NAGC (2010) as an exceptional ability in “any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g. mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g. painting, dance, sports)” (para. 1). Gardner (2006) refers to it as an inborn intelligence that manifests itself in many forms including intellectual and linguistic. While the focus of the study is not on student participants’ potential, their gifted profile may affect their use of linguistic strategies. The assumption is that gifted children are precocious and have special traits such as the patience and maturity to spend time developing their skills and “excel in their own separate ways” (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 132).

### **Personal traits.**

Personal traits shape and develop a gift (Tannenbaum, 2003). Meta-learning is a trait that provides students with the mental ability to prepare for advanced language learning (Ma & Oxford, 2014; Oxford, 1990), while *grit*, persistent and precocious approach behaviours (Costa, 2003;

Duckworth, 2016a), leads “the learner to tune in to the task ahead with the adaptive impulses of a homing pigeon returning to base” (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 157). Other traits such as motivation and self-concept are viewed as links to success (Gagné, 2003; Hu & Nassaji, 2016; Subotnik et al., 2011) and linguistic development (Cohen, 2012).

Research suggests that other factors besides linguistic strategies play a role in language development (Gunning & Oxford, 2014; Krashen, 2009; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008; Pavlov, 2015; Phakiti, Hirsh, & Woodrow, 2013). Nandi (2011) leaves open the question of whether the good language learner is endowed with inherent abilities for exceptional achievement, noting that further research is needed to determine whether personal traits “can be channelled so as to facilitate successful L2 teaching/learning results” (p. 77). The personal traits of meta-learning, approach behaviour, motivation, and self-concept were chosen for this study based on Tannenbaum’s (1983) suggestion that they can be “facilitative characteristics that help to close the gap between potential and fulfillment” (p. 154).

### ***Meta-learning.***

Gifted students “are aware of the need to know the road to excellence before testing whether they can make the journey” (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 156). Meta-learning endows gifted students with the ability and tenacity to prepare for success (Renzulli, 2003; Tannenbaum, 1983). It is closely related to meta-cognition and fosters an ability among gifted students to successfully plan and process how and what they want to learn (Barfurth, Ritchie, Irving, & Shore, 2009; Costa, 2003; Gallagher, 2003). It empowers them to be active thinkers (Chan, 1996) and good language learners (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002; Yunus, et al., 2013). Whether referring to meta-learning or meta-cognition, the focus of this study is on gaining insights into the strong metalinguistic trait they

equip gifted students with, which in turn accounts for their superior phonological awareness and leads them to excel linguistically (McBride-Chang, Manis, & Wagner, 1996; Tannenbaum, 2003).

### ***Approach Behaviour.***

“Every act of excellence has its own requirements” (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 157). The need to act may stem from personal values which predict how students behave and how they act when taking on a task (Boer & Fischer, 2013). Successful gifted students tend to follow a behaviour termed self-management (Gagné, 2003) or task commitment (Renzulli, 2003). Recent research suggests that this behaviour can be taught (Duckworth, 2016a). It is associated with having the grit to put in the effort and persevere (Gagné, 2003; Subotnik et al., 2011; Rogers, 2002).

Grit describes the passion and precocity for task commitment and self-management that some gifted students have (Renzulli, 2003). Duckworth et al.’s definition (2011) of grit is descriptive of the resolve that is common among ambitious gifted students (Tannenbaum, 2003). Duckworth (2016a) relates grit to putting in the hours and the effort needed to excel. It is an approach behaviour that can be assessed (Duckworth, 2016b; Duckworth et al., 2011) and developed (Duckworth, 2016a). Grit affords Spelling Bee contestants the drive to deliberately practice and learn new words (Duckworth et al., 2011). It also explains some university ESL students’ persistence to succeed despite and perhaps in spite of their low language proficiency (Jimerson et al., 2016; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). Research connects this drive to accomplish and learn a language to motivation (Hu & Nassaji, 2016; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Subotnik et al., 2011; Tannenbaum, 2003) which is discussed next.

### ***Motivation.***

Motivation, combined with general and domain-specific ability, approach behaviour including task commitment, opportunity, and chance lead to outstanding performance among



gifted students (Gagné, 2003; Subotnik et al., 2011; Tannenbaum, 2003). It explains the passion that gets students interested in learning a second language (Cohen, 2012; Harmer, 2001; Hu & Nassaji, 2016; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Phakiti et al., 2013) and willing to try new learning strategies (Li & Qin, 2006; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Gagné (2003) includes interest and need as catalysts for motivation. "Motivation is a concept that explains why people behave as they do rather than how successful their behavior will be" (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005, p. 20). This definition associates motivation to develop a second language with behaviour. Dörnyei (2003) reports that understanding such behaviour needs to include looking at students' willingness (a) to communicate in the new language, (b) to engage in language learning tasks, and (c) to utilize linguistic strategies. Another definition describes motivation as an investment. "Learners will expect or hope to have a good return on that investment-a return that will give them access to hitherto unattainable resources" (Norton-Peirce, 1995, p. 17). The relationship of motivation to language development is not new and it is usually apparent in students' attitudes towards learning a language (Cohen, 2012; Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Lambert, 1973; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 2014).

### ***Self-concept.***

Motivation stems from the need to satisfy the self (Maslow, 1968). This self has been found to directly affect individuals' motivation to learn (Fukuda, 2004; Rogers, 2007). Self-concept "is the subjective image we each have of ourselves and that we spend our lives maintaining and enhancing" (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 165). It explains how individuals feel about themselves and their roles in life (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). It is also associated with the ambition to succeed (Tannenbaum, 2003) and to develop a language (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005). For example, academically successful gifted students are often known for their positive self-concept (Marsh & Scalas, 2011; Robinson, 2002).

## **Environment.**

Personal traits are shaped by the socio-cultural environment (Pajares & Schunk, 2002; Subotnik et al., 2011). “Human potential needs nurturance, urgings, encouragement, and even pressures from a world that cares” (Tannenbaum, 2003, p. 54). Parents and teachers have the responsibility to support the development of students’ potential (NAGC, n.d.). They are expected to meet the dual needs of gifted ESL students without having a clear understanding of these needs. The importance of their role in supporting the development of academic and social/emotional skills (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Subotnik et al., 2011) and academic vocabulary proficiency (Hoff, 2013; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Tong, Luo, Irby, Lara-Alecio, & Rivera, 2017) is clear.

Staying informed is a key strategy for parents of gifted ESL students since “parents can greatly facilitate their gifted child's development by helping him or her develop a positive attitude toward learning as well as a sense of self-confidence” (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983, p. 24). Parents can create a challenging environment that supports the development of students’ personal traits (Robinson, 2002) and cognitive skills (Hein, Tan, Aljughaiman, & Grigorenko, 2014; Vygotsky, 1963).

An effective student-teacher-parent relationship cultivates parents’ understanding of giftedness and enhances their ability to support their children and their children’s teachers (Weber & Stanley, 2012). Teachers are the daily nurturers and facilitators of academic learning; they also need specialized training to acquire sound pedagogical approaches to support gift (Gallagher, 2003; Tannenbaum, 1983) and language (Lucas et al., 2008; Pavlov, 2015) development. A recent study investigated the difference between the self-efficacy and self-esteem among gifted students attending a gifted program and non-gifted students outside the gifted program. Results revealed

that gifted students' self-efficacy and self-esteem were lower than those of non-gifted students, despite gifted students' higher grade-point-average. This was due to the teacher's style as "she discouraged students from asking anything that may go against something she has taught" (Edins, 2009, p. 48). Moreover, teachers who receive specialized training in second language instruction may help in increasing academic vocabulary among ESL students (Tong et al., 2017). Ongoing staff professional development is key to providing an environment that supports language development while also nurturing the abilities of gifted ESL students (Gallagher, 2003; Harris et al., 2009; Pavlov, 2015; Scott, 2008).

### **Chance.**

Chance is an opportunity that randomly presents itself, thus allowing students to develop their gifts and their vocabulary. The occurrence of positive chance is closely related to achievement (Duckworth, 2016a; Tannenbaum, 1983). Some gifted students may arrive at a school that is not understanding of their gifted needs, or worse, they may never get identified as gifted and thus may never fulfill their potential (Chua, 2014; Subotnik et al., 2011).

While it is an element that cannot be controlled, chance provided student participants with favourable opportunities in: being identified as both gifted and ESL; being accepted into a school that understands their gifted and ESL needs; and being surrounded by adults who aim to provide the nurturance necessary for the development of their gifts and language skills. It is an element that can be enhanced by mentors, teachers, and parents who recognize the child's needs and provide rich opportunities such as sharing educational resources, dedicating individual time, and financing extracurricular activities. Chance is important for developing gifted potential and linguistic level since "without some experience of good fortune, no amount of potential can be truly realized" (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 209).

## **Second Language Acquisition (SLA)**

This section reviews SLA theory and elaborates on basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1979a). This includes the literature on the strategies these students deploy in advancing their academic language (Cohen, 2012; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). Broad principles of second language teaching are explained, drawing especially on Krashen's (2009) notion of providing comprehensible input +1 (*i+1*). This offers a segue into the final section on socio-cultural theory and the contexts in which all children grow and learn.

### **Academic language proficiency.**

#### ***BICS versus CALP.***

Cummins (1979a) posits a conceptual framework of BICS and CALP as key variables that distinguish those who achieve academic success. BICS and CALP were coined to describe language use in contexts that increasingly move from the *here and now* to abstract uses of language that require low frequency word knowledge. Though the model has been contested in the literature for its simplification and dichotomy of a complicated concept (Aukerman, 2007; Scarcella, 2003; Valdéz, 2004), I have adopted it for the purposes of this inquiry. Cummins has taken to time to respond to these scholars (2008), the model is widely recognized in the field, it is accessible and intuitive to a practitioner audience, and continues to provide strong theoretical insights into the processes and thresholds for academic success in second language learning (Cummins, 2008) including the work at hand among gifted learners.

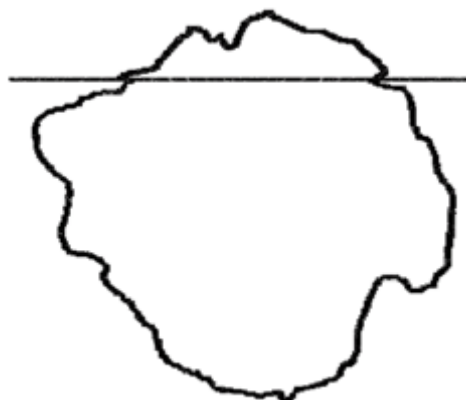


Figure 2.2 Cummins' BICS/CALP Model.

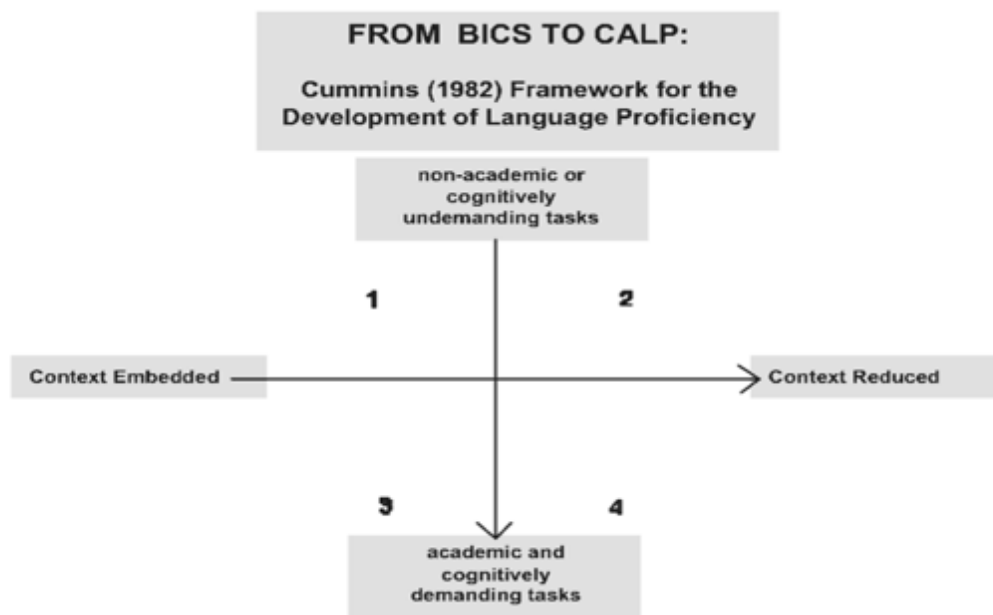
Adapted from *BICS-CALP: An introduction for some, a review for others* (p.91) by H. Roessingh, (2006). TESL Canada Journal, 23 (2), 91-96. Adapted with permission.

Figure 2.2 illustrates Cummins' model (1979a, 1981b) by way of a dual iceberg metaphor. BICS comprises the surface features of L1 and L2 use: the everyday, context-embedded, conversational exchanges that can be realized with a vocabulary size of perhaps 2,000 – 5,000 high frequency words. Learners can generally acquire BICS proficiency within 2 years of arrival or immersion in L2 settings. CALP level proficiency, on the other hand, is a long, gradual and protracted process that requires instructed support and time (Cummins, 1979a; Dennaoui et al., 2016; Kieffer, 2008; Scarcella, 2003; Schleppegrell, 2012). It takes about 5 to 7 years to move from BICS to CALP (Cummins, 1981a), and some students may never make this jump without strategic nurturance. CALP is characterized by language that is context reduced, metaphoric, technical, abstract and complex (Cummins, 1981b; Scarcella, 2003). Note the 2 peaks on the surface of the iceberg, and the depth of the invisible, underlying CALP.

### ***Critical elements of CALP.***

Cummins' (1981b, 2000) *Framework of Language Proficiency* divides language development into four quadrants. It views language learning as dependent on the level of available context and students' ability to understand it (see Figure 2.3). The assumption is that students

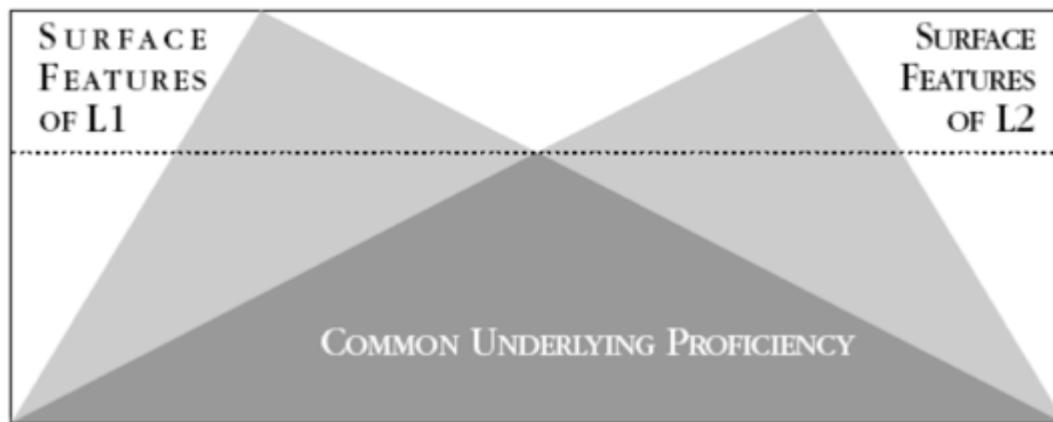
acquire BICS proficiency in quadrants one and two through exposure and experience in everyday conversational contexts. In quadrant three, tasks become cognitively demanding and higher proficiency is required. Tasks are even more challenging in quadrant four; they become more cognitively demanding and context is reduced, thus increasing the risk of ESL students becoming unable to succeed academically (Roessingh, 2006).



*Figure 2.3 Cummins Framework of Language Proficiency.*  
Adapted from *BICS-CALP: An introduction for some, a review for others* (p.92) by H. Roessingh, (2006). TESL Canada Journal, 23 (2), 91-96. Adapted with permission.

Progress through the four quadrants requires structured mentoring and scaffolding by educated professionals (Roessingh & Kover, 2003). The effect of this projected change in cognitive load is evident in the grade four slump (Chall & Jacobs, 2003), a time when students start presenting with academic problems (Dennaoui et al., 2016; Kim & Garcia, 2014; Roessingh, 2012). Grade four is recognized as an important threshold for this transfer potential to occur and coincides with a literacy threshold where learners shift from learning to read, to reading to learn (Chall & Jacobs, 2003). Students who arrive at school with little developed L1 CALP are faced

with the challenge of having to develop CALP through literacy learning in L2 (Cummins, 1981a). Their trajectory has been described as forever chasing a moving target as they juggle the exigencies of L1 communicative demands and L2 academic demands of CALP for engagement with schooling tasks (Hoff, 2013; Roessingh, 2008).



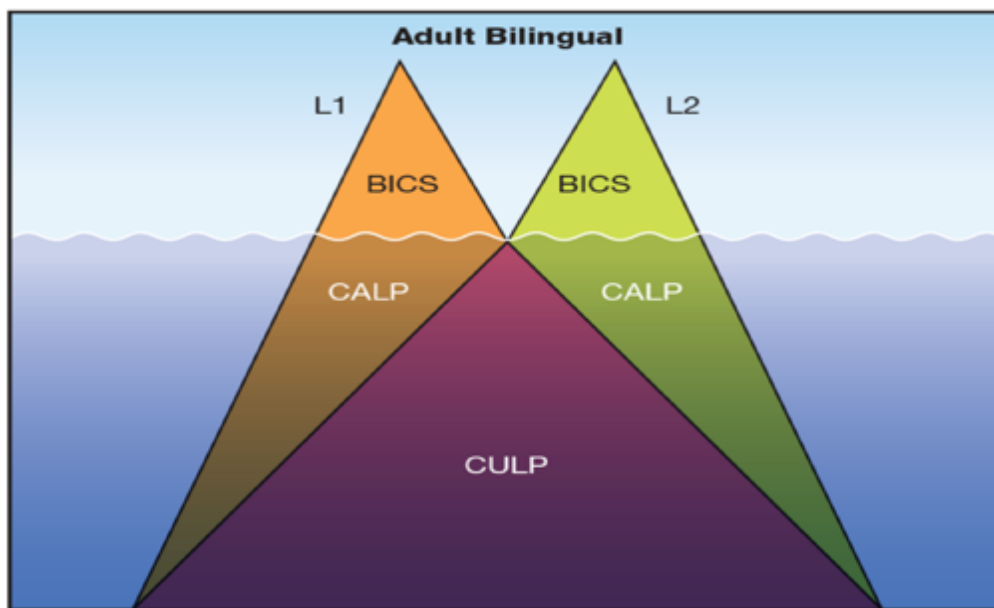
*Figure 2.4* Dual Iceberg Representation of Bilingual Proficiency.

Adapted from “Variability of ESL learners’ acquisition of cognitive academic language proficiency: What can we learn from achievement measures?” by H. Roessingh and P. Kover, 2003, *TESL Canada Journal*, 21(1), p.6. Adapted with permission.

Cummins (1979b) posits that a threshold L1 level is needed for students to develop L2 and function in quadrant 4. He (1979b, 1983, 2000) advances the importance of L1 CALP, connecting it to the development of L2 proficiency. The *Dual Iceberg of Bilingual Proficiency* (Cummins, 1981b) provides an image of how bilingual students’ L2 is developed using L1 (see Figure 2.4). The below-the-surface *Common Underlying Proficiency* (CUP) clarifies how students who have L1 CALP build their academic L2.

Students who are highly proficient in L1 will find it easier to develop L2 CALP (Cummins, 1979b, 1980, 1983). Yet, for some ESL students who are born in Canada or arrive at a young age, this is a level that they may never achieve (Roessingh, 2008). Some scholars relate the use of academic language at home from a young age to progress in school (Hoff, 2013; Scheele, Leseman, Mayo, & Elbers, 2012), and others state that a high L1 proficiency facilitates the acquisition of

CALP in L2 (Krashen & McField, 2005; MacWhinney, 1997; Roessingh, 2008; Roessingh & Kover, 2003; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005). This suggests that L1 skills can be viewed as building blocks that students borrow and apply to develop L2 CALP (Cummins, 1981a; MacWhinney, 1997). Figure 2.5 illustrates this relationship.



*Figure 2.5 Iceberg Representation of a High Balanced Adult Bilingual.*  
Adapted with permission H. Roessingh, email, November 10, 2015.

### **First and second language acquisition/interaction.**

#### ***Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP).***

Recent research supports maintaining L1 and becoming bilingual (Genesee, 2008) even when L1 is only spoken at home (Saville-Troike, 1984). Cummins' CUP theory illustrates how "experience with either language can, theoretically, promote the development of the proficiency underlying both languages, given adequate motivation and exposure to both" (1980, p. 95). Cognitive understandings that have already been developed in L1 can readily be transferred into L2 with support to map new linguistic information onto pre-existing mental models/understandings (Genesee, 2008). Several researchers encourage bilingualism, citing that

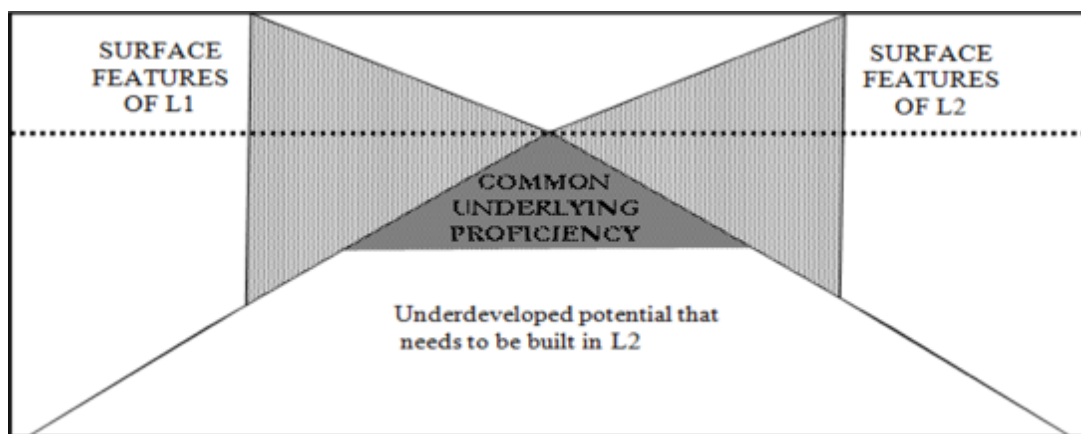


students in bilingual schools who develop L1 to academic levels will perform better in L2 than those in English only systems (Cummins, 2000; Krashen & McField, 2005; Reyes, Kenner, Moll, & Orellana, 2012; Rolstad et al., 2005).

### ***Balanced bilinguals.***

An understanding of second language learning is advanced by examining the significant research available on bilingualism (Bialystok, 2001; Genesee, 2006); with some researchers proposing the *emergent bilinguals* label as one that is more appropriate since it is not laden with the negative connotation that labels such as ESL students may imply (Garcia, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008). For the purpose of this study, the concept of *balanced bilinguals* presents a unique lens for reviewing first and second language acquisition. *Balanced bilinguals* are “bilinguals who have attained a similar level of skills in both languages” (Cummins, 1976, p. 36).

The ideal, but rare, situation for *balanced bilinguals*, also referred to as equilingual or ambilingual (Baker, 2011), is having CALP proficiency in L1 and L2 which enables higher cognitive levels and academic success. However, the more common bilingual profile is uneven, and among young learners, L2 typically must outdistance L1 for purposes of academic literacy development. L1 may be reserved for communicative purposes (BICS), while CALP-like proficiency is generally developed/learned in the context of schooling experiences.



*Figure 2.6* Visual of Underdeveloped Proficiency.

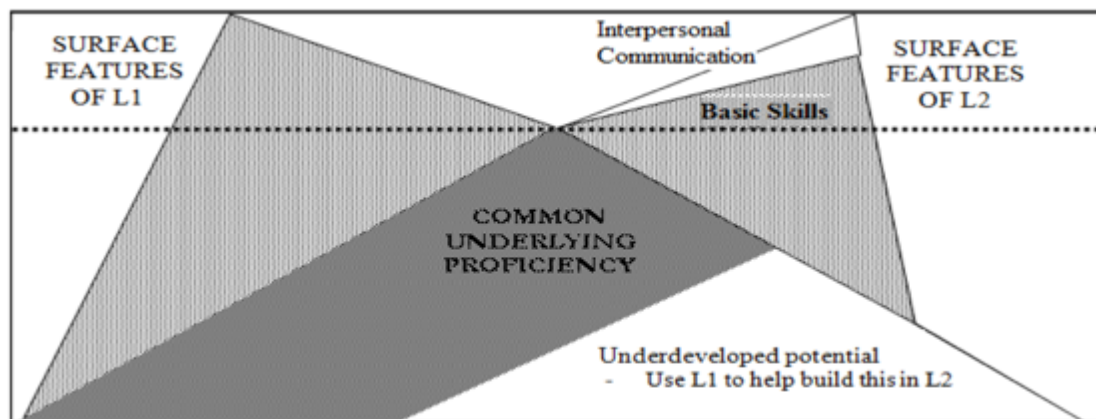
Adapted from “Variability of ESL learners’ acquisition of cognitive academic language proficiency: What can we learn from achievement measures?” by H. Roessingh and P. Kover, 2003, *TESL Canada Journal*, 21(1), p.6. Adapted with permission.

A concern arises (Roessingh & Kover, 2003) when students remain at a low balanced bilingual level or below the threshold level (see Figure 2.6). This situation is common among ESL students in English schools who may neither have access to the recommended academic L1 exposure out of school (Dennaoui et al., 2016; Wong Fillmore, 2000) nor do they have sufficient support to develop academic literacy (CALP) in the context of the mainstream classroom (Roessingh & Kover, 2003; Toohey & Derwing, 2008). These young students are linguistically vulnerable as a consequence of low levels of proficiency in both L1 and L2. They need targeted support from nurturing adults, which highlights the important role that parents/teachers and other mentors play in L1 and L2 vocabulary development (Dennaoui et al., 2016). Home and school environments are key in providing the nurturing adults. Adults’ interactions need to be deliberate, thus ensuring that gifted ESL students in particular regularly access strategies that keep them challenged and aid in developing linguistic awareness (Corson, 1997; Hoff, 2013).

### **Advancing the development of CALP.**

#### ***Developing CALP.***

Despite consistent research highlighting the importance of developing L1 academic proficiency, a concern remains that the L1 used at home among ESL students schooled in English speaking milieus, may not be at a CALP level that reflects positively on the progress of their L2 proficiency (Roessingh & Kover, 2003). Research confirms the need to scaffold these students in order to build conscious metacognitive awareness of L2 use (Cohen, 2012; Corson, 1997; Shoari & Aidinlou, 2015). Research also finds that ESL students' low frequency L2 vocabulary increases when they cooperate with native English speakers (Dennaoui et al., 2016; Moore & Schleppegrell, 2014; Oxford, 1990). Roessingh and Kover (2003) propose developing L1 CALP at home at a young age to ease the acquisition of L2. This proposition highlights the significance of informing parents of the importance of maintaining and developing L1 CALP at home (Dennaoui et al., 2016). Figure 2.7 details the effect of developed L1 on L2 development.

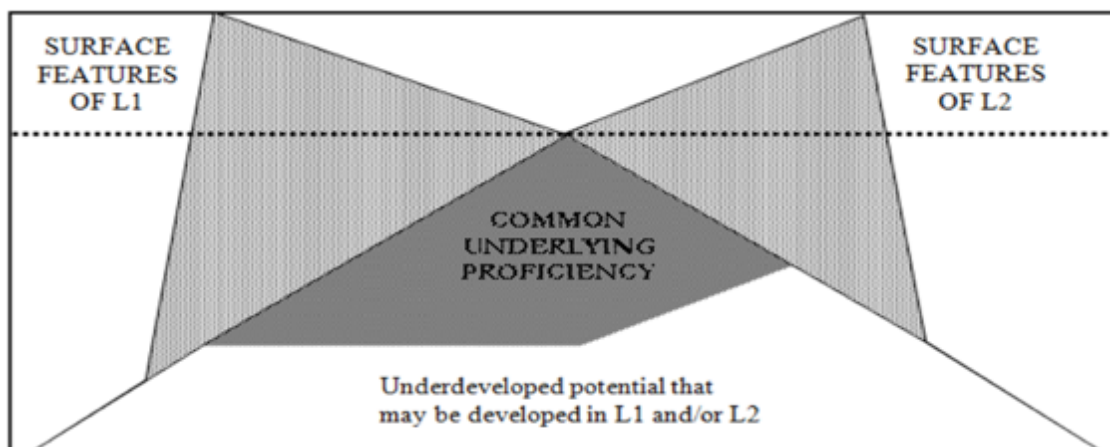


*Figure 2.7 L1 Effect on L2 Development.*

Adapted from “Variability of ESL learners’ acquisition of cognitive academic language proficiency: What can we learn from achievement measures?” by H. Roessingh and P. Kover, 2003, *TESL Canada Journal*, 21(1), p.8. Adapted with permission.

Some students who arrive in Canada at a young age do not fare as well as older arrivals in developing CALP in either language (Cummins, 1981a) and suffer when they reach university (Roessingh & Kover, 2003; Gunderson et al., 2012). They are at risk since they may either have lost their parents’ first language (L1) or not developed it to an academic level (Wong Fillmore,

2000) that allows them to develop L2 CALP (see Figure 2.8). Roessingh and Kover's (2003) *Model for Developing Academic Proficiency* demonstrates that with increased focus on language, concepts and strategies in terms of hours invested and direct instruction, L2 CALP development is possible at any level.



*Figure 2.8 Uneven Bilingual Proficiency Iceberg.*

Adapted from “Variability of ESL learners’ acquisition of cognitive academic language proficiency: What can we learn from achievement measures?” by H. Roessingh and P. Kover, 2003, *TESL Canada Journal*, 21(1), p.7. Adapted with permission.

Roessingh (2012) stresses the importance of deliberate classroom practices that provide meaningful engagement with academic material for L2 CALP development to occur. Her findings promote instruction for ESL students that is directed towards increasing academic vocabulary. She connects the grade four slump to students’ lack of low frequency words which are crucial for their academic growth. This explains the need to start developing CALP English proficiency in the early grades (Biemiller, 2001; Roessingh, 2018) before task expectations require higher language proficiency (Dennaoui et al., 2016; Roessingh, 2012; 2018). It is a time when students can benefit and build a CALP knowledge base that can be sustained and developed over time.

### ***Conscious focus on strategy.***

Linguistic strategies “are the L2 learner’s tool kit for active, conscious, purposeful, and attentive learning, and they pave the way toward greater proficiency, learner autonomy, and self-

regulation” (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002, p. 372). This tool kit includes strategy deployment and personal traits of the good language learner. Language learning involves conscious awareness of strategy deployment and an ability to monitor whether or not the strategy is working. A conscious focus on the strategies used is rarely given the weight it deserves (Oxford, 1990) despite recent research that continues to highlight its importance (Hu & Nassaji, 2016; Lawrence, Capotosto, Branum-Martin, White, & Snow, 2012; Moore & Schleppegrell, 2014; Tong et al., 2017).

Corson (1997) recognizes the need to teach “critical awareness” (p. 710) of words’ use and function. Recent research also suggests that it is through conscious attention to language that L2 will develop (Cohen, 2012; Ellis, 2005; Lyster, 2015; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Marcelletti, 2013; Schmidt, 2012). The same is true for gifted ESL students (Deveau, 2006; Okan & Ispinar, 2009) where, for example, consciously presenting them with new language through challenging tasks encourages the use of their heightened abilities to learn the new language. For the purpose of this study, language learning strategies can be developed and are classified into six types: (a) memory – remembering more effectively; (b) cognitive – using all mental processes; (c) compensation – compensating for missing knowledge; (d) metacognitive – organizing and evaluating learning; (e) affective – managing emotions; and (f) social – learning with others (Oxford, 1990).

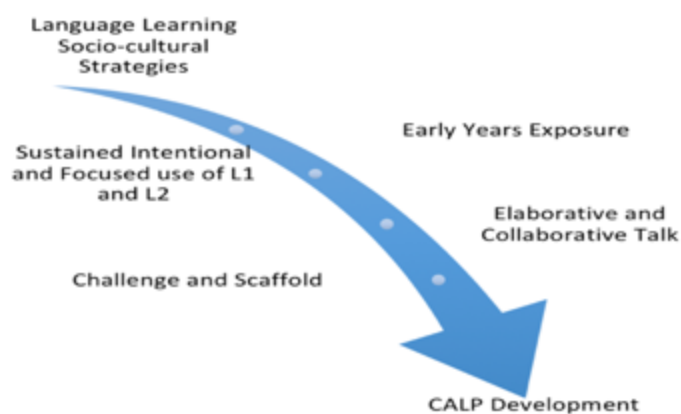
### ***Comprehensible input +1 ( $i+1$ ).***

In order to advance language learning, Krashen posits the need for comprehensible input +1 ( $i+1$ ). While Krashen (2009) acknowledges that vocabulary can be acquired without thinking about the language used, he also emphasizes the importance of the clarity of the words used during interactions. His theory stipulates input that is relevant to the learner (Krashen, 2009): “when input is comprehensible, when meaning is successfully negotiated,  $i+1$  will be present automatically, in most cases” (p. 68).

Elman et al. (1998) associate the ability to understand the language expressed with the ability to use it. Others also accentuate adjusting language level to one that is comprehensible, in order for language development to occur (Sachs, Bard, & Johnson, 1981; Saito, Trofimovich, & Isaacs, 2016; Snow, 1995). *i+1* (Krashen, 2009), along with a conscious awareness of strategies used (Cohen, 2012; Corson, 1997) and enhancement of L1 as a strong platform for transfer to L2 (Cummins, 1980) lead to explicit focus on CALP development. The ‘good language learner’ deploys these strategies and utilizes personal traits to advance the development of their academic vocabulary (Cohen, 2012).

### **Socio-cultural Theory**

Second language acquisition (SLA) is, therefore, a product of the strategies that students use, parents/teachers and other mentors orchestrate, and the contextual variables or conditions that they provide to promote learning. Sociocultural theory, as defined by Vygotsky (1997) emphasizes the contributions of society and culture to individual development (i.e., interaction with others shapes cognition and therefore language development). This places the burden on society to provide these strategies and the interactions needed for language development (see Figure 2.9).



**Figure 2.9 Socio-cultural Environment.**

It clarifies how social interactions develop students' vocabulary through an emphasis on the strategies that adults implicitly and explicitly employ. The influence of these social processes cannot be ignored nor dismissed (Cummins, 2015). Students' early years determine the language they use and their ability to develop it. Their home and school offer opportunities for vocabulary development using sustained intentional and focused use of that language. As students grow older, applying strategies that involve targeted communication, challenges and scaffolding is considered vital.

### **Early years exposure.**

Vygotsky's (1963) theory of cognitive development explains how learning is developed by imitation and through social interaction in the early years. It brings to attention the importance of communication within the early stages of language development. Parents' role in language development starts from infancy and their children's linguistic proficiency is determined by their daily language use (Dennaoui et al., 2016; Hart & Risley, 2003; Hoff, 2013; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Vygotsky, 1963). Parental cultural influences are also reflected in their children's language learning and study habits (Boer & Fischer, 2013; Ma & Oxford, 2014). This implies that family and community characteristics can potentially influence students' future linguistic and academic success.

Research shows the importance of teachers' influence in providing continuous structured exposure to low frequency words such as protection, appliances and equipment, in the primary years (Biemiller, 2001; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). These are the years where most children cannot read and are dependent on the more knowledgeable adults to guide their learning (Hart & Risley, 2003; Hoff, 2013; Lightbown & Spada, 2006). The implication is that early access and direct instruction of low frequency words through activities, such as reading and meal time talk,

will facilitate CALP development in the later years; it provides ESL students with the linguistic tools that many native speakers of English receive at home (Biemiller, 2001; D'Anguilli, Siegel & Maggi, 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

### **Sustained intentional and focused use of language.**

Language maintenance and development requires long term intentional focus on L2 CALP development strategies (Cummins, 1981a; Roessingh, 2006; Tong et al., 2017). Schmidt (2012) suggests that it is only through the conscious attention to language that students place on comprehending, interacting, studying, and performing tasks that their L2 will develop. This conscious focus on language learning and strategy use can be taught and learned (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002; Yunus et al., 2013). It enables ESL students to use strategies that advance language proficiency (Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). Direct teaching of strategies needs to start in the early years and be sustained in the elementary years (D'Anguilli et al., 2004). Students can be guided to focus on the words used through various tasks that allow them to, “hear it, say it, read it, write it → own it” (Roessingh, 2018, p. 26).

### **Elaborative and collaborative talk.**

Vygotsky (1963) underscores the contextual factors in the child's social/learning environments that explain how language learning and cognition develop. He highlights the importance of communication, especially elaborative and collaborative talk, in mediating the social environment for all youngsters, including gifted ESL students, as they co-construct and make meaning of their world and their place in it. He (1963) references students' interactions with adults as the catalysts for language learning and emphasizes their important role in language development. Interactions should include a sustained exposure and use of target vocabulary that students would not encounter in every day conversations (August, Carlo, Dressler & Snow, 2005;



Francis & Simpson, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). The type of conversations that parents and teachers engage in with students through storybook reading, meal time talk, purposeful and structured play, and creative, open ended play are all key social learning opportunities that afford a space for vocabulary discussion and language learning to take place (Biemiller, 2001; Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Government of Alberta, 2009; Roessingh, 2018).

This illustrates the importance of nurturing relationships and social interactions (Vygotsky, 1986) for linguistic development. It also brings forward the need for direct strategy instruction (D'Anguilli et al., 2004; Gunning & Oxford, 2014) and underlines the importance of purposeful, collaborative interactions (Nassaji & Tian, 2014; Vygotsky, 1986). Direct instruction of linguistic strategy awareness and second language learning remains beneficial for vocabulary development as students get older (D'Anguilli et al., 2004; Gunning & Oxford, 2014; Krashen, 2009; Tong et al., 2017). It is important to select purposeful tasks that strengthen their understanding of the nuances of newly acquired words (August et al., 2005; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Examples of these tasks include word games, word walls and purposeful classroom dialogues.

### **Challenge and scaffold.**

Vygotsky (1997) distinguishes between the actual level, which is the language level that students are at, and *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) which is the level that is still in development and can be enhanced with support from others. He underscores scaffolding, mediated interactions through language, targeting and challenging the learner by 'pitching' just ahead of 'where they're at' (ZPD), and the key role of the adult or more competent peer in providing for all of this. ZPD is also a significant precursor to gifted students' success. For gifted ESL children, it is an environment that balances acceleration or enrichment with scaffolding, without losing focus on the necessary aptitudes to develop the gifted potential (Rogers, 2002; Tannenbaum, 2003). In

short, ZPD gives prominence to the intentional focus that this study places on challenge and scaffold for vocabulary development.

Research suggests that an environment that sustains vocabulary expansion should be language rich and must target low frequency expressive and receptive words (Francis & Simpson, 2009). It also requires instructional scaffolding wherein students are provided with tasks that support them to experiment with new words (Shoari & Aidinlou, 2015). The idea is to help students transition from teacher-directed strategies in the early years to student-owned learning as they move into high school and university. This is not to say that teachers cease direct instruction, but explicit instruction that challenges and scaffolds coupled with student-directed activities will lead to increased vocabulary development (Francis & Simpson, 2009; Hunt & Beglar, 2005). Students' active and involved participation enhances their ability to learn new words and build awareness of the nuances of language (Cohen, 2012).

## **Summary**

This chapter presented the research framework and a review of research on giftedness, SLA, and socio-cultural theories. Reviewed literature was meant to enhance understanding of gifted ESL students' linguistic strategy use. Literature on giftedness centered on the five factors configured by Tannenbaum's Star Model (2003) and presented meta-linguistic skills, approach behaviour, motivation and self-concept as catalysts for language development. A review of literature on language acquisition identified the relevance of structured instruction that advances the development of CALP. It also confirmed that while certain traits of gifted learners may provide them with special abilities to utilize linguistic strategies, the socio-cultural environment is responsible for scaffolding the growth of strategy use. The caring adults in this environment have a responsibility to expose students to advanced language in the early years and to continue to

challenge and scaffold them to learn academic words in the higher grades. Realizing that little research has been done on the experiences of gifted ESL learners schooled in an English milieu was what directed this inquiry to explore their use of linguistic strategies. The chapter that follows will detail how this exploration took place.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This case study is bounded by the linguistic strategies of gifted ESL students schooled in an English milieu. Parents and teachers were also invited to participate as stakeholders in the students' language learning journey. The study gave voice in particular to student participants, allowing them to share the linguistic strategies, personal traits and socio-cultural factors they utilize for vocabulary development.

Chapter 3 defines this inquiry's understanding of a case study, including detailing the reasons for choosing this methodological approach. It also addresses the research contexts of setting and characteristics of the research participants. Next, it discusses data collection, procedure, and data analysis methods, and their relationship to the three research questions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations germane to this study, delimitations, limitations, and issues of trustworthiness, as well as a summary.

#### **A Case for Case Study**

The exploratory nature of the research complemented the choice of case study (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Stake, 1995) as the aim was to understand linguistic experiences through an inductive examination of data. This was critical due to the paucity of research that particularizes gifted ESL students' experiences. Its instrumental approach aligned with case study (Stake, 1995; 2006) by exploring the subjective experiences of each gifted ESL student in school, home, and community milieus. This section details the study's focus, purpose, object, and subject as an instrumental-heuristic case that allowed insight into gifted ESL students' linguistic strategies, personal traits, and socio-cultural environments through a focus on their perspectives, as well as, those of their parents and teachers.

Research in Canada has generally been focused on promoting change in ESL programs to accommodate increasingly high numbers of ESL students, with Canadian researcher, Cummins, leading the way (2007, 2011, 2015). However, research regarding these students' personal educational experiences in Canada is still rare. A case study methodology afforded the exploration of in-depth data using six data collection tools (Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test (Martin, & Brownell, 2016), background survey, Duckworth's 12-Item Grit Scale (2016b), Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (1990), focus groups with all participant groups, and interviews with students) and allowed students, parents, and teachers to reflect on linguistic strategies used and observed. Students shared a bounded system through their similar experiences of arriving to school with knowledge of a first language (L1) other than English (L2), being identified as gifted and ESL, learning in a mid-senior high setting, and attending ADA. Their shared vocabulary development experiences formed the case study (Stake, 1995).

This study presented particular data about which strategies, personal traits, and environmental experiences aided students to be successful in language learning. Its purpose was instrumental (Stake, 1995; 2006); discerning particular linguistic strategies used for vocabulary development. In illustrating and understanding patterns of linguistic use through the exploration of students' practical linguistic strategies, it illuminated a novel understanding of gifted ESL students, thus its purpose was also heuristic (Merriam, 1998).

Delineating this inquiry's focus was an important step towards verifying the relevance of the use of case study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Thomas, 2013). The bounded focus was the experiences of a group of gifted ESL students enrolled in the same school, who came from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Case study approach was pertinent since it allowed an in-depth contextual look at their particular socio-cultural environments, personal traits, and linguistic

strategies (Stake, 1995; 2006). The flexibility to use varied methods (Flyvbjerg, 2011) provided a vital combination of data that increased trustworthiness and allowed for gathering data from different perspectives. With these clarifications, the object or unit of analysis of the study was the gifted ESL students who were part of Advanced Development Academy (ADA), and the subject was strategies that support linguistic development.

### **Research Setting**

ADA, the school that student participants attend, is located in an urban location in Alberta, Canada. It is a publicly funded and a non-denominational charter school. It offers an opportunity for students to remain together from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The school's definition of giftedness reflects a focus on outstanding performance in *aptitude* or *competence*. Its mandate is to meet the social-emotional as well as the academic needs of gifted students. This is accomplished through a differentiated learning environment that favours developing students' potential by focusing on affective learning, health and wellness, social responsibility, and academics.

English is the language of instruction in all subjects at ADA, within an environment that promotes cultural awareness and an understanding that gifted ESL learners may face language challenges and need guidance to develop their potential. Teacher professional development opportunities encourage reflection on diversity. This stance, along with a curriculum that differentiates for gifted learners and smaller class sizes than other regular program public schools in the city, create a unique setting that allows teachers to cater to the needs of their gifted ESL students.

The application process to attend ADA includes presenting a psychological assessment with scores that meet the giftedness criteria outlined by the school district; students must achieve an IQ score of 130 +/-5 on an intelligence test such as WISC-IV (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for

Children – Fourth Edition). Students who qualify are invited to participate in a group activity which is used to assess how they might perform in class. Going through the admission process is an experience that students in this study have in common. Their shared characteristics are detailed next.

### **Research Participants**

A total of 12 participants were recruited through the school, Advanced Development Academy (ADA): seven students (four of the seven students were chosen using purposive sampling as detailed in the Findings section), two parents, and three teachers. Letters were sent out to grade 8 and 9 ESL students, parents, and teachers explaining the nature of the research and inviting them to participate.

Students' sample represented gifted ESL students with shared characteristics in Grades 8 and 9, recruited from ADA. The unit of analysis was an identified student from a group of gifted ESL students who (a) was enrolled in ADA, (b) was predominantly taught in English, (c) arrived in school with knowledge of an L1 other than English (L2), (d) was identified by the school as gifted and ESL upon admittance, and (e) was in Grade 8 or 9 at the time of the study. Letters were sent out to 50 students and even students assented to participate with their parents' consent, five girls and two boys. Their chosen pseudonyms are Amy, Andrew, Jody, Kathy, Kaylee, Melody and Simon. All students were born in Canada except for Simon, who was born in Venezuela. All spoke a language other than English as their first language (Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, and Spanish). All stated that even though they were labelled "ESL learners", they did not attend separate ESL classes in their current grade. Their English level was further explored using the Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test-Fourth Edition (Martin & Brownell, 2016) for

purposive sampling; Andrew, Jody, Kathy, and Melody were selected. As mentioned earlier, this choice will be detailed further in the Findings section.

Parents and teachers were recruited from ADA based on their being a part of student participants' language learning environment. Invitation letters were sent out to the parents of the 50 students. Two mothers, Emma and Lucy (pseudonyms), responded. Both parents were born in China and were able to communicate in English. Efforts to recruit more parent participants, which included resending the letter to parents inviting them to participate, did not yield more respondents.

Ten teachers who were directly involved with the 50 students were contacted. Three teachers, Ms. Sara, Ms. Allison, and Mr. David (pseudonyms) agreed to participate. Ms. Sara was ADA's ESL teacher who worked with student participants and had been with the school for two years. Ms. Allison was ADA's French teacher who was eager to participate and share her experience teaching a third language. Mr. David was the students' English teacher and had been teaching English to gifted ESL students for many years.

### **Data Collection**

Various data was collected allowing for thorough research (Flyvbjerg, 2011) regarding student participants' experiences. Throughout the data collection process, participants were invited to clarify any questions that did not make sense and to share any concerns regarding what was asked. Six data collection instruments provided a detailed understanding of participants' personal engagement with both or either L1 and L2, and their linguistic strategy and personal trait use (see Table 3.1).

### **Table 3.1**

#### *Research Instruments Used*



Procedures	Measured Factor
Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test, Fourth Edition (EOWPVT-4)	Expressive vocabulary level (Martin & Brownell, 2016)
Background survey	Linguistic background
12-Item Grit Scale	<i>Grit</i> – passion and perseverance in pursuing a personal goal (Duckworth, 2016a)
Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)	Linguistic strategy use (Oxford, 1990)
Focus group discussions	Linguistic strategy use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents</li> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• Students</li> </ul>	
Individual student interviews	Linguistic strategy use (with a focus on personal traits)

Written responses were required for background survey, Duckworth’s 12-Item Grit Scale (2016b), and Oxford’s Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (1990). The researcher was present when students were filling out the forms and students were allowed to ask questions and encouraged to take their time. Students were eager to get started and filled out the three forms in one hour or less. Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test - Fourth Edition (EOWPVT-4) (Martin & Brownell, 2016), focus group discussions, and individual student interviews were administered orally. Student and teacher data was collected on the school premises in a room used regularly by students and teachers. Parents’ data was collected on a Sunday morning in May (Mother’s Day) outside of school due to parents’ working schedules. The sections that follow present the data collection methods, as well as the need for and the procedures involved in each measure.

#### **Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test – Fourth Edition (EOWPVT-4).**

Vocabulary level was assessed using EOWPVT-4, an individually administered test that measures expressive language in a conversational setting (Martin & Brownell, 2016). It is a valid and reliable instrument for assessing expressive vocabulary abilities (Martin & Brownell, 2016). Administered orally, the test assesses students’ speaking vocabulary by asking them to identify

one word that reflects a picture they see. It is composed of 190 illustrations and students are prompted to start the test at specific images based on their chronological age (Martin & Brownell, 2016). Images' themes vary and include words such *squeegee*, *scarab* and *sickle*. Students are not provided any other clues as to the expected word besides the image they see. They are allowed only one chance to respond. Any correct or incorrect second responses that participants provide after the first word they use is considered an error (Martin & Brownell, 2016). The test is completed when a student hits a ceiling of six consecutive errors (Martin & Brownell, 2016).

The test was administered by the researcher, in English, for all student participants in less than 20 minutes for each student. Students participated individually in the EOWPVT-4 on separate days and the guidelines for the EOWPVT-4 were explained by the researcher to each student. Sample images were also used for practice to ensure that students understood the guidelines and were able to respond accordingly.

### **Background survey.**

The background survey was created by the researcher to gather information that relates to student participants' cultural and linguistic profiles (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Oxford, 1990). It allowed for the collection of data on their individual backgrounds such as age; length of residency if not Canadian born; language background including whether parents' first language was spoken at home; and whether parents and caregivers spoke English at home (see Appendix A). Fifteen minutes were allotted for students to answer nine questions on the background survey and most students finished in 10 minutes or less. Questions ranged from general such as *do you like learning new languages?* to more specific such as *which language are you most comfortable speaking?*

### **12-Item Grit Scale.**

Grit scale scores added data that acquainted the researcher with student participants' learning strategies by providing data on one personal trait. Grit is a measurable personal trait that research has shown to be connected to vocabulary development (Duckworth, 2016a). Duckworth's 12-Item Grit Scale (see Appendix B) measures the passion and perseverance (2016b) that result in grit.

The 12-Item Grit Scale (Duckworth, 2016b) is a validated written data collection method (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007) that most students completed in 20 minutes or less. It is comprised of 12 statements and students have to decide the extent to which each statement describes them using 1 to 5 Likert scale. Six items measured *Perseverance of effort* (PE) and included statements such as *I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge* and *I finish whatever I begin*. The other six statements included *New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones* and *I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one*. They gauged *Consistency of interest* (CI). Scoring measures for both sections followed those suggested by Duckworth (2016b) and are detailed in the Data Analysis section.

### **Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL).**

Oxford's (1990) categorizations and research on language learning strategies were relevant to this study. Her Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) system (1990) classifies three direct strategies (memory, cognitive, and compensation), which students employ with a conscious focus on the language used and three indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective, and social) where the emphasis is on actions that promote language learning.

SILL is a useful, valid, and reliable instrument as established through its continuous use across many cultural groups (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995) and its translation into many languages including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Turkish. It is composed of 50 strategy statements (Oxford, 1990) with which students can agree or disagree using 1 to 5 Likert scale (see Appendix

C). The instrument is divided into six parts, and each part focuses on a different language learning strategy including: (a) memory – remembering more effectively (e.g., *I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them*); (b) cognitive – using all mental processes (e.g., *I use the English words I know in different ways*); (c) compensation – compensating for missing knowledge (e.g., *I make up new words if I do not know the right words in English*); (d) metacognitive – organizing and evaluating learning (e.g., *I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better*); (e) affective – managing emotions (e.g., *I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English*); and (f) social – learning with others (e.g., *I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk*) (Oxford, 1990). It quantifies the frequency of students’ use of each strategy summed up into a total score that reflects their overall average language learning strategy use. It is a written self-report that most students completed in 30 minutes. The researcher was present during that time and encouraged students to ask questions if they had any concerns. Scoring is detailed in the Data Analysis section.

### **Focus groups.**

Focus groups explored participants’ reflections on language learning strategies in a group setting which led to collection of rich data. “Acting somewhat like magnifying glasses, focus groups induce social interactions akin to those that occur in everyday life but with greater intensity” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011, p.559). Focus group discussions were held separately for each group of participants. Each focus group was about one hour in length. As mentioned earlier, the parents’ focus group was held outside of school, whereas teachers’ and students’ focus groups took place on the school premises. The researcher chaired discussions, facilitated, and offered prompts to participants. The researcher also allowed for pauses to encourage clarifying questions and ensure reflection time.

Availability of participants was the deciding factor in the order the focus group data was collected; the parents' focus group was held first and was followed by teachers' and students' focus groups respectively. Recording of focus group discussions provided another opportunity for detailed data collection and analysis that could not be accomplished while observing and facilitating. It allowed the researcher to establish rapport with participants and to be engaged in the discussions as they shared their linguistic experiences (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011).

In the parental group, participants agreed to talk about their experiences raising children in Canada. Questions were posed to encourage discussion of topics that ranged from the choice of language they wanted their children to develop (L1, L2, or both), to the strategies they used to support language development (L1, L2, or both) (see Appendix D) such as, *have you tried to pass your language to your child?* and *what are the expectations about home language use?* The focus group discussion lasted one hour allowing each parent time to share personal experiences regarding raising her gifted ESL child.

The teachers' focus group revolved around two topics, each of which was discussed for about half an hour (see Appendix E). Questions about participants' experiences teaching linguistically diverse students were prompted first (e.g., *what are your thoughts on linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms?*) with the purpose of exploring issues arising from classroom language diversity and the strategies that teachers use to support students' language learning. In the second half hour, the researcher questioned teachers regarding their observations of students' linguistic strategy use and its observable impact on linguistic growth as in, *are you aware of any after school activities that students are involved in that help them develop their linguistic proficiency?* The teachers' focus group lasted more than an hour and two teachers opted to stay beyond the allotted time to ensure their linguistic strategies and experiences were shared.

Student focus groups considered the role that the personal traits of meta-learning, approach behaviour, motivation, and self-concept play in increasing L2 proficiency. The researcher asked questions related to these traits without specifically mentioning them (see Appendix F). For example, one question that probed students' approach behaviour and motivation was, *do you like learning new words in English or in-home language? If yes, what do you do to remember a new word?* Other questions that aimed to facilitate a discussion on self-concept were, *how confident are you about your use of the English language now? Do you feel that you have an accent that makes you stand out as a non-native speaker of English? If yes, does it bother you?*

Students were requested to share and compare linguistic experiences (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011). They were also encouraged to ask questions for clarification. Each of the two student focus group discussions lasted about one hour. The choice of focus group discussion as a data collection method was based on research that finds that some participants may share experiences through the group interaction process that they may not share in individual interviews (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011). Thoughts and experiences shared during group discussions were used to prompt further reflection during interviews.

### **Individual interviews.**

Focus groups were followed by 30- to 45-minute individual interviews with each student participant. Interviews were essential data gathering tools that revealed personal experiences (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Interviews took place on school premises, in a room where students meet regularly, making the setting comfortable and familiar. Individual interviews were conducted face to face, offering participants the chance to revisit their focus group contributions, share immediate reflections that expanded on personal traits, or initiate contemplation of

unexplored thoughts. Students thus had an alternative setting to share their experiences for those who may have preferred the more intimate setting of individual interviews to the group.

Interview questions varied. Some were structured, engaging students and seeking an understanding of their personal traits (e.g., *do you prefer working alone or with friends? Do have a scheduled homework time?*). Others were semi-structured or open-ended (e.g., *what are your thoughts when asked to read textbooks and other reading material provided in class? Do you read without looking up unknown words? Do you try to guess them in context?*), providing opportunities for expanding on thoughts and linguistic experiences (see Appendix G). The researcher took on the role of listener and facilitator, allowing for pauses, clarifying, or using prompts as necessary. One participant did not grant permission to be recorded so the researcher took notes, and later read and edited them. Three interviews were recorded and transcribed in preparation for analysis.

## **Procedure**

The procedure of recruitment and data collection took about six months. The researcher presented the research purpose and tasks to 50 Grade eight and nine ESL students in ADA's library. Attending students were also encouraged to ask questions about the research and the tasks involved. Letters were then provided to each student to introduce the researcher, detail the research purpose, and elaborate on the six data collection instruments that the students would undertake should they agree to participate.

Parents of attending students were sent two letters: one letter invited them to participate and another one sought their approval and explained the tasks their children would be involved in should they decide to participate. The students' teachers were also contacted and received two letters. The first letter introduced the researcher and explained the nature of the research should

one of their students choose to participate. The second letter invited them to be a part of the research themselves.

As mentioned earlier, a total of 12 participants were recruited. Data collection started with the students' written tasks: background survey, 12-Item Grit Scale, and SILL. Students were given the choice to finish all tasks in one sitting or come back at different dates to finish one task at a time. All students were eager to participate and completed the 3 tasks in over one hour. Parents' focus group discussion was conducted next and was followed by the teachers' focus group two weeks later. During that time, the researcher was also administering EOWPVT-4 to students individually during recess so that students would not miss class time. Students' focus groups were conducted once all students completed EOWPVT-4 testing. And finally, the researcher scheduled individual student interviews through their homeroom teachers.

With data collection completed, the researcher built a profile of the linguistic experience of gifted ESL students expanding their English vocabulary. EOWPVT-4 was used to verify the expressive English proficiency levels of student participants for *purposive* sampling (Merriam, 1998; Miles et al., 2014). All students were invited to continue participation in the remaining tasks regardless of their EOWPVT-4 score, so they would not feel left out. However, the researcher explained to the students that the data most relevant to the research purpose would be used.

Background survey provided the cultural and linguistic background of each student participant. Students' SILL scores provided a partial answer to the first research question: How do gifted ESL students deploy language learning strategies to advance their vocabulary development? Similarly, students' results on the 12-Item Grit Scale partially addressed the second research question: How do gifted ESL students utilize personal traits for vocabulary development? And finally, data from focus group discussions and individual interviews responded to all research



questions including question number three: How do parents and teachers perceive their role in nurturing the linguistic development of their gifted ESL learners? With data collection completed, the next stage was data analysis which is explained in the following section.

## **Data Analysis**

Exploratory analysis of data highlighted successful strategies and personal traits used to increase linguistic proficiency. Expressive vocabulary level, background, grit, and linguistic strategy results added pertinent data (Creswell, 2015). Inductive and deductive content analysis of focus groups and interviews (Creswell, 2015), explained in detail below, allowed for an exploration of the strategies used by students to enhance linguistic development.

### **Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test – Fourth Edition (EOWPVT-4).**

Scoring of EOWPVT-4 responses relied on the criteria within the test's 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Record Form which included raw score, standard score, confidence interval, percentile rank and age equivalent (Martin & Brownell, 2016). Results were compiled using a dated data log (Miles et al., 2014) and placed into tables for ease of analysis (see Appendix H). Analysis of students' behaviour during the testing, as well as of the incorrect responses, were narrated.

### **Background survey.**

Background survey results for the four students who had exceptional vocabulary scores were compiled. A table was created to facilitate data input of students' responses (see Appendix I) as well as data interpretation (Creswell, 2015). Results provided background information for each student related to their date of birth, place of birth, and their linguistic (whether they spoke L1, L2, both L1 and L2, or a third language) and cultural (whether they identified as Canadian, their parents' culture, or both) preferences.

### **12-Item Grit Scale.**

Data from the 12-Item Grit Scale (Duckworth, 2016b) reflected students' grit in general, using an instrument that does not focus on vocabulary development. Prompts included words that reflected the proposed definition of grit such as, *setbacks*, *hard worker*, *maintaining focus*, and *diligence* (Duckworth, 2016b). They provided students with a direct opportunity to reflect on their persistence and consistency of interest.

Answers were scored using a five-point scale. *Perseverance of effort* (PE) responses for statements 1, 4, 6, 9, 10, & 12 were measured on a descending scale from 5 to 1, where 5 = very much like me, 4 = mostly like me, 3 = somewhat like me, 2 = not much like me, 1 = not like me at all. Scoring *Consistency of interest* (CI) statements 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 11 followed an ascending scale of 1 to 5: 1 = very much like me; 2 = mostly like me; 3 = somewhat like me; 4 = not much like me; 5 = not like me at all (Duckworth, 2016b). The results of each section provided participants' PE and CI scores respectively. The maximum score that a student could attain for each of PE and CI is 30 and the minimum score is 6. Scores for each participant were totaled providing measurable data where a grit score of 5 is viewed as *extremely gritty*, whereas a grit score of 1 is *not at all gritty* (Duckworth, 2016b). A table was created detailing students' grit scores (see Appendix J).

### **Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL).**

Scoring SILL responses followed Oxford's suggested guidelines (1990) where students' choices were ranked by the number proposed by each selection. They were scored on a five-point scale (Oxford, 1990). Selected responses numbered from 1, *never or almost never true of me*, to 5, *always or almost always true of me*. The highest average score that could be reached is 5 and the lowest is 1. Some students stated that, in some sections, none of the choices portrayed their personal experiences and the researcher allowed for the creation of a *not applicable* answer. They

explained that they did not make use of these specific linguistic strategies to develop their language proficiency, mirroring the *never or almost never true of me* option (Oxford, 1990) and thus *not applicable* responses received a score of 1.

While Oxford's (1990) purpose for the SILL was to give students an opportunity to reflect on their strategy use, students' scores in this study were used by the researcher to examine students' most frequently used strategies. A table that facilitated interpretation of strategies used was created (see Appendix K).

### **Focus groups and individual interviews.**

Creswell's (2015) six steps to analyzing and interpreting focus group and interview data were used as follows:

1. Prepare and organize: The first step entailed organizing, transcribing, and hand analyzing collected data. Students', parents' and teachers' data were separately organized. The researcher opted to manually transcribe recordings from focus group discussions and interviews, viewing it as a first opportunity to develop awareness of participants' responses. Transcription facilitated the initial reviewing and organizing of data. Once data was organized and transcribed, it was hand coded which enhanced the researcher's familiarity with participants' responses. The researcher read the data and color-coded pertinent words and text sentences. Manual analysis of organized data was implemented by looking for common words and phrases that related to linguistic strategies and personal traits, as well as other emergent themes. Data collected from non-audio taped results were similarly reviewed and organized.
2. Explore and code: Exploring and coding meant digging deeper into the transcribed data and labelling pertinent themes. The purpose of "the coding process is to make sense out of

text data, divide it into text or image segments, label the segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into broad themes” (Creswell, 2015, p. 242). Using this process, tables were created from the data according to themes.

3. Describe and develop themes: This stage entailed describing and developing themes from data as they related to the research questions and purpose. The researcher reread texts a minimum of three times seeking a thorough examination of data and labelling of code words and text segments. Description of collected data was detailed and reported as shared by participants.
4. Represent and report findings: Findings were represented and reported by creating comparison tables and narrative discussion. The researcher constructed detailed narrative descriptions which included participants’ quotes (see Appendices L, M, N). Tables represented the different themes and compared participants’ views regarding each theme. Parental focus group results included socio-cultural and personal traits themes (see Appendix O). Data from teachers provided a unique view of gifted ESL strategies from a second group of adults who support students’ linguistic needs (see Appendix P). Analysis of student data elaborated on personal traits and linguistic strategies (see Appendix Q). This stage of working with the data aided in uncovering major themes.
5. Interpret findings: Findings were interpreted as they related to the research questions. The researcher synthesized collected data illuminating personal traits, linguistic strategies, and socio-cultural factors utilized for language development. Personal views, possible limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research were reflected upon and developed in this stage.

6. Validate findings: For the purpose of validating findings, both triangulation and member checking were conducted. “Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals” (Creswell, 2015, p. 259). The perspectives of three stakeholders were gathered exploring linguistic strategies among gifted ESL students. Member checking involved sharing findings as interpreted by the researcher with teacher and parent participants by email and with students through the school.

### **Ethical Considerations**

From gaining permission to enter the school site, to preparing consent/assent forms and collecting data, the safety of participants was the number one priority. As such, a pseudonym was chosen for the school to protect students’ identity. Each participant was also given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym. These ethical attempts were combined with the standard ethics protocol set by the University of Calgary. This study received approval from the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) (2014) and the school district.

### **Delimitations**

This study was an investigation into the world of a group of students living in urban Alberta. The imposed delimitation was in choosing ADA (a school of choice focused on gifted students) and then identifying a small sample size of students who started school in Kindergarten or Grade 1, were identified by the school as both gifted and ESL and continuing their journey in an English-milieu school. This delimitation complemented the study’s focus on gaining depth of insight to enable generalizability of the findings. It also offered a bounded unit that strengthened the case for choosing case study and then proposing a linguistic development model.

### **Limitations**

The researcher was the sole person reviewing, collecting, and analyzing the data. As well, participants' responses may have varied depending on the type of day/mood they were having so data may be viewed with this as a limitation. The researcher's unfamiliarity with participants is an added limitation as they may have hesitated to share pertinent experiences. It was with these limitations in mind that the researcher chose to commence using focus group discussions with students, in order to help them become acquainted with the researcher and vice versa, before the individual interviews took place.

Additionally, use of the background survey, 12-Item Grit Scale and SILL was a limitation since they limited students' opportunities to share detailed information on their learning strategies based on the nature of the instrument. These results of these data collections tools may also be viewed as a limitation since students' answers were dependent on the type of day they were having and their subjectivity during self-report. However, they served as prompts to further engage students in thinking about what linguistic strategies they were willing to share in focus group discussions and interviews. The written format also gave them the time to process the language of the questions and the opportunity to reflect their thoughts on paper and choose their answers with no pressure to share full details.

### **Trustworthiness**

The researcher aimed to ensure appropriate measures were taken to enhance trustworthiness, but it is important to note that "human phenomena are themselves the subject of controversy" (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 120). While necessary precautions were taken to ensure participants' anonymity, the researcher remained dependent on their honesty in describing their experiences for data collection. As well, data interpretation and analysis may unintentionally reflect the researcher's personal experiences.

To overcome such possible conflicts and to increase trustworthiness, four methods were utilized: data comparison; respondent validation; member checking; and detailed description (Creswell, 2015). Data comparison was engaged when comparing student participant responses on the various data collection tools. Respondent validation and member checking were secured through requesting participants' approval of their individual summaries. Narrative findings were shared with participants. Participants were invited to change, add, and/or withdraw any comment or phrase that they felt did not represent their perspectives or that they now wished to reconsider sharing. All participants approved the summaries except for one student who did not respond to inquiries regarding summaries. Finally, the researcher provided a detailed narrative description of findings and used participants' quotes in an attempt to "transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences" (Creswell, 2003, p. 196).

### **Summary**

This chapter detailed the steps taken in formulating and carrying out the case study. The study explored the linguistic strategy use of four student participants schooled in an English milieu. Two parents and three teachers also consented to participate.

Research involved multiple sources of data including a researcher created background survey, Duckworth's 12-Item Grit Scale (2016b), Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (1990), focus groups and individual interviews. Results were first reviewed separately, then together, during the analysis stage. Such content analysis ensured that each student's voice was heard individually and as part of a group.

Case study was an appropriate methodology as it allowed particular focus on students' perspectives. Following ethical considerations, ensuring participants' anonymity and including member checking increased the trustworthiness of results. Student perspectives delivered unique

voices and allowed an exploration of their distinctive personal traits. The three different stakeholder groups' responses ensured a thorough inspection of linguistic perspectives of each participant, revealing both common and unique themes.



## **Chapter 4: Findings**

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the data analysis in the order that the data was collected. It includes the EOWPVT-4, background survey, the 12-Item Grit Scale, SILL, and the qualitative focus group discussions and interviews as these reflect on the three framing questions for this inquiry:

1. How do gifted ESL students deploy language learning strategies to advance their vocabulary development?
2. How do gifted ESL students utilize personal traits for vocabulary development?
3. How do parents and teachers perceive their role in nurturing the linguistic development of their gifted ESL learners?

A central purpose of the study was to glean insights into the linguistic profile of gifted ESL learners. This was accomplished through exploring the linguistic strategies and personal traits that gifted ESL students utilize for vocabulary development. Question three was included to provide an outside perspective on this topic from knowledgeable adults.

The chapter begins with data confirming the gifted language learning profile of the participants in the study. Data from the background survey, SILL and grit scale are shared next. The outcomes of the qualitative analysis of parents', teachers', and four students' (chosen based on their above average expressive vocabulary level scores) data are presented in the order that the data was collected. These outcomes offer common (e.g., use of strategies and personal traits) and different (e.g., cultural mismatch between parents and teachers' expectations) themes for vocabulary development within each group. Each participant group section begins with a brief description of the participants followed by a discussion of these themes. The chapter concludes

with a synthesis of the key themes emerging from these data that reflect on the three orienting questions listed above.

### **Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test – Fourth Edition (EOWPVT-4)**

Recall the purpose of utilizing this instrument is to ascertain/verify the exceptional language proficiency level of the participants. This first step in the data analysis suggests that not all seven of the initial participant pool meet the criteria for exceptional language proficiency. Kaylee, Simon and Amy fall below the sought-after threshold and the rest of their data is not analyzed any further; Andrew, Melody, Jody and Kathy all demonstrate English language proficiency well above their chronological age (scoring over the 90th percentile) and become the focus of this inquiry (see Appendix H). Referred to as *theoretical* sampling strategy (Seale, 1999) or *purposive* sampling (Merriam, 1998; Miles et al., 2014), these latter four students are chosen based on their ability to reflect and comment on their attributes, abilities, and strategy use so as to inform an emergent theory construction of how the gifted learner comes to achieve exceptional learning outcomes. Their qualitative reflections along with those of their parents and teachers are shared in the Focus Group Discussions and Individual Interviews section.

### **Background survey**

The researcher created the background survey in order to gather data not only on students' background such as age and length of residency in Canada, but also to inspire students to begin thinking about their language use and cultural identification (see Appendix I). Andrew, Melody, Jody and Kathy came from an Asian language background. All speak a language other than English as their first language (Andrew – Mandarin; Melody – Mandarin and Cantonese; Jody – Cantonese; and Kathy – Vietnamese). Note that all participants perceive themselves to be bilingual on some level, although Melody states that she is literate in L1. They use their first language for

communicative purposes at home especially with their parents. Some report using both L1 and L2 with siblings. This is consistent with findings reported in the literature on language shift (Wong-Fillmore, 2000). This will be elaborated on further in the qualitative findings as it emerged as a consistent theme.

### **12-Item Grit Scale**

Data from the 12-Item Grit Scale (Duckworth, 2016b) offers measures that go beyond students' grit in vocabulary development since prompts allow for individual reflection on daily practices. This score adds data that compliments this study's exploration of the use of personal traits to improve vocabulary. All students' scores reflect some grittiness levels. All PE scores are high and portray an ability to persevere at tasks that matches students' qualitative responses. All students have lower scores in CI, as a result of low scores on questions related to consistency of interest over time.

### **Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)**

SILL results provide a window into linguistic strategies that students use but may not have otherwise shared when asked about their particular linguistic strategies. It seems important to note that low SILL scores simply convey that students are not using all available linguistic strategies, either because they do not feel that these strategies work for them or they are not aware of them. SILL scores can be increased with education, practice, and exploration of new strategies (Oxford, 1990). Students' scores reveal variances in strategy use (see Appendix K).

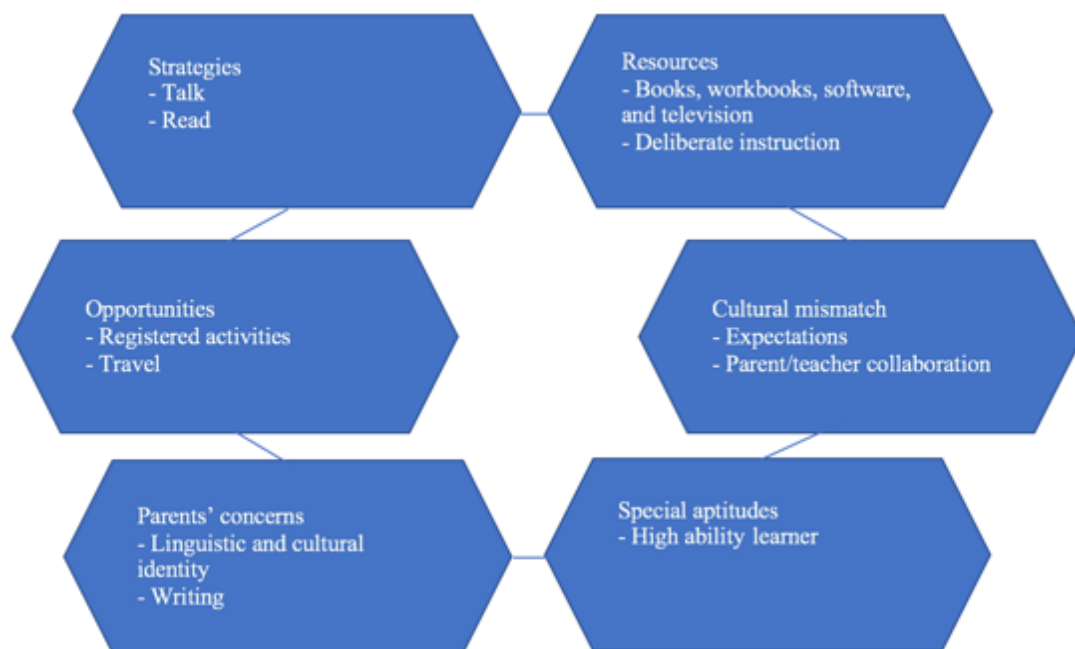
### **Focus Group Discussions and Individual Interviews**

Students' quantitative measures and qualitative insights are complemented by those of their parents and teachers. Findings in this section are presented in the order the data was collected: parents, teachers and students respectively. Parents are responsible for orchestrating the home

learning environment and affording the opportunities for their children's language learning to be realized. The findings of the teachers' narrative data are presented next; they are responsible for structuring the formal learning environment that advances students' academic vocabulary and content understanding. Finally, students' responses provide insight into their experiences and reflections on English language learning.

### **Parent focus group discussion.**

Parents' focus group was the first to be conducted and included two participants: Emma and Lucy (pseudonyms). They are mothers of two male students who attend ADA. They share their experiences as first-generation immigrants raising their gifted ESL boys. This section introduces these parent participants and the themes that arise from their discussions: (a) strategies, (b) resources, (c) special aptitudes, (d) opportunities, (e) cultural mismatch, and (f) parents' concerns (see Figure 4.1).



*Figure 4.1* Parental Themes.

### **Meet the parents.**

#### ***Emma.***

“We told him that Chinese is important. Of course, in my opinion English is the most important. It is number one” (Emma, 2017).

Emma and her husband are of Chinese origin. Emma supports her son to develop the Chinese language skills (does not specify whether Mandarin, Cantonese, or other) for reasons that go beyond knowing his family roots, communicating with family, and perhaps going on future visits to China. For her, it involves learning about a country that is rich in history, culture, and literature, as well as, enhancing for future job prospects. However, living in Alberta, she also acknowledges the importance of English for her son’s academic and professional success.

#### ***Lucy.***

“Family environment, my experience was I think maybe if as a parent we could focus more on literature and we will influence our kids definitely, but for me I didn’t do a good job because both my husband and I focus on engineering things and computer things” (Lucy, 2017).

Lucy and her husband are also of Chinese origin and arrived in Canada seven years ago with their son. Lucy sees value in having her son learn and develop English. She also values her Chinese roots and cherishes having her son learn about Chinese and other cultures. At home, she and her husband support their son to improve his Chinese language proficiency (does not specify whether Mandarin, Cantonese, or other) and to understand the Chinese way of thinking.

### **Parental themes.**

#### ***Strategies.***

*Talk.* Both sets of parents started out speaking only Chinese with their boys. Now that her child is older, Emma has switched to speaking English more frequently. She puts the onus on the school to help him continue to improve his English vocabulary. Chinese also remains Lucy's main language of communication with her husband, friends and family. She recently started speaking English with her son, not only for his benefit, but for also hers as she is looking to improve her pronunciation. Nevertheless, whenever she speaks English with her son, he responds in Chinese. This is consistent with most student participants who report speaking with their parents in L1.

*Read.* Lucy puts high responsibility on the home environment to enrich both language and cultural affiliations. She regrets not focusing on English literature. She instead chose to focus on mathematics and sciences due to both her and her husband's background in engineering. She blames her son's lack of interest in reading on her family's habits, "the reading, we didn't read a lot at home, we didn't hold book. I never in our living room, in our kitchen keep reading". Reading is a strategy that is reported to be favored among student participants, as it supports their quest for learning and enriches their academic vocabulary. Emma, on the other hand, has always enforced reading time. Her son now loves to read, and she does not feel the need to ask him to read.

### ***Resources.***

*Books, workbooks, software, and television.* Emma and her husband read Chinese books with their son, watch Chinese television together, and supply him with Chinese language software. Lucy's husband regularly spends time working on Chinese textbooks with their son. Their attempts to have their children speak L1 succeeded, as both boys are able to do so. Emma also provided her son with workbooks that facilitate vocabulary development such as, *Worldly Wise 3000* (EPS Literacy & Intervention, 2018). Lucy regrets not bringing English resources home and shares that

this lack of resources may have affected her son's English writing ability. Both parents note that their sons are having difficulties writing essays in L2.

*Deliberate instruction for CALP development.* Emma shares the benefits of a vocabulary program that ADA incorporates as part of the ESL curriculum. It was part of her son's grade 5 to 8 Language Arts class. She describes it as a program where students are taught about word stems which she feels expands their academic vocabulary knowledge. She sees great value in this resource and is disappointed that no such program exists in grade 9.

***Special aptitudes.***

*High ability learner.* When asked about the reason she chose ADA, Emma mentions that she always knew that her son was special and called him "a Math learner". She researched the different available programs in the city and found in ADA an enriched environment that would meet his advanced needs. ADA was the only school to offer such support starting in Kindergarten. Lucy chose ADA for the same reason. Her son showed advanced mathematics skills that she felt the regular system did not enrich. She did not think a Chinese-English bilingual school was necessary due to her husband's regular Chinese tutoring. An enriched environment that catered to her son's talent in mathematics seemed more important.

***Opportunities.***

*Registered activities.* Emma registered her son in Chinese Sunday school. She also hired a tutor to ensure that his English writing development is sustained. Her appreciation for linguistic activities and programs that intentionally target language development mirrors students' sentiments favouring such opportunities.

*Travel.* Both parents view trips as opportunities for cultural and linguistic exposure. Emma took her son to China and shares that he would like to go back to explore new areas. Lucy tries to reinforce the value of languages when going on family trips:

When I took my son to Montreal, we visited several big bookstores and we could not read these books at all and I said, ok you see, this is knowledge world, because we do not have that language ability, so we put that kind of world behind us, we could not understand at all (2017).

Travel is viewed as an opportunity for linguistic and cultural development by participants from all three participant groups.

***Cultural mismatch.***

*Expectations.* Emma dislikes the Canadian high school system as it requires students to enrol in an English language course for only one term (four months) a year. Her concerns stem from her belief that academic vocabulary cannot be developed without a regular and conscious focus on language. The following quote explains her thoughts:

I think at least they should provide workbooks or worksheets that just focus on vocabulary. Some words, vocabulary, you cannot use them in daily life. They are advanced vocabulary, and you never use it when you, maybe when you take advanced courses, so in that portion I think they should just focus on vocabulary development. They will never learn from anywhere else (2017).

Lucy also counts on the school to support her son's progress in English.

*Parent/teacher collaboration.* Emma and Lucy view their children's success as a result of a collaborative parent/teacher relationship. Emma describes a "good teacher" as one who is willing to communicate with parents. She states, "the teacher just sent me a long email. Oh, I was so



moved; I think she is so good. She takes the time to communicate with me”. She is equally happy that the teacher was also enthusiastic about working with the tutor Emma hired. Additionally, Emma reports that this teacher once took the time to provide “four pages of comments for each student” on a written assignment. Such experiences reinforce her happiness with having her child attend ADA.

Despite also being happy with ADA, Lucy’s experience is not comparable to Emma’s. She shares that she rarely hears from her son’s teacher and seldom sees any comments besides the grade on assignments. She adds,

the teacher could have time for sharing more information with the parents, what they (the students) are learning in the school and share more information regarding key to writing. I still think my son is not very good at writing, or how to open a nut, perhaps my son’s shell is too thick, too strong and he has to be opened. We have to work both parents and teachers together to open this nut. I just would like to know some details (2017).

Her comments stem from a concern that she may not be supporting her child appropriately due to her own low level of English proficiency. She is wary about sharing her concerns with the teacher, worried that it might reflect negatively on her son who is quiet and may not actually appreciate the attention. Lucy feels that she lacks resources and needs encouragement to meet her son’s needs. Her comments highlight the need to support ESL parents as well as their children.

### ***Parents’ concerns.***

*Linguistic and cultural identity.* Lucy, whose son was not born in Canada, notes that he identifies with the Canadian culture. Despite his ability to speak, read, and write Chinese, and his equal understanding of the Chinese and Canadian cultures, both she and her son view him as a

Canadian with the Chinese culture becoming “only a culture for grandma and grandpa”. This finding is reiterated among student participants, who view English as their first language, and confirms research regarding sentiments toward parents’ first language (Cummins, 2000; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008; Wong Fillmore, 2000).

*Writing.* Lucy is worried about her son’s writing and has already tried everything she can think of to help him improve. From sharing her own experiences writing her PhD in English, telling her son to “attract the readers’ attention and keep them interested”, to detailing “keep the sauce and explain everything clearly”, she reports that she has reached a point where she can’t help him anymore. Emma, who is similarly concerned that her son’s writing is not supported in school, hires a tutor to teach him better writing skills.

#### **Teacher focus group discussion.**

Ms. Sara, Ms. Allison, and Mr. David (pseudonyms) respond to prompts with the same passion they share for meeting the diverse needs of their gifted ESL students. Each of them has concerns about their students’ linguistic journeys and share what they do to ease students’ frustrations. This section starts with an introduction to their backgrounds and is followed by a discussion of common themes: (a) strategies, (b) resources, (c) personal traits, (d) opportunities, (e) cultural mismatch, and (g) teachers’ concerns (see Figure 4.2).

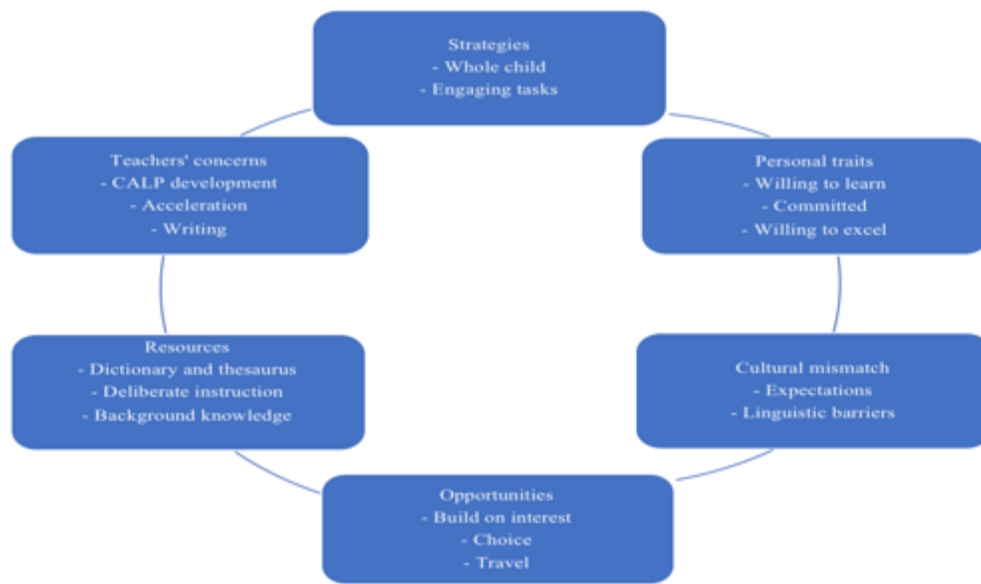


Figure 4.2 Teachers' Themes.

### Meet the teachers.

#### *Ms. Sara.*

“You have to meet them where they are and help them find that spot where they can learn best” (Ms. Sara, 2017).

Ms. Sara is a young ESL teacher whose ambition to support her students is made clear throughout the discussion. She is a native English speaker who had experienced the challenges of learning a new language by taking French and German in school as well as Spanish in university.

#### *Ms. Allison.*

“You’re always growing if you’re always asking questions. If you think you know everything then what is there to learn” (Ms. Allison, 2017).

Ms. Allison is the school’s French as a Second Language teacher whose participation adds a distinctive perspective through her experience teaching a third language to these students. She is a trilingual speaker of English, French, and Spanish, and might also be considered a multilingual

as she can also manage orally in Italian and Portuguese. Additionally, she lived in Argentina for a few years, providing her with an immersion experience that she can fall back on and use to relate to ESL students' circumstances.

***Mr. David.***

“It’s (developing the high gifted potential) partly inborn, partly nurtured by families, and partly by opportunity too” (Mr. David, 2017).

Mr. David is an English teacher and brings a mix of personal experiences and valuable expert insights to the focus group discussion. A self-described “unilingual”, he had been exposed to French, Cree, and Chinese. Growing up and working across different regions in Canada affords him an awareness of what it takes to land in a new community and decipher an unfamiliar language, thus enriching his ability to relate to his students’ experiences.

**Teachers’ themes.**

***Strategies.***

*Whole child.* Ms. Sara reminds teachers and parents to always look at the whole child and their experiences, as they may have other exceptionalities or special circumstances that hinder or enhance their progress. She asks parents to be understanding of their child’s needs and not apply too much pressure if they believe that their child is not performing to their expectations.

The push to look at the whole child comes from a personal experience working with a young boy who was neither motivated to study nor participate in activities. As his ESL teacher, she believed that her priority was to engage him in tasks that would develop his English proficiency. She tried every approach she could think of but was not able to capture his interest. She recruited help from other teachers and staff, even going as far as arranging for out of school excursions but the boy remained uninterested. It took the support of the counselors in Student Services who

encouraged him to open up, and to discover that his emotional wellbeing was his first priority, not language acquisition. She views this as a lesson acquired in her early years of teaching and she now starts her journey with new students by focusing on the child and their priorities, so as to “meet them where they are and help them find that spot where they can learn best”.

*Engaging tasks.* Teacher participants focus on student engagement when preparing vocabulary development tasks. Ms. Allison suggests song of the week, where students listen to a song of their choice for a week and pick up new words while also enjoying listening to the song. Students build on these words by experimenting with them in various activities on the last day of the week. The activities include battleship and dice games, where students play these games to learn different parts of speech. She emphasizes that these activities should appeal to all students regardless of age and enable them to expand their vocabulary while having fun.

Mr. David dislikes having students memorize words for a test and so he usually incorporates *storytelling* about the nuances and history of the words into his classroom routine. He engages students by opening up opportunities to discuss a word or quote of the day and by including books and novels that reflect on the meaning of words. Finally, he credits his ESL students with the idea to use subtitles (usually available in most movies) when watching movies in the classroom which allows them to visualize the spoken words by increasing exposure and hence the possibility of remembering new words.

He also uses vocabulary development strategies that nurture word awareness; playing scrabble; creating word lists; using the dictionary; watching movies; reading while highlighting unfamiliar words; and talking to older students. Additionally, he likes to share and discuss the latest research on language learning with his students, since he clearly sees some of his students relating to this research. In short, he views any opportunity where students are engaged in their

learning or are willing to linguistically challenge themselves as a promising prospect for learning new words. Feeling engaged is viewed as a motivator by student participants as well.

### ***Resources.***

*Dictionary and thesaurus.* All teachers value the use of dictionaries and thesauruses in their classrooms. However, Ms. Sara worries that some students might not always be using them correctly. She notices some students' tendencies to look up word synonyms and employ them without searching for actual meaning, thus missing out on comprehending the non-literal nuances of language. Mr. David's practical experience taught him that using a thesaurus might lead to new challenges: "the thesaurus can be and can't be a good idea". While he accepts that a thesaurus exposes students to different possibilities for expressing their ideas, he recognizes that dependence on a thesaurus may not be enough to understand the nuances that come exclusively with exposure to the language. Both teachers agree that the use of these resources needs to be coupled with explicit instruction on their use (Hunt & Beglar, 2005).

*Deliberate instruction for CALP development.* Like parents, teachers also discuss resources that require intentional and deliberate instruction in order to expand academic vocabulary. Ms. Sara reports the positive impact of having a word wall but notes that it is crucial to put creative thoughts into the posted words. She wonders, for example, whether the tendency to focus on academic vocabulary prevents students from using simpler words that may be better at expressing what they wish to convey. She also suggests experimenting with different word classes other than nouns, such as verbs, sentence starters, and transitional phrases.

She reports the benefits of the *Word Within a Word* series (Thomson & Kemnitz, 2014), the vocabulary program that parent Emma also mentions. This series is implemented in grades 5 to 8 and teaches students to dissect a word by looking for prefixes, suffixes, and roots before searching

for its meaning. Students learn the meaning of these dissected words including their origin, which then arms them with a knowledge base to build their vocabulary. She adds that while some students may not immediately see the benefits of this program, they usually do in high school and university where they have to deal with complex academic words.

*Background knowledge.* The building upon multiple language knowledge is clear in Ms. Allison's French classroom. She finds it easier for ESL students with a Spanish background to understand the concept of gendered nouns and verb conjugations/agreements. Consistent with research, this was particularly evident with the older students who used their cultural background and proficient L1 knowledge to improve both L2 and French proficiency (Costa, 2003; Roessingh & Kover, 2003).

***Personal traits.***

*Willing to learn.* Ms. Allison describes students' willingness to "push themselves" as a learning advantage,

With the gifted population, they pick up so fast if they are ready to learn it they will.

So, if you read them a story or if you give them their own time to read, it's insane how many new words they'll pick up just from sitting down and reading for 20 minutes.

It's almost like they push themselves. (2017)

Students in this study share similar experiences whether from reading synonyms or watching television. Their willingness to learn is clear as they talk about the conscious efforts they put into remembering new vocabulary (Gagné, 2003).

*Committed.* This aptitude to exceed limits is also evident when she asks students to write about topics of interest to them. She notes that some students are willing to dedicate time and effort to working on their pieces with her facilitating: "hinting where corrections need to be made and

they have to figure out what it is, and like, seeing the difference in how they push themselves”. Ms. Allison explains that these exercises enriched students’ vocabulary as they devoted plenty of time to think about their writing and to explore the nuances of different words, in order to present the perfect writing piece.

*Willing to excel.* Another advantage of working with gifted ESL students is seeing certain students excel and take charge of their learning. Ms. Allison shares the accomplishments of a young boy in Grade 7, who not only sat for some Grade 12 diploma exams but also managed his own learning. While she admits that the boy’s mother did push him to practice, she is certain that his outstanding progress is a result of his interest, positive attitude, and his love for learning.

### ***Opportunities.***

*Build on interest.* Ms. Sara reports that motivation is key to progress; even at a young age, students can plan their learning once they find a passion. Hence, both parents and teachers should help students cultivate their stated interests, not only to shed light on their passions, but also to determine what might cause them to underperform.

Ms. Allison’s strong belief in fostering student curiosity to inspire motivation is evident throughout most of her responses. Whether asking students to write a story on a topic of their choice or giving them the freedom to research a city of their liking, she clearly gears the learning to students’ passions. She places great value on building their curiosity and learning through encouraging them to ask questions (Costa, 2003; Renzulli & Reis, 2003). Her support of students’ interest arises from relating progress in language learning directly to motivation, looking at “how invested they want to get into it and how much they do care about learning a new language. Motivation is such a big factor”.



*Choice.* Mr. David stresses the importance of choice in motivating students to engage in their learning. He sees it as his way of differentiating in his classroom. When given the opportunity to choose, he finds that students do not realize that they are “doing work” to the extent that they wonder when he is going to assign homework. An example is giving students the option to choose any book for an independent reading project. The condition is that students pick a book which challenges and engages them. They are allowed to change their minds about a chosen book if they can justify their second thoughts. Their selections are not usually limited by their language proficiency but based on their interest and their passion to learn about a topic. He finds that this “choice” not only nurtures vocabulary development, but also removes any feeling of inferiority that ESL students might have about their lower level of language proficiency.

*Travel.* In Mr. David’s opinion, another vocabulary development opportunity arises when parents take their children to visit their home country. Parents can use these trips to discuss local traditions and cultures. He shares the story of a student who was a native English speaker and who took it upon himself to learn his family’s L1 because “he didn’t want to look bad when he went to visit”. While his description of the boy’s achievement highlights this particular student’s perseverance, self-motivation, and aptitude for language learning in general, it also serves as an example of how parents can use cultural trips to build linguistic proficiency. He admits that some students may find it hard to handle two languages. This is where being aware as a teacher and as a parent, of what may work for any one student is crucial.

***Cultural mismatch.***

*CALP development.* When asked about what parents do or can do to ensure their child expands L2 academic vocabulary, the teachers’ advice is to continue developing awareness of L1 academic vocabulary. Ms. Sara highlights that discontinuing the use of L1 at home could be

“detrimental” to L2 development. She also encourages reading in English at home to build on that L1 vocabulary.

Ms. Sara adds that one issue arising from working with gifted ESL students revolves around facilitating their move from BICS to CALP. She describes the situation as: “verbally they seem very competent because they know certain words very well, which they can use to get their message across. But making connections and organizing their information has been a little bit of a challenge”. She notices students having to learn new sounds and words that may not exist in their first language such as “on” or “of”, making it hard for them to form higher level sentences.

Ms. Allison also highlights the importance of developing L1 vocabulary at home, calling it an “asset”, since it allows students to develop L2 by building on L1 knowledge. She couples this personal advice with reference to research confirming that “your second or your third or your fourth language will only ever be as strong as your first language”. Both of these responses support the research suggesting the importance of maintaining L1 vocabulary at a CALP level (Cummins, 1983; Krashen & McField, 2005; MacWhinney, 1997; Rolstad et al., 2005).

Mr. David sees value in parents speaking and reading L2 at home. However, if parents are not proficient in L2, he recommends that parents engage with their children in their first language or literature. One example offered was when a student who read a book in L2 about his parents’ culture and was then able to discuss it with his dad who read it in L1. Mr. David relates how such a practice both enriched the conversation between parent and child and provided a vocabulary enrichment strategy.

*Expectations.* When asked about her relationship with parents, Ms. Allison states that some parents have high expectations of their children and expect her to push their children to work “harder and faster”. She recognizes that their cultural backgrounds perhaps dictate such

expectations, yet she does not shy away from explaining to parents that, while the Canadian education system might seem lax, it is successful in ensuring student progress. Her advice to parents is to focus on building on their children's passions, rather than pushing them to work hard and achieve. She believes that students will excel and persevere if they find what interests them. She had tested this theory in her French class, where identifying a child's passion for comics led him to excel in French simply because he enjoyed putting in the hours to read and research French comics.

*Linguistic barriers.* Having two grown gifted children of his own and having had to move cities to accommodate for one of his son's needs, Mr. David identifies with parents and is always willing to meet with them despite language barriers. He encourages and uses these opportunities to learn about students' home environments and to inform parents about the expectations of the Canadian education system. Ms. Sara also values collaborative parent teacher communications and is concerned that some parents might not meet with her due to language barriers.

***Teachers' concern.***

*Acceleration.* Another concern of the teachers stems from acceleration and the balancing act required to ensure that gifted students who want to excel remain challenged without being overwhelmed. The following quote details this concern:

You can't just chuck a harder book on an ESL student who wants to accelerate. Do they have the right vocabulary to understand and discuss the nuances of what's going on, the maturity level of the themes? That's something that I am still trying to wrap my head around because I definitely agree with acceleration, I'm just trying to figure out what that's going to look like for ESL students moving forward. (Ms. Sara, 2017)

Mr. David has similar concerns about students' ability to handle academic language. He describes being a gifted ESL learner as a "two-edged sword". He views diverse cultural backgrounds as rich with topics that can enrich classroom discussions and also relate to curriculum expectations. Yet, he is aware that such discussions require a high level of academic English vocabulary, where understanding the nuances of academic words and expressing complex thoughts becomes important:

You have an obligation to try and intervene on couple of levels. One of them is how do you help them get past the language barriers. Second thing is about helping them to get past the social-emotional stuff that happens as a result. (2017)

His thoughts on acceleration in the classroom are guided by studying the reasons for it. Particularly for L2 academic vocabulary, his concern goes beyond confirming that students understand the meaning of the academic words. It is ensuring that they understand the nuances of words with abstract concepts that becomes a challenge. With acceleration, he is careful to ensure students are able to analyze the content of what is being read and adds that, "there's no problem with revisiting stuff they've read before; that helps with that language development".

*Writing.* Writing tasks can be frustrating for some gifted ESL students. These students are usually enthusiastic about sharing their ideas but lack the language skills necessary to form connections or format complex sentences. Ms. Allison usually deals with students' concerns by reminding them that developing a language takes time and helping them scaffold so as to present their ideas in simpler sentences that match their language level.

### **Student focus group discussions and interviews.**

The voices of Melody, Jody, Andrew, and Kathy (pseudonyms), the four students who scored over the 90th percentile on the EOWPVT-4, provide rich insights into the strategies

they use to develop academic vocabulary. This section starts with a brief description of their backgrounds to familiarize the reader with each of these four participants. The linguistic strategies they use and other common themes are presented next: (a) strategies, (b) resources, (c) special aptitudes, (d) personal traits (e) opportunities, (f) knowledgeable others, and (g) students' concerns (see Figure 4.3).

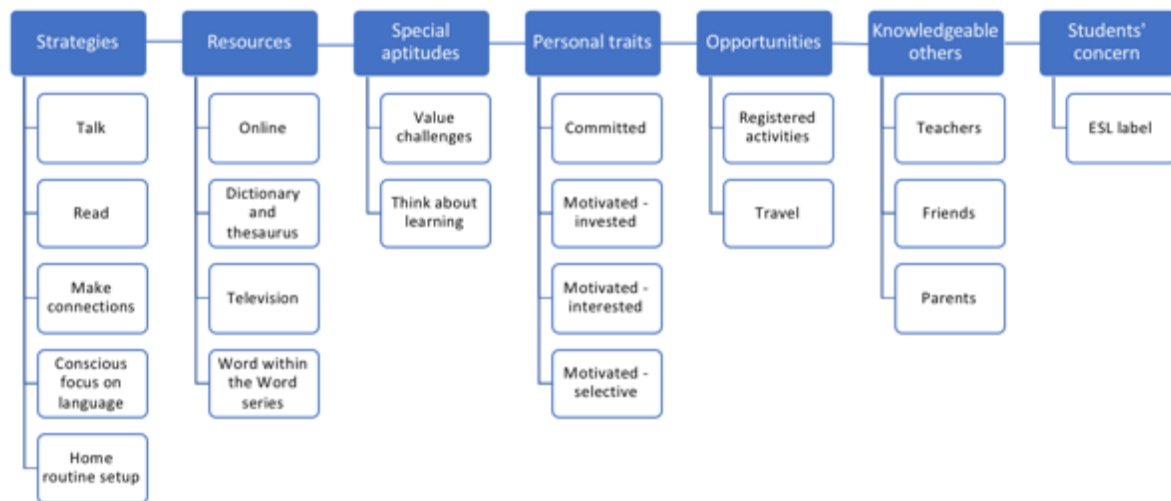


Figure 4.3 Students' Themes.

### Meet the students.

#### *Melody.*

To be honest, I think, reading parts of the textbooks is useless, since I know tons about the Aztecs, Japan, and all that stuff and I find it pretty useless. (Melody, 2017)

Melody had just turned 14 on the first day of the study. She states that she speaks “English with my mom and sometimes Mandarin with my dad”. Her responses reflect that she has persevered to develop 2 languages since she believes that language learners have to “be very dedicated” in order to develop their linguistic skills.

#### *Jody.*

Jody did not consent to have her voice recorded and her responses reflect the researcher's observations and ability to take notes. Jody is able to communicate in her parents' L1 (Cantonese) and uses it all the time with her parents and occasionally with her brother. While she is confident speaking in both English and Cantonese, she favours English with her friends, even those who speak Cantonese.

***Andrew.***

I think the best way that I learn is when something is actually happening to me or whatever and something that is interactive, then, to actually find a way to solve or to clear something up (Andrew, 2017).

Andrew, aged 14 years and 6 months at the time of data collection, was born and raised in Canada to Chinese parents who make speaking Chinese skills (does not specify whether Mandarin, Cantonese, or other) a priority in their home.

***Kathy.***

It depends if I'm actually interested in the language, because like if I'm not interested in the language, then I don't have any motivation to learn it. (Kathy, 2017).

Kathy was born in Canada and speaks English and Vietnamese with her parents and friends outside of school. Like the other students in this study, she also prefers to speak in English. Her responses reveal her firm belief that her learning is guided by her interests.

**Students' themes.**

***Strategies.***

*Talk.* All four students emphasize the value of using a language regularly since it is the way they were able to develop both L1 and L2. Melody credits her confidence in English (L2) to it being her language of choice for communication, as well as, for reading and creative writing. Jody,

mostly speaks L1 with her parents, and does not recall having difficulty learning Cantonese as she had been hearing it and speaking it since she was little. In order to succeed in learning a language and communicate ideas effectively, Jody recommends that language learners use the language daily.

Andrew does not recall speaking English at home when he was young and credits his comfort speaking Chinese (L1) to his parents' continuous support. He always communicates in L1 with them and they continue to provide vocabulary for words he does not know. While he is confident in his use of both languages, he mentions that he wants to increase his efforts to focus on L1 as "it certainly will be helpful for the future". His advice to students trying to develop English proficiency is to use it on a daily basis. This advice stems from his experience learning both English and Chinese by having everyday conversations with parents and friends.

Kathy has always lived in a bilingual home and speaks both English and Vietnamese with her family. She reports that "English was a little bit ahead of Vietnamese". She is comfortable speaking Vietnamese and can read a few words but does not know how to write in Vietnamese.

*Read.* Reading in English (L2) is a common strategy for vocabulary development among all student participants. They are confident in their L2 language skills and attribute this confidence to their enjoyment of reading in L2. Melody mostly reads in L2 despite her ability to read in L1. Andrew enjoys reading and discussing Shakespeare's work. Overall, they report trying to understand the meaning of the word in context before searching it elsewhere.

*Make connections.* Melody shares how making connections makes it easy for her to transfer her knowledge in one language to develop another. For example, she references the value of Pinyin (a system of writing in Mandarin Chinese that uses the Latin alphabet to ease pronunciation) in developing her English and explains that any student can do it and all they have to do is "remove

the speaking marks from it and just sound it out”. She also shares an alternate way stating, “if you speak Chinese, then you could compare the words and find a way to remember its pronunciation”. Her example confirms the value of building on word knowledge in one language to progress another (MacWhinney, 1997).

*Conscious focus on language.* While making connections is a theme that reflects conscious thought, students show strong critical skills by analyzing their level of language knowledge. Jody believes that learning English (L2) is easy once a student learns the alphabet and the stems. While she is confident in her L2 skills, she recognizes that she should continue to increase her vocabulary by, for example, putting conscious effort into acquiring new words. She feels that she already does this by writing new words in a document that is now full of academic words to help her remember them.

Andrew emphasizes the importance of comprehending that every word has a certain context that it can be used in. He advises students to understand the meaning of the word. He adds that he does not “try to force the words. I feel, so like if it sounds awkward, sometimes some people try to use big words and sometimes it kind of, it just doesn’t go with the mood”. He deals with concerns that arise from using synonyms by placing a conscious focus on the vocabulary he uses and by seeking linguistic resources (dictionaries and thesauruses) and support from mentors (teachers and parents).

*Home routine setup.* Melody factors in time to do English homework after school and is usually still left with time to participate in other activities. Jody suggests that language learners need to find routines that motivate them to work hard. For example, they can plan time for homework and complete it by prioritizing the work they are itching to do. She suggests they regularly review their English notes and use apps, such as Duolingo, to practice new English



words. Additionally, students need to be flexible in their learning: even though she prefers working alone, she would work with friends to gain an outside perspective.

### ***Resources.***

*Online learning.* Whether further developing any of the three languages she is already familiar with, or talking about learning a fourth language, Kathy looks favourably on researching and using available online resources. When asked about her vocabulary development strategies, she reiterates that her first go-to strategy is to enlist the help of friends. If they could not provide her with clear explanations, she searches the meaning of the new word online and uses dictionary and thesaurus websites. She and Andrew find these online resources to be particularly convenient when writing since they allow for quick access to the precise meaning of a word. Melody finds online apps, such as Duolingo (an app which students can download on their phone or computer and study any language whenever they have time) to be effective resources for building vocabulary.

*Dictionary and thesaurus.* All students use dictionaries and thesauruses to search and understand the meaning of newly encountered words. Melody talks about her interest in reading synonyms as a way to improve her academic vocabulary. Andrew uses these resources if they are easily available. The value they and their teachers place on these resources to build academic vocabulary seems to justify their continued use in the classroom.

*Television.* Jody enjoys watching television in different languages to expand her vocabulary. She prefers subtitles when watching Chinese series or other foreign movies such as Japanese anime movies. Andrew also finds watching programs of interest to him on television while being on the lookout for new words to be a successful strategy. He recommends that students use a dictionary

or a thesaurus to look up new words they encounter in these circumstances. Two teachers and a parent also see the value of television and videos for exposing students to new vocabulary.

*Word Within the Word.* Just like their parents and teachers, Kathy and Andrew see the *Word Within the Word* series (Thomson & Kemnitz, 2014) as a way to easily expand academic vocabulary. Andrew describes the learning experience as, “it’s like you get to know the stems in everything in English and sometimes if you know where the word comes from, then you know what it means and it’s a lot easier”. Kathy reports, “so we get like bits of the word. So, I’ll try to find out the meaning like into the context but if it really puzzles me, then I’ll search it up”. These descriptions highlight their ability to think about their learning and will be further discussed in the *think about learning* section.

### ***Special aptitudes.***

*Value challenges.* Melody would choose a language if she sees value or feels added motivation to learn it. She would learn “French or Finnish, because Finnish is the hardest language in the world and I like challenges, and then French because I need it for Cadets”. Kathy also shares her love of challenges and says, “I try to, like, decipher the meaning, cause sometimes words are like similar in English”. All students share a similar passion for figuring out the meaning of words in context and challenging themselves to understand the context before searching the meaning of unfamiliar words.

*Think about learning.* Melody’s ability to make connections is made evident by a sequence she follows to remember new words. “First, I would try to understand it and then usually I go to the internet and find out what it means and the synonyms and then use that instead”. She also reports, “I read synonyms, so like words that mean the same thing, so like if the word was *crimson*, then I would use *red* or *dark red*, then I remember it that way”. She is always trying to find other

connections detailing her strategy to remember the word *crimson*, “that’s how you would probably describe something like blood, it would be either *crimson* or *blood red* and yeah, but if I was describing an apple that had a dark color, I would use *dark red*”.

Kathy and Andrew’s appreciation of the *Word within the Word* series similarly portrays an ability to think about their learning. Andrew also shares that he reviews teachers’ comments trying to understand what he did wrong and gets annoyed once he figures out his mistakes. He accepts the feedback and uses it to advance his learning. Students’ ability to reflect on and detail their thoughts is likely a reflection of their giftedness and an above average phonological awareness (McBride-Chang et al., 1996; Tannenbaum, 2003).

### ***Personal traits.***

*Committed.* All students declare that it takes hard work to successfully develop academic language proficiency. Melody asserts the value of grit for vocabulary development (Duckworth et al., 2011) and the idea that language learners have to “be very dedicated” in order to develop their linguistic skills. Kathy’s advice to language learners includes similar reflections such as, “don’t give up learning English, just if you don’t understand something ask someone, repeat it over in your head and if that doesn’t work then just get a dictionary”. Andrew comments that one is not born a language learner since learning a language requires commitment. He illustrates this by noting that his decision to study “everyday a bit” helps him learn and improve his French proficiency.

*Motivated - Invested.* Students’ view of language knowledge as an *investment* confirms the research (Norton-Peirce, 1995). To Andrew, languages are gateways to future academic and professional opportunities and thus explain his drive to develop three languages. He acknowledges that knowing only one language “is probably fine” but looks at learning more than one language

as providing “more opportunities probably in the future for work”.

Kathy places a high value on L2 academic proficiency for school success, viewing language as a means of communication. She states that the language of the country where one lives dictates in which language the different academic subjects, such as mathematics and social studies are taught. To her, advanced L2 proficiency is vital for student success in Canada since it is an English-speaking country.

*Motivated - Interested.* Kathy shares, “I’m not really a big writer, I don’t enjoy writing, but I still can do it, I just don’t find any interest in it”. The significance she places on *interest* before undertaking a task is consistent with her other responses. Her lack of interest in writing means that she has to put in more effort to complete her written assignments. Yet, her work ethics drives her to complete these tasks once she concentrates on the goal of completing them.

The importance Kathy places on interest is also evident in the way she handles being asked to read a book she is not eager to attempt. She first underscores her passion for reading, “when I was little, I was a big reader so I’m not really picky”. Next, she admits that she would be keener to read a book if the topic is of interest to her. She reiterates that, similar to learning and developing a language, her interest is key in how soon she would start reading and then completing the assigned book. Her responses align with teachers’ beliefs and Oxford’s (2014) work.

*Motivated – Selective.* Jody is confident speaking both English and Cantonese and asserts that learning and using a second language is a choice. For Andrew, developing a language has to be a choice because “you like don’t want to learn a language, if you’re forced to learn it, (you) probably won’t learn it that well”. He likes learning other languages besides English and Chinese and describes learning French as a choice he made because “French is a pretty cool language”. The other students discuss interest as the motivator for learning a language and report that it is a choice

they make.

### ***Opportunities.***

*Registered activities.* Melody sees value in attending a language school to develop a language. Jody recalls that growing up, most of her L2 exposure was from speaking to native speakers of English in daycare. These experiences add to the research on the need for structured instruction (Roessingh & Kover, 2003) and continuous communication (Hart & Risley, 2003; Hoff, 2013; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Vygotsky, 1963) for language development.

*Travel.* Kathy is confident in her L1 proficiency level and has tested her capacity to speak it during several family trips to Vietnam. Despite her awareness that she might not know some basic L1 words, she feels certain of her ability to communicate and manage as needed. Similarly, Andrew has traveled to China and is confident in his L1 conversational skills. The value of travel and other direct socio-cultural exposures to new vocabulary in increasing language proficiency is endorsed by students, parents, and teachers as well as in recent research (Biemiller, 2001; Roessingh, 2018).

### ***Knowledgeable others.***

*Teachers.* Jody reports the value of capitalizing on any encouragement and or mentoring opportunities received from caring adults. Kathy shares that she is proficient in English and Vietnamese and speaks a little bit of French. She describes herself as “interpersonal” and highlights the efficacy of this trait for language development. She explains that it emboldens her to reach out and ask for support from teachers. It also strengthens her confidence when communicating with native speakers. She shares that her primary strategy for developing any language would involve working with “someone who knows the language really well and someone who has had experience teaching it, or like helped out with it”. Students’ comments reiterate the value that research places

on the elaborative and collaborative talk provided by teachers and other caring adults as catalysts for language learning (August et al., 2005; Nassaji & Tian, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013; Vygotsky, 1963)

*Friends.* Andrew listens to friends' suggestions when he asks them for advice; does not hesitate to ask for help if he needs it; and is usually willing to work with friends to improve his language skills. For example, once he was concerned about having a non-native accent and discussed these concerns with a friend. His friend told him that it wasn't his accent that was the problem but the fact that he spoke too fast. He started focusing on slowing down until he felt confident.

Kathy shares that she rarely has any issues expressing her thoughts in L2, but if the odd situation arises, she would rely on friends for support. Through the eyes of students, friends can be part of the socio-cultural interactions that facilitate language development. This aligns with available research on the importance of collaborative talk (Nassaji & Tian, 2014; Vygotsky, 1986).

*Parents.* Andrew, Jody and Melody credit their parents for helping them develop their L1 vocabulary. Their parents also encourage the development of English and support them to do well in this language as well. Kathy also views her parents as resources despite their low English proficiency. She usually asks her mother when she needs ideas for written assignments since she is "really good at writing". Students' descriptions of parental roles in early language development add to existing research (Hart & Risley, 2003; Hoff, 2013; Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Parents' cultural influence is also reflected in the students' attitudes towards language acquisition (Boer & Fischer, 2013).

***Students' concerns.***

*ESL label.* Even though she reports herself to be “pretty confident” in L1, Kathy prefers to speak, read, and watch television or movies in L2. Jody does not identify as an ESL student since, in her opinion, the label reflects a student who requires support learning English. She worries about ESL students being teased for their accents or mocked for their low language proficiency. Similarly, but indirectly, other student participants identify as being non-ESL learners. Kathy writes, “I don’t have trouble speaking English”. Their sentiments add to research discussions on the ESL label (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008).

### **Summary**

The gifted ESL students’ vocabulary development profile is defined by their linguistic strategy use, socio-cultural influences and gifted learner traits. Analyzing the data included integrating parents’, teachers’, and students’ perspectives. Participants’ responses revealed that a conscious focus on strategy, personal trait, resource, and opportunity use is favoured.

Suggested strategies ranged from a general focus on the experiences of the whole child to more specific actions such as conversation and reading synonyms for fun. The gifted ESL learner traits highlighted some specific special needs. While gifted ESL students were capable of taking charge of their learning, they needed environments that challenge and scaffold their learning. They also needed mentoring to deal with social/emotional issues that arise from being gifted and second language learners. The socio-cultural environment also supplied students with knowledgeable people who provided early learning resources and opportunities for elaborative and collaborative talk. These knowledgeable others met the gifted ESL learner needs by providing choice, resources to identify interests, and strategies to expand vocabulary.

In short, participants' responses indicate that second language development goes beyond determining efficacious linguistic strategies. It arises as a process that is intertwined with other factors. These factors include personal traits and support from the environment.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to understand how gifted students utilized linguistic strategies, personal traits and the support of caring others to develop their academic vocabulary. By exploring a single case of study of their shared experiences, a new understanding of the gifted ESL learner linguistic profile emerged, building on previous research. The main goal of contributing to the literature by advancing an understanding of this learner's experiences was accomplished.

This study relied on six data collection instruments to establish which strategies the students felt best advanced their linguistic development. The following research questions guided the study.

1. How do gifted ESL students deploy language learning strategies to advance their vocabulary development?
2. How do gifted ESL students utilize personal traits for vocabulary development?
3. How do parents and teachers perceive their role in nurturing the linguistic development of their gifted ESL learners?

The discussion that follows is framed around the three over-arching questions that guided the inquiry. The data was considered holistically, in order to make the connections to the extant research literature and identify new questions arising from this study that remain unanswered. In the concluding chapter these questions are highlighted once again to suggest directions for further research, policy development, and pragmatic questions about how best to raise bilingually developing children in the Alberta context.

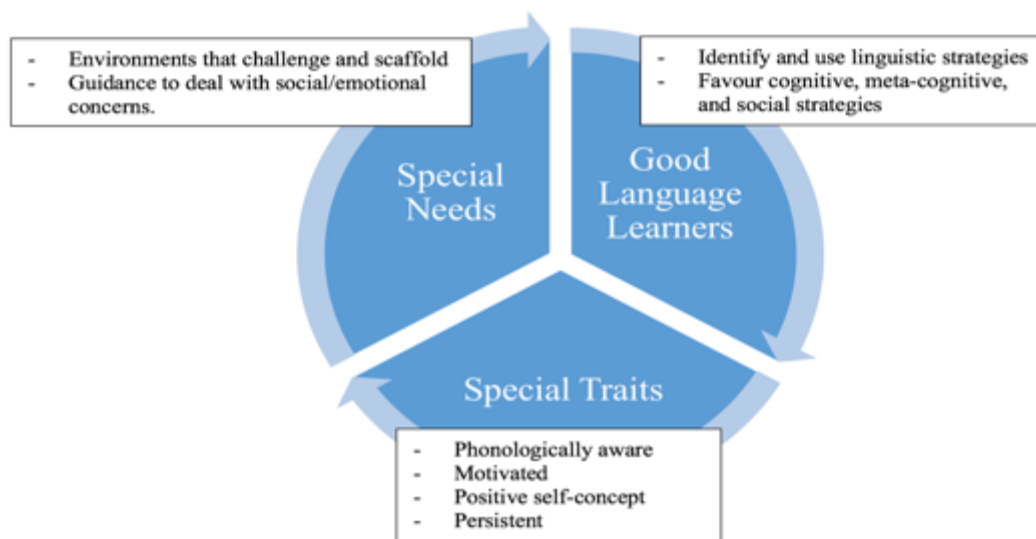
In chapter 4, the findings highlighted participants' vocabulary level, linguistic background, preferred strategies and socio-cultural influences. Commonalities among the three groups of participants are interpreted in this chapter. Equally important, the Discussion considers how the 'good' gifted language learner consciously deploys (a) linguistic strategies, (b) personal traits, and

(c) socio-cultural influences for linguistic development. Elaborate responses to three questions are provided next. A summary concludes this chapter.

The cumulative data suggested that academically successful gifted ESL language learners are (see Figure 5.1):

- confident as they persist to pursue their learning goals;
- ‘good language learners’ who strive to identify and utilize linguistic strategies;
- in need of personalized education that scaffolds their language learning and guides them to deal with educational issues and social/emotional concerns.

Further research to build on these findings will serve to complete the image of the gifted ESL learner vocabulary development profile and linguistic growth journey.



*Figure 5.1* Gifted ESL Learner Profile.

Analysis suggested that the gifted ESL students’ ‘toolkit’ might include balanced opportunities for students to choose their learning strategies (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002), structured/scaffolded instruction (Corson, 1997; Roessingh, 2012; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012;

Vygotsky, 1997) and socio-cultural strategies (Hart & Risley, 2003; Hoff, 2013; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Vygotsky, 1963). Figure 5.2 demonstrates the equal importance of the three factors. The three factors are elaborated on next through a discussion of the responses to the three research questions.



*Figure 5.2 Gifted ESL Learner Toolkit.*

### **Question 1**

How do gifted ESL students deploy language learning strategies to advance their vocabulary development?

The profile of students in this study can be described as that of the ‘good language learner’; they were aware of various linguistic strategies and deployed them to advance the development of their academic vocabulary (Cohen, 2012). Analysis of linguistic strategies recommended by all three groups of participants revealed the following consciously employed strategies used by students to expand vocabulary:

- Read on a daily basis (four students, three teachers, two parents)
- Engage in daily interactive conversations in L1 and L2 (four students, three teachers, two parents)

- Use language enrichment resources (at home and in school; online and offline) (four students, three teachers, two parents)
- Repeatedly practice new words (three students, three teachers, one parent)
- Reach out to knowledgeable others for support (three students, three teachers, one parent)
- Monitor their own learning progress (three students, three teachers, one parent)
- Build a better understanding of the nuance and structure of newly learned words (three students, three teachers, one parent)
- Utilize structured tasks that challenge and scaffold (two students, three teachers, one parent)

Students understood the value of CALP words for academic success (Chall & Jacobs, 2003; Hoff, 2013; Roessingh, 2008). Students are bilingual. They might not be considered balanced bilinguals (Cummins, 1976, Baker, 2011), as they preferred to speak English most of the time. This confirmed previous research that indicates a gradual loss of first language and culture among ESL learners and a preference for English (Cummins, 2000; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008; Wong Fillmore, 2000). All students were at a conversational L1 level and their L2 scores revealed a high L2 CALP. This is a finding that added to current research on the value of conversational L1 for L2 CALP acquisition (Cummins, 1980; Krashen & McField, 2005; MacWhinney, 1997; Rolstad et al., 2005; Saville-Troike, 1984). It left unanswered which other factors play a role in increasing CALP proficiency.

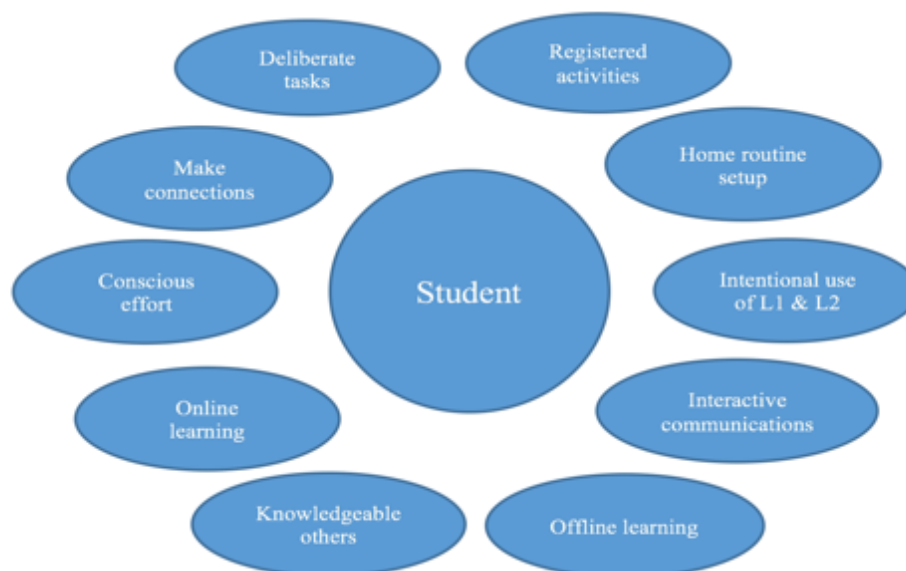


Figure 5.3 Students' Key Vocabulary Development Strategies.

Students were unified in valuing linguistic strategies such as communicating, reading, and being critically aware of learning (see Figure 5.3). Each student also brought forward unique approaches and combined them as they saw fit, in accordance with their personalities and preferences. Extroverted students easily reached out to those around them to help them understand new words. Research describes this strategy as the *willingness to communicate* (Dörnyei, 2003). Other students spent time looking up new words and figuring out ways to remember them. Whether online or offline, they made connections between what they read, saw, or experienced in order to expand their vocabulary.

In short, the findings revealed students' awareness of the linguistic strategies they use and a habit to engage in their learning (Costa, 2003). Their EOWPVT-4 scores suggested that their awareness and hard work may have resulted in increased levels of language development (Moore & Schleppegrell, 2014; Oxford, 1990). Note that all of the listed strategies demonstrated the intellectual commitment, the desire, and the perseverance required to succeed (Costa, 2003; Gagné, 2003; Gallagher, 2003; Robinson, 2002). This confirmed previous research (Duckworth et

al., 2011) which identifies these traits as important for vocabulary development, as is elaborated upon in the responses to the second research question.

## **Question 2**

How do gifted ESL students utilize personal traits for vocabulary development?

One of the most difficult tasks in this inquiry process was deciding whether personal traits presented a fertile ground for enhancing vocabulary development. In order to best respond to this question, connections were made by exploring students' responses on the Grit scale (Duckworth, 2016b) and the three participant groups' oral responses looking for commonalities on this topic. All students scored high on the Grit scale and shared personal experiences that highlighted their strong metalinguistic abilities and commitment for learning.

Students' qualitative responses revealed a willingness to (a) learn (Cohen, 2012; Harmer, 2001; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Rogers, 2002), (b) use linguistic strategies (Dörnyei, 2003; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), and (c) challenge themselves (Li & Qin, 2006; Robinson, 2002). Findings suggested that students in this study have the linguistic ability to develop an understanding of academic words. For example, students were portrayed as having a strong metalinguistic awareness (McBride-Chang et al., 1996; Tannenbaum, 2003) that allowed them to quickly learn new words, by "sitting down and reading for 20 minutes" (Miss Allison, 2017). The following traits were viewed by participants as valuable for vocabulary development and linguistic proficiency growth.

- Value challenge
- Strong metacognitive ability
- High ability learner
- High motivation

These are the cognitive traits that are typical among high IQ individuals (Mendaglio, 2007; Tannenbaum, 2003). Their growth or inhibition is influenced by home and school environments (Costa, 2003). In this study, they emerged as *catalysts* that helped to expand vocabulary among student participants. An example was Kathy and Andrew describing the specific benefits of the *Word within the Word* series, thus making it more likely that they would engage with the material and use their learning when encountering new vocabulary.

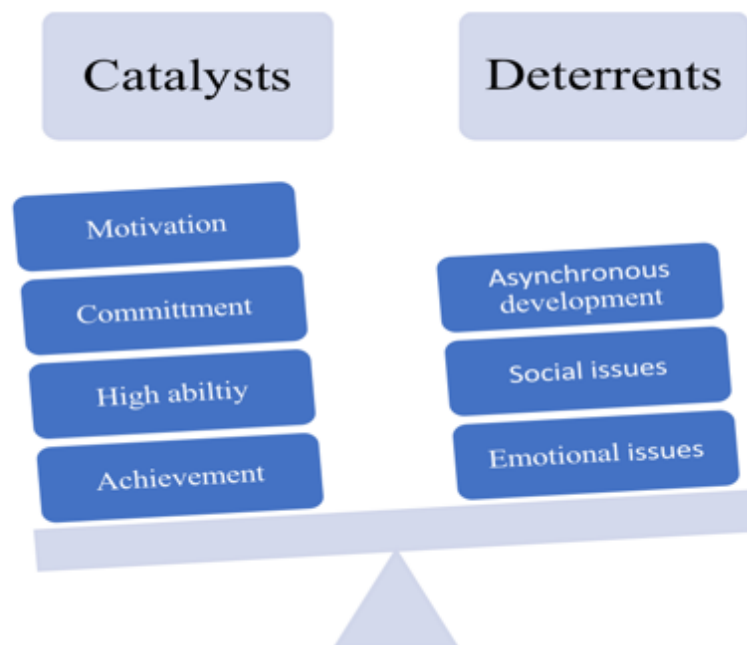
The traits of note in the gifted good language learners in this study also highlighted what may be described as an *ability* or a *willingness* to persist and persevere (Costa, 2003; Gagné, 2003; Robinson, 2002), a necessary trait for vocabulary expansion (Duckworth et al. 2011). Students' responses in this study reflected some grittiness. As well, repeated references to their daily commitments and their ability to plan and progress their language learning were made by all three participant groups (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002; Renzulli, 2003; Robinson, 2002; Tannenbaum, 1983; Yunus et al, 2013).

Equally important were students' affective traits. If not appropriately supported, such traits might become *deterrents* to progress in language learning (Mendaglio, 2007; Silverman, 2016). When Andrew talked about his feelings of anxiety when he read his teacher's comments on a task, he then showed emotional maturity by accepting the comments and using them to enhance his learning. As well, Jody and Kathy's rejection of the ESL label portrayed a confidence in expressing their linguistic identity and a positive self-concept. Feelings of frustration and inferiority can lead to discouragement or worse, but they can also lead to motivation and a more positive self-concept, if students are encouraged to talk about them and accept them. Affective traits included:

- Emotional sensitivity that may lead to student frustration and anxiety if not supported

- Social issues (rejecting the ESL label) that may lead of feelings of inferiority if not acknowledged and dealt with appropriately
- Asynchronous development of cognitive, physical, and social-emotional abilities, that may lead to social and emotional issues if not provided with an environment which accommodates for such uneven development

Results confirmed research on the value of general gifted cognitive abilities, such as planning and monitoring learning, for enhanced language learning (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002; Yunus et al., 2013). Yet, consistent with research, other traits such as asynchronous development (Silverman, 2009) require more specialized learning supports. Student participants were part of an environment that provided for their affective needs which in turn gave them the confidence to utilize personal traits to develop linguistic strategies. Figure 5.4 illustrates how the positive traits among student participants enhanced vocabulary development in spite of affective traits that may have deterred it.



*Figure 5.4 Catalysts and Deterrents of Vocabulary Development.*



In all, students exhibited typical gifted language learner behaviour in their keen attempts to overcome obstacles and challenge themselves (Rogers, 2002; Tannenbaum, 2003). Teachers and parents met the needs of students by providing social environments that nurture, challenge and scaffold for language proficiency development (Rogers, 2002). Given the results of the current study, further research could also examine which traits could be developed among the non-gifted population to tip the balance in favour of vocabulary expansion.

Findings in this study added to research on the ‘good language learner’ (Nandi, 2011) and confirmed the importance of personal traits for vocabulary development. While question two focused on student participants’ utilization of personal traits for vocabulary development, it became clear that teachers and parents played a role in providing the environment that allowed for language development and encouraged the utilization of these traits. Parents and teachers believed that these traits are not static and can be developed within environments that challenge and scaffold learning (Rogers, 2002). This complemented research on the role of adults in supporting the development of the positive aspects of these traits (Pajares & Schunk, 2002; Subotnik et al., 2011) and will be discussed under question three.

### **Question 3**

How do parents and teachers perceive their role in nurturing the linguistic development of their gifted ESL learners?

Data from parents and teachers implied a need for collaboration between the two groups (Colangelo, 2003). Their results confirmed research that delineate their role in providing safe academic environments that lead to the development of low frequency vocabulary (Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Vygotsky, 1997). Comparison and analysis of data

provided two major themes that confirm that the socio-cultural context is partially responsible for language development (Tannenbaum, 2003):

1. Students' answers indicate that a growth in their conscious focus on linguistic strategy use was influenced by the people around them
2. Results of all three participant groups indicate the value of ongoing home-school collaboration

Participants identified various practical strategies that reinforce the collaborative nature of language acquisition. Students used different linguistic strategies and built on what parents and teachers provided. Teachers' strategies sought results and were intentional. Teachers also highlighted the pros and cons of certain gifted personal traits. Parents were aware of their children's talents and tried to meet the needs of their children by prioritizing after school routines (Gagné, 2003).

Teacher and parent participants provided the challenges, scaffolds, opportunities, and encouragement necessary for vocabulary expansion (Colangelo, 2003; NAGC, n.d.; Roessingh & Kover, 2003). They shared that personal traits can be developed within environments that challenge and scaffold (Rogers, 2002). They worked to nurture the special abilities of their students (Harris et al., 2009; O'Neil, 2006; Pavlov, 2015; Rogers, 2002; Tannenbaum, 2003) and supported their language learning.

Teachers introduced linguistic strategies, activities, and resources that promote the use of academic vocabulary. Their actions affirmed the value of direct and planned language development instruction so as to provide constant challenges and continuous scaffolding (D'Anguilli et al., 2004; Deveau, 2006; Gunning & Oxford, 2014; Krashen, 2009; Roessingh, 2012; Tong et al., 2017; Vygotsky, 1997). They encouraged students to make decisions and take

charge of their own learning. Teachers described working to provide *fun* vocabulary development opportunities that keep students engaged and cater to their interests (Krapp, 2000; Okan & Ispinar, 2009; Renzulli & Reis, 2003). They also met learning needs by understanding individual student strengths and weaknesses. For example, while students might understand the literal meaning of an academic word, teachers were aware that they might not understand its nuances, so they ensured that the word becomes fully comprehensible and relevant to the students (Krashen, 2009).

Teachers' strategies also revealed a focus on the experience of the whole child highlighting the positive and negative effects of certain gifted traits. As they met the needs of their students, they introduced strategies that take into account the five elements suggested in Tannenbaum's Star Model (2003) namely (a) superior general intellect, (b) potential, (c) personal traits, (d) environment, and (e) chance. Teachers understood that their students have high IQs and gifted potential and allowed them the freedom to choose books that challenge them to build their knowledge and interests. They supported the development of their personal traits such as when Miss Allison encouraged her students to persist in the writing task.

They also provided affective strategies to help students deal with social/emotional issues as they encounter their frustrations and sensitivities. Their responses suggested that motivation can be channeled to facilitate language development through a focus on students' interests (Gagné, 2003; Krapp, 2000; Nandi, 2011; Renzulli, 2003). They provided the safe environment for students and enabled positive outcomes by practices such as allowing students choice in completing projects. The findings illustrate the importance of prioritizing and using gifted ESL students' interests to improve learning (Krapp, 2000; Renzulli & Reis, 2003; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010) and suggest that further research may be useful regarding the efficacy of using student interest to enhance vocabulary development.

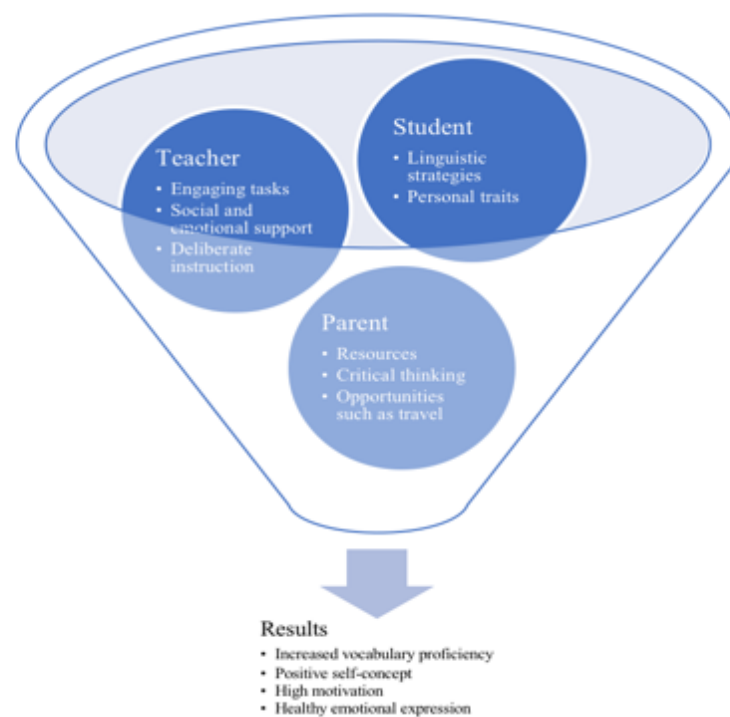
Parents' emerged as the cheerleaders who nurture these personal traits (Pajares & Schunk, 2002; Subotnik et al., 2011). They worked hard to provide environments that ensure that their children remain committed to learning (Duckworth, 2016a; NAGC, n.d.). Parental actions increased students' self-confidence and helped develop their cognitive and affective traits (Tannenbaum, 2003).

Parents took their caring roles seriously and provided challenging home environments that value language learning and enforce academic expectations (Tannenbaum, 2003) and lead to language development (Hart & Risley, 2003; Hoff, 2013; Lightbown & Spada, 2006). They intentionally spoke in L1 and L2 and their actions supported the value that research places on bilingualism (Cummins, 1980; Genesee, 2008; Saville-Troike, 1984). Their children are able to communicate in both languages and to make connections between them.

Parents also provided opportunities through deliberate interactions, travel and scheduled activities that challenge and aid in developing metalinguistic awareness (Corson, 1997; Francis & Simpson, 2009; Hoff, 2013; Nassaji & Tian, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). They encouraged critical thinking about language use and culture (Corson, 1997) through conversations and providing experiences. They valued direct instruction of vocabulary and supplemented with linguistic resources such as workbooks and reading material that expand vocabulary (Deveau, 2006).

Research suggests that involving parents in student vocabulary development is vital for students' and teachers' success (August et al., 2005; Weber & Stanley, 2012). Parent and teacher participants shared the responsibility for supporting the development of the traits of gifted students (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Subotnik et al., 2011) and the language skills of ESL learners (Hoff, 2013; Lucas et al., 2008; Tong et al., 2017).

The role of encouraging students to deploy the appropriate linguistic strategies and personal traits for vocabulary development was also assumed as part and parcel of this collaboration. These results implied adding the students themselves to the equation. They also implied that a strong parent-teacher-student collaboration and a direct focus on CALP development reflected students' above average EOWPVT-4 scores (see Appendix H), high motivation (Hu & Nassaji, 2016), positive self-concept, and healthy emotional expression (Roessingh & Douglas, 2012; Subotnik et al., 2011). Figure 5.5 shows the interactive nature of this 3-directional collaboration.



*Figure 5.5 Parent/Teacher/Student Collaboration Efforts and Results.*

These findings mirrored the research reporting that parents and teachers are the facilitators of students' learning and creativity (Colangelo, 2003; Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Hein et al., 2014; Lucas et al., 2008; Robinson, 2002). The strength of the collaboration and communication directly increases students' learning success. They also suggested that further research on the

collaborative role that caring adults can play in gifted ESL students' linguistic proficiency and vocabulary development is needed.

### **Summary**

The findings of this study suggested that academically successful gifted ESL language learners are: (a) confident as they persist to pursue their learning goals; (b) 'good language learners' who strive to identify and utilize linguistic strategies; and (c) in need of support that scaffolds their language learning and of assistance to deal with educational issues and social/emotional concerns.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions**

This study undertook an in-depth examination of the perspectives of gifted ESL students, as well as parents and teachers who care for them, with regards to students' second language acquisition. The purpose was to glean insight into the linguistic strategies, personal traits, and socio-cultural factors that Canadian born gifted ESL students utilize to increase language proficiency. Drawing on a three-pillared framework that prioritized giftedness, second language acquisition, and socio-cultural theory, the researcher aimed to develop a firsthand understanding of students' linguistic experiences. The study was guided by case study methodology that allowed for three groups of participants' voices to be heard and provided insight into the gifted ESL linguistic repertoire. In this final chapter, conclusions are drawn, implications and recommendations for vocabulary development in gifted ESL students are discussed, future research directions are suggested, the significance of the study is presented, and final thoughts are shared.

### **Conclusions Drawn from Data**

Six data collection tools provided results that went beyond responding to the research questions. An initial conclusion was drawn from students' data; developing academic vocabulary is important for school success and should not be limited to determining efficacious linguistic strategies. Parents' and teachers' data confirmed and expanded upon the students' results.

The broad idea that initiated this study sought to gain insights into linguistic strategy, personal traits and socio-cultural factors use among Canadian born gifted ESL students in an English milieu school. The purpose was to explore how the 'good' gifted language learner consciously deploys (a) linguistic strategies, (b) personal traits, and (c) socio-cultural influences

for second language development in general and vocabulary expansion in particular. This initial question informed three research questions that explored the topic from different angles.

The first question was answered by exploring strategy use for vocabulary development. Findings provided a glimpse of the successful student language learning profile as one who is willing to engage, commit, and learn. Elaborative and collaborative talk, reading, and a conscious focus on vocabulary development were strategies that gifted ESL students deployed for vocabulary development. They also utilized online and offline resources to build their proficiency and understand the nuances of newly acquired words. Choice was a factor that decides whether students will utilize these strategies. It is, in turn, influenced by personal traits such as motivation and commitment.

The second question looked at the personal traits that students used for vocabulary development. Answering this question highlighted the importance of providing for students' needs in order for the catalyst traits (e.g., motivation and commitment) to outweigh the deterrents (e.g., asynchronous development and social issues). Exploring personal traits also provided a glimpse into students' linguistic identity and its effect on second language development. All students viewed English (L2) as their language of choice for communication (Cummins, 1976; 2000; Wong Fillmore, 2000). Their sentiments rejected the implications of the ESL label as "an institutional marker, pointing to a need for additional services and also to the status of someone still marked as a novice in the English language, an English language learner" (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008, p. 390). They denied their bilingualism as they viewed themselves as speakers of English.

The third question shifted gears to consider the role of mentors as influential factors in second language acquisition. Links to the role of the socio-cultural environment that emerged in response to the first and second questions were emphasized in this response. Socio-cultural



influences that kept students motivated and committed to utilize linguistic strategies reflected an environment that supported the whole student's experience. Parents' and teachers' collaborative role in encouraging the development of students' passions, interests, and goals was key in motivating them to expand their vocabulary.

It is worthy to note that the participating ADA teachers provided students with opportunities to ask questions, question assumptions, and take charge of their learning and also helped them develop intrinsic motivation for language learning. They strove to keep abreast of the latest research, constantly questioned their teaching methods, and regularly searched for tools to enhance their students' learning. Parent participants reported allowing their children to decide how and what they wanted to learn, thus helping them to stay motivated and develop a positive self-concept. They also provided a home environment that encourages a love of language learning and a strong work ethics. The results of both groups of adults' efforts were made obvious by the confidence students had to share personal experiences and the motivation to learn.

Collaboration among parents, teachers, and students was also necessary to develop this confidence. The role that parents and teachers played in providing intentional and deliberate tasks, resources, and opportunities that promote language learning was important; students reported that they reached out to the adults in their lives for linguistic support. Results thus prioritized a 3-way collaboration among stakeholders as part and parcel of the vocabulary development process.

In short, the study highlighted the linguistic strategy usage and the strengths and weaknesses of the gifted ESL learner. It also confirmed the need for mentors and caring adults. Canada is unique in its diversity profile with challenges equally unique in addressing what is best for its young ESL children who are born in Canada and are ultimately 'Canadian' at heart. The ultimate

goal of the study was an increase in understanding gifted ESL students' emotional, social, and language learning needs and exploring ways to support their vocabulary development.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Practice**

In attempting to hear all participants' voices, build on the research framework, and include proposed and emergent themes, a simpler but inherently more complex model for vocabulary development emerged. It expanded on current research and confirmed the impact of maintaining age appropriate vocabulary in advancing the development of English (L2). It also highlighted the role of parents and teachers as nurturers and facilitators of learning. Moreover, it placed a focus on actively empowering students to reflect on both their emotions and their abilities; thus, encouraging their curiosity and desire to learn. The section that follows discusses the implications for practice arising from the study and presents the proposed vocabulary development model.

#### **Implications.**

Teachers and parents viewed their collaborative actions and interactions with students as key in developing students' confidence to then utilize linguistic strategies and expand their academic language. The results of this study identified the socio-cultural environment as the provider of strategies and opportunities to develop students' curiosities and interests (Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Krapp, 2000; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Vygotsky, 1997). The implications for vocabulary development which in turn increases language proficiency thus identified the necessity of involving all three stakeholder groups.

ADA provided such an environment as was evident from the teachers' responses. They prioritized students' interests, personal traits, and social/emotional needs, and also encouraged the use of vocabulary expansion strategies. Teachers sought the tools and education needed to provide this environment. Each teacher managed to find ways to foster a relationship between students'

interest, personal traits, and vocabulary development strategies (Krapp, 2000; Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Ms. Allison encouraged one student to explore his interests and engaged his mother so as to allow him time and space to pursue these interests. This led the student to develop his language skills and drove him to excel beyond classroom requirements simply by utilizing his curiosity to understand the nuances of newly encountered vocabulary. Mr. David, a parent of two gifted students, referenced the potential negative effects of gifted students' personal traits and social-emotional issues on learning. He saw the development of L2 proficiency as contingent on the support students receive to appropriately deal with these personal traits and issues. Finally, Ms. Sara emphasized the value of looking at gifted students' individual experiences and increasing their motivation by understanding their needs (Gagné 2003) and boosting their self-concept (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). These teachers' actions were successful and warrant revisiting a differentiated curriculum that prioritizes students' interests and needs for vocabulary expansion.

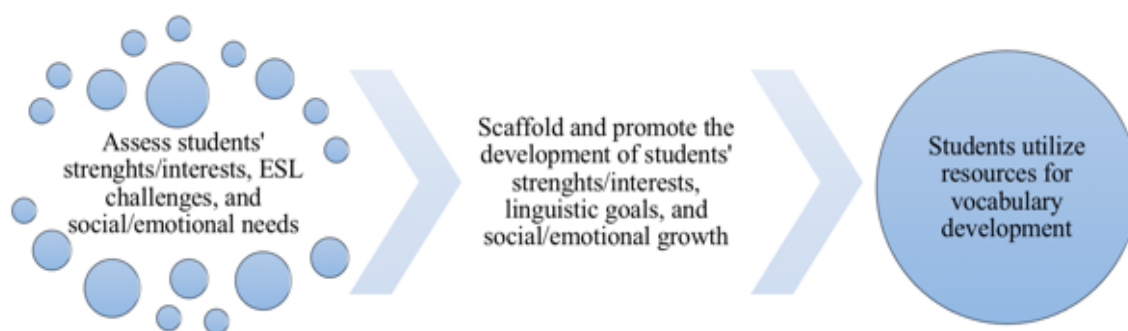
Parent participants were also supportive of their children's emotional and learning needs. They understood their children's personalities and respected their personal choices. They allowed them the space to explore their interests, to choose whether or not they want to develop a second and a third language, and to do homework at their leisure, thus building their desire to learn and their confidence in their personal choices (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Finally, parents were continuously seeking resources and support to enhance their own skills and to ensure their children thrive in developing their L2 proficiency to an academic level. Their responses highlighted the need to provide first generation immigrant parents with a variety of appropriate resources as well as teachers' support.

Students' confidence levels were a result of these environments (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). They shared sensitive topics and described how they handled their emotions. Many stated that they

were confident in English and referred to it as their first language, reflecting the self-assurance that can result from environments that provide specifically for gifted and ESL learner needs. This suggested a need for a reinforcement of policy, so as to (a) make teachers' continuous education a monitored requirement, (b) encourage results-oriented parent/teacher collaboration, and (c) promote a pedagogy that addresses gifted ESL students' developmental issues, social/emotional concerns and interests.

### **Proposed vocabulary development model.**

Results of the study reiterated Tannenbaum's (2003) suggestion to look at the whole child. The value of CALP vocabulary for engagement with school tasks (Cummins, 1981a; Hoff, 2013; Roessingh, 2008) was also reiterated by the three stakeholders. These results led the researcher to propose a vocabulary development model that recommends a focus on the gifted ESL learner strengths and interests, ESL challenges, and social/emotional needs (see Figure 6.1). Personal traits are significant in enhancing vocabulary development; their growth emerged as dependent on support from caring adults. These adults play a role in ensuring the gifted ESL students' language, social/emotional and other learning needs are identified and met.



*Figure 6.1* Researcher Proposed Vocabulary Development Model.

Once gifted ESL students' needs are identified and provided for, students become self-aware, attempt to self-regulate, and a positive self-concept will result which leads to the need and ambition to succeed (Maslow, 1968; Pajares & Schunk, 2002; Tannenbaum, 2003). This is when a focus on personal interest becomes a priority. Personal interest is seen as a motivating factor for language development (Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Krapp, 2000). It provides students with passion and perseverance to persist and work effectively toward the goal of vocabulary expansion (Duckworth et al. 2011). School-created and student operationalized linguistic strategies are both necessary. Vocabulary learning is co-constructed with the knowledgeable other providing  $i+1$  (Krashen, 2009) and appropriate scaffolding, to ensure that an increase in vocabulary and linguistic proficiency materializes (Vygotsky, 1997).

The implication is that a buy-in from both teachers and parents is needed in order for them to invest the time to develop awareness of gifted and ESL students' needs and then operationalize ways to assist them. This buy-in will enable adults to gain knowledge to better support students' language learning in general and then challenge and scaffold students in order to increase vocabulary. When students feel supported, they will take ownership of their learning, and discover and use the linguistic strategies and traits that best fit their learning styles.

While the suggested actions are not novel, the proposed model highlights the importance of a results-oriented parent/teacher/student collaboration for these actions to lead to a successful vocabulary learning experience. It requires a willingness to make space for parent-teacher collaboration opportunities in service of supporting each other and their students. The goal is to create environments that scaffold emotional expression and development of students' interests. Ultimately, this will help create environments that facilitate students' buy-in regarding the importance of expanding their vocabulary through increased linguistic strategy use. This model

proposes dealing first with any social/emotional concerns and academic issues that arise from students being both gifted and ESL. Students will be drawn in by their natural curiosity and will then utilize linguistic strategies that are compatible with their personal traits, in order to expand their vocabulary.

### **Future Research Directions**

Emerging from this study are a series of questions that suggest further research regarding the learning needs of gifted ESL students and seek innovative approaches to support second language acquisition in general and vocabulary development in particular. The study presents the perspectives of a small sample of students bounded by their shared school environment. Parents' and teachers' observations add depth to students' reflections.

The purpose of the study was to explore students' linguistic strategy use. Key findings suggest several areas for future research directions:

1. Results prioritized a primary focus on students' interests to increase motivation and thus independent vocabulary learning. What role does a student interest-focused school environment play in vocabulary development? How can teachers incorporate students' stated interests into the curriculum?
2. Encouraging students to express their emotions was viewed as a primary step towards increasing vocabulary. How do teachers accomplish this in practice, while teaching the curriculum?
3. Parents reported needing school support in finding resources and strategies to help them build their children's academic vocabulary and writing skills. What role can schools play in supporting the home learning environment of gifted ESL students in general, and in working towards expanding academic vocabulary in particular?

4. Teachers were concerned about not being able to collaborate with parents who do not attend parent teacher meetings due to perceived language barriers. What can teachers do to get these parents into the school and engage them in their children's' learning?
5. Grit has been described in the research as a desirable trait and one that can be learned and developed. Can the other personal traits that arose as being of benefit in this study, such as meta-learning and valuing challenge, be similarly learned and developed?
6. Students described successfully utilizing language learning apps and other online resources to develop their vocabulary. How can we test the efficacy of such resources, and expand their use, so as to enhance academic vocabulary development?

These questions underscore the need for a better understanding of the gifted ESL learner profile in general, and their linguistic strategy usage in particular. Further exploration of L2 learners' experiences, along with those of their mentors, would provide additional data to enable all ESL students to succeed.

The student participants are lucky to be in school and home environments that are understanding of their gifted exceptionalities and their ESL needs. This gives a cause for concern about the circumstances of gifted ESL students whose gifted potential might not be nurtured, and whose ESL needs might not be met, providing another topic for future research.

### **Significance of the Study**

The overarching understanding arising from this study is that gifted ESL students utilize strategies, personal traits and socio-cultural resources to expand their vocabulary and increase second language proficiency. Increased understanding of their strategies, traits, and the environments that promote their language learning is pivotal and has implications for personal and

academic practice particularly for gifted ESL students, their parents, and their teachers. These implications can inform:

- adults' roles in second language development;
- value of access to vocabulary development opportunities and resources;
- personal traits that facilitate vocabulary development; and
- gifted ESL students' vocabulary development strategies that may not be obvious to policy makers nor to teachers who support students' linguistic development.

In addition, the research findings identified practical linguistic strategies that would be of considerable interest to all stakeholders involved in designing gifted and or ESL programming. Finally, exploring the personal traits that students utilize for vocabulary development provides a base for further research.

### **Final Thoughts**

Employing a single case study as methodology allowed voice for a group of students with dual needs. Gifted, SLA, and socio-cultural theories provided the research base upon which the study was designed. Using multiple data collection tools provided rich data that went beyond the study's scope of vocabulary development. I directly quoted student statements throughout, in an attempt to ensure their voices were clear. English is their chosen language for communication. Their words tell me that they do not want the ESL label. Perhaps the increase in the critical mass of population of Alberta will alter their situation to one that includes policies that cater to students' diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Research on gifted and ESL students' linguistic experiences is rare and providing them with this opportunity to share their personal stories, coupled with empirical data, revealed experiences that can be used as a guide for a variety of other language learners. Results confirmed available



research and reflected particularities and multiple variations of participants' strategy and personal trait use for second language development. These results will enable other students, their parents and educators to grasp these insights or use them to reach ones that are different but valuable for increasing linguistic proficiency. Further research to build on these findings will serve to complete the image of the gifted ESL learner vocabulary development profile and journey.

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## Appendix A

### Background Survey



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Display Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Time spent in Canada if not born in Canada: \_\_\_\_\_

Which language are you most comfortable

- Speaking \_\_\_\_\_
- Reading \_\_\_\_\_
- Writing \_\_\_\_\_

Which language or languages do you speak at home with:

- Your parents/caregivers \_\_\_\_\_
- Siblings \_\_\_\_\_

Which language or languages do you speak with your friends:

- In school \_\_\_\_\_
- Out of school \_\_\_\_\_
- When studying \_\_\_\_\_
- When hanging out \_\_\_\_\_

Do you like learning new languages?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think it is important to speak different languages?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

How do you identify yourself in terms of culture? (Canadian, parents' culture, or a combination of both)

\_\_\_\_\_

Is there anything else you would like to add or comment?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix B

### 12 – Item Grit Scale

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Student Display Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions for taking the Grit Scale:** Here are a number of statements that may or may not apply to you. For the most accurate score, when responding, think of how you compare to most people -- not just the people you know well, but most people in the world.

Answer in terms of how well the statement describes you. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. **There are no right or wrong answers, so just circle that letter that honestly reflects you!**

1. I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.
  - a. Very much like me
  - b. Mostly like me
  - c. Somewhat like me
  - d. Not much like me
  - e. Not like me at all
2. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.
  - a. Very much like me
  - b. Mostly like me
  - c. Somewhat like me
  - d. Not much like me
  - e. Not like me at all
3. My interests change from year to year.
  - a. Very much like me
  - b. Mostly like me
  - c. Somewhat like me
  - d. Not much like me
  - e. Not like me at all
4. Setbacks don't discourage me.
  - a. Very much like me
  - b. Mostly like me
  - c. Somewhat like me

- d. Not much like me
  - e. Not like me at all
5. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.
- a. Very much like me
  - b. Mostly like me
  - c. Somewhat like me
  - d. Not much like me
  - e. Not like me at all
6. I am a hard worker.
- a. Very much like me
  - b. Mostly like me
  - c. Somewhat like me
  - d. Not much like me
  - e. Not like me at all
7. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.
- a. Very much like me
  - b. Mostly like me
  - c. Somewhat like me
  - d. Not much like me
  - e. Not like me at all
8. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.
- a. Very much like me
  - b. Mostly like me
  - c. Somewhat like me
  - d. Not much like me
  - e. Not like me at all
9. I finish whatever I begin.
- a. Very much like me
  - b. Mostly like me
  - c. Somewhat like me
  - d. Not much like me
  - e. Not like me at all
10. I have achieved a goal that took years of work.
- a. Very much like me
  - b. Mostly like me
  - c. Somewhat like me
  - d. Not much like me

- e. Not like me at all
11. I become interested in new pursuits every few months.
- a. Very much like me
  - b. Mostly like me
  - c. Somewhat like me
  - d. Not much like me
  - e. Not like me at all
12. I am diligent (have or show care and conscientiousness in my work).
- a. Very much like me
  - b. Mostly like me
  - c. Somewhat like me
  - d. Not much like me
  - e. Not like me at all

## Appendix C



# Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL)  
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Student Display Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This form of the strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) is for students of a second language (SL). Please read each statement and fill in the bubble of the response (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) that tells HOW TRUE THE STATEMENT IS.

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

Answer in terms of how well the statement describes you. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. **There are no right or wrong answers** to these statements.

### Part A

- |  |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.                               | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 2. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.   | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 3. I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.           | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 4. I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.              | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 5. I use rhymes to remember new English words.   | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 6. I use flashcards to remember new English words.   | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 7. I physically act out new English words.   | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 8. I review English lessons often.   | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 9. I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |

## Part B

- |  |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 10. I say or write new English words several times.  | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 11. I try to talk like native English speakers.  | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 12. I practice the sounds of English.  | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 13. I use the English words I know in different ways.  | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 14. I start conversations in English.  | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 15. I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.           | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 16. I read for pleasure in English.  | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 17. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.   | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 18. I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 19. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.                    | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 20. I try to find patterns in English.   | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 21. I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.               | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 22. I try not to translate word for word.  | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.                                  | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |

## Remember

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

## Part C

- |  |                         |                         |                         |                         |                         |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 24. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.                        | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 25. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.                | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| 27. I read English without looking up every new word.                              | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |

28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
29. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

#### Part D

30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
35. I look for people I can talk to in English. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
37. I have clear goals for improving my English skills. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
38. I think about my progress in learning English. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

#### Remember

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

#### Part E

39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

#### Part F

45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
47. I practice English with other students. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
48. I ask for help from English speakers. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
49. I ask questions in English. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers. ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

(Adapted from Oxford, 1990)

## Appendix D

### Parent Focus Group Discussion Questions



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How many languages do you speak? Which language do you favor?
2. How many languages does your child speak? How much time is spent talking in English?
3. Describe the language you use in your social circle. (Family, members of similar or different cultural and or linguistic community)
4. What is the language spoken at home? With spouse? With child, if different? If you have other children, what language do they speak amongst themselves?
5. What type of home environment do you think is important for your child's academic and linguistic success? What do you do to help them succeed?
6. Why did you choose a gifted school? Would you have preferred a school that teaches (your first language)?
7. Have you tried to pass your language to your child? Is it important to you that your child learn this language? Why or why not?
8. How does your child react to you speaking in your home language? What are the expectations about home language use?
9. Do you feel that your child has successfully integrated into the Canadian culture? Do you think speaking English helped him or her integrate?
10. What are your thoughts on language learning for your child? Do you speak English with your child, watch English movies, or read in English?
11. What are teachers currently doing that you think is helping students learn or get better in English?
12. What can teachers do to help students develop your child's language proficiency?



## Appendix E



### Teacher Focus Group Discussion Questions

Date \_\_\_\_\_

#### First Half Hour – Linguistic Strategies

1. How many languages do you speak?
2. What are your thoughts on linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms?
3. In your opinion, what are the issues arising from having students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds? To what extent do you feel teachers have the responsibility to be aware of these issues?
4. In your opinion, what are some of the linguistic strategies that teachers can use to support students who are gifted ESL?
5. Can you share some of the linguistic strategies that have worked for you in supporting the vocabulary development of students in your classroom?

#### Second Half Hour – Linguistic Experiences

1. How would you describe your relationship with the parents of the students in the study?
2. How do you think the home linguistic environment impacts students' learning in the classroom? Do you think it is important that students speak or read in English at home?
3. Are you aware of any after school activities that students are involved in that help them develop their linguistic proficiency? What are your thoughts on these activities in terms of impacting student vocabulary development?
4. What are parents currently doing that you think is helping students meet linguistic curriculum expectations?
5. What can parents/caretakers do at home to help students expand their academic vocabulary?

## Appendix F



### Student Focus Group Discussion Questions

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How many languages do you speak at home? What would you do to get better at English or any other language?
2. Adults sometimes describe people who can speak 2 or more languages as “good language learners”. Have you heard this term before? Would you consider yourself to be a good language learner?
3. Do you like learning new words in English or in-home language? If yes, what do you do to remember a new word?
4. Do you plan time for homework? How about for English homework? Do you like reading or watching TV or movies in English?
5. How confident are you about your use of the English language now? Do you feel that you have an accent that makes you stand out as a non-native speaker of English? If yes, does it bother you?
6. How do you feel about being labeled an ESL student? Were you aware of that label when you started school? Did you know what it meant? Did this label affect how you approached learning English? Do you still think about it today? Does it make you want to plan how to get better at speaking English?
7. Thinking about the friends you like to hang out with. What language/languages do you speak together? Do you make a point of speaking English? Do you discuss concerns about your current English level with each other? Do you correct each other’s mistakes?
8. Can you share any memories or experiences of when you first started to learn your first language? What strategies worked for you? Did you figure out an easy way to remember new words?
9. What would you like to do when you graduate from high school? Do you have a plan as to how you are going to accomplish that? Would you ask for help to support your plan?

## Appendix G



### Student Interview Questions

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Display Name \_\_\_\_\_

#### Follow up on focus group discussions

1. What would you like to do when you graduate? Do you have a plan as to how you are going to accomplish that? Would you ask for help to support your plan?
2. Do you like reading or watching TV or movies in English or L1?

#### Meta-learning and Approach behaviour

1. If I wanted to learn your parents' L1, do you think I would be able to learn it? What kind of support would I need if I were to try learning it on my own? What would I need to do? Do you think that I would need to plan how to learn a language in order to learn it?
2. Do you think it would be easy for a new student to learn English? Do you remember when you started to learn English? Was it easy? What would be the hardest part about learning English? (Prompts: speaking, reading, writing) What advice would you give to a new student trying to learn and develop their English proficiency?
3. Is it enough to be fluent in English in order to succeed in school? What else would I need to do?
4. Do you prefer working alone or with friends? Do have a scheduled homework time?
5. Do you try to learn new English words on a regular basis? (So, if you encounter a new word in a text, do you look it up? Do you look up words you know in one language and try to find out what they mean in another language?)
6. What strategies do you use to remember new words you hear or read?

#### Motivation

1. Describe your current level in English speaking? Are you happy with it?

2. Do have any strategies that you use to help you learn or develop a language?
3. If you were to learn a new language today, which language would you choose and why? What would be your first strategy? (Prompts: plan, learn new words, talk to others)
4. If your friends decide to learn a new language such as Galactic Basic from Star Wars, or Italian, would you be interested in joining them? How will you ensure that you learn it fast?

**Self-concept**

1. How confident are you in your ability to speak the first language you learned with your friends who speak it?
2. How would you describe your confidence in your ability to speak, read, and write in English? Do you try to learn new words? What do you think helped get better at it?
3. What are your thoughts when asked to read textbooks and other reading material provided in class? Do you read without looking up unknown words? Do you try to guess them in context?
4. What are your thoughts on writing in English? Do you find that sometimes you use a few words to replace a word you don't know its meaning in English? (example, "get used to" versus "adapt")

## Appendix H

### EOWPVT-4 Scores

#### *EOWPVT-4 Scores*

	Chronological Age	Raw Score	Standard Score	Age Equivalent	Percentile Rank
Melody	14.00.26	161	137	>18.6	99%
Jody	13.08.26	156	132	>18.6	98%
Andrew	14.06.18	156	127	>18.6	96%
Kathy	13.07.12	148	122	>18.6	93%
Kaylee	13.11.10	137	109	15.6	73%
Simon	13.08.02	133	105	14.6	63%
Amy	14.00.05	126	96	13.0	39%

*Note.* EOWPVT-4 Scores reflect students' ability to name illustrations that follow a vocabulary development sequence using chronological age at time of administration to determine at which section a student starts the assessment.

## Appendix I

### Background Survey Data

Students' Responses on Background Survey				
	<b>Andrew</b>	<b>Melody</b>	<b>Jody</b>	<b>Kathy</b>
<b>DOB</b>	2002/10/24	2003/04/07	2003/08/14	2003/09/27
<b>Age</b>	14 years	14 years	13 years	13 years
<b>POB</b>	Canada	Canada	Canada	Canada
<b>Speak</b>	English	English & Chinese	English & Cantonese	English & Vietnamese
<b>Read</b>	English	English & Chinese	English	English
<b>Write</b>	English	English	English	English
<b>WPA</b>	Mandarin Chinese	English & Chinese	Cantonese	English & Vietnamese
<b>WSIB</b>	N/A	English	English & Cantonese	English
<b>WFIS</b>	English	English & Chinese	English	English
<b>WFOS</b>	English	English & French	English	English & Vietnamese
<b>WFST</b>	English	English	English	English
<b>WFHO</b>	English	English	English	English
<b>LLNL</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>TLDLI</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>CUID</b>	C1 & C2	C1 & C2	C1 & C2	C1 & C2
<b>Comment</b>	Nope	Quack	N/A	I don't have trouble speaking English

*Note.* DOB: Date of birth; POB: Place of birth;

Speak: Language most comfortable speaking; Read: Language most comfortable reading; Write: Language most comfortable writing; WPA: Language/s spoken with parents; WSIB: Language/s spoken with siblings; WFIS: Language/s spoken with friends in school; WFOS: Language/s spoken with friends out of school; WFST: Language/s spoken with friends when studying; WFHO: Language spoken with friends when hanging out; LLNL: Like learning new language, TLDLI: Think learning different languages is important; CUID: Cultural identity; C1=parents' culture, C2=Canadian culture

## Appendix J

### Grit Scores

12 Item Grit Scale Scores

	<b>Perseverance of Effort (PE)</b>	<b>Consistency of Interest (CI)</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Grit</b>
<b>Andrew</b>	22	12	34	<b>2.83</b>
<b>Melody</b>	21	10	31	<b>2.58</b>
<b>Jody</b>	20	13	33	<b>2.75</b>
<b>Kathy</b>	21	19	40	<b>3.33</b>

*Note* The maximum score students can attain for each of PE and CI is 30 and the minimum score is 6. The maximum grit score on this scale is 5 (extremely gritty) and the lowest score on this scale is 1 (not at all gritty)

## Appendix K

### SILL Scores

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Scores							
	Part A	Part B	Part C	Part D	Part E	Part F	Average
<b>Andrew</b>	3.11	4.00	3.83	3.88	2.16	2.50	<b>3.40</b>
<b>Melody</b>	1.66	3.42	4.16	3.33	1.16	3.16	<b>2.88</b>
<b>Jody</b>	1.77	3.07	3.33	2.66	1.00	1.66	<b>2.38</b>
<b>Kathy</b>	2.33	2.71	1.83	3.33	2.00	2.83	<b>2.58</b>

*Note.* Each part of the SILL represents a group of learning strategies as follows:

Part A = Remembering more effectively

Part B = Using all your mental processes

Part C = Compensating for missing knowledge

Part D = Organizing and evaluating your learning

Part E = Managing your emotions

Part F = Learning with others

The overall average tells how often a student uses strategies for learning English.



## **Appendix L**

### **Parent Focus Group Discussion**

Emma and Lucy (pseudonyms) are mothers of 2 young boys attending ADA. They were both eager to share their experiences as first-generation immigrants raising their children in a new culture. Their conversations focused on linguistic development in the home and school environment. Their major concerns differed due to their divergent backgrounds and their sons' varied school experiences.

#### **Emma**

Emma is an active parent who is involved in her son's learning as is obvious by her willingness to participate in the parents' focus group. She and her husband are of Chinese origin, value their roots, and would like to see their son embrace their heritage. They also see value in him developing English proficiency and adopting the Canadian culture. Emma wants her son to learn other languages besides English and Chinese and while she had hoped he would choose Spanish (students can choose to learn Spanish or French at ADA), she is still glad that he chose to learn French.

#### **L1 linguistic strategies.**

Emma and her husband speak Chinese with their son most of the time and use various resources to develop his Chinese. They read him Chinese books, watch Chinese television together, and supply him with Chinese software. Additionally, Emma registered her son in Chinese Sunday school. She had also taken him to China and is happy to share that he would be agreeable to go back not only to visit her hometown and that of his dad, but also to explore new areas.

She sees value in building her son's knowledge of the Chinese language and culture that goes beyond her personal reasons of knowing his family roots, communicating with family, and

perhaps going on future visits to China. The significance she sees in this knowledge involves her son's learning about a country that is unique and rich in its history, culture, and literature, as well as, for future job prospects. She is proud of her son's ability to speak Chinese and comfortably identify with both the Canadian and Chinese cultures.

### **L2 linguistic strategies.**

Living in Canada, Emma acknowledges the importance of English for her son's future success. She states that her husband also shares these thoughts saying, "We told him that Chinese is important. Of course, in my opinion English is the most important. It is number one". As her son was growing up, and starting from preschool, Emma provided him with workbooks that facilitate English language development such as, Wordly Wise 3000 (EPS Literacy & Intervention, 2018). Now that her child is older, she put the onus on the school to help him continue to improve his English proficiency. Her strategy now involves speaking English with her son more frequently than when he was in elementary school. She also hired a tutor to ensure that his English writing development is sustained.

### **Special aptitudes.**

#### ***High ability learner.***

When asked about the reason she chose ADA, Emma mentions that she always knew that her son was special, calling him "a Math learner", and would require enriched support that caters to his advanced educational needs. ADA seemed to be the only school to offer such support starting in Kindergarten.

### **School's role.**

#### ***Canadian education system.***

Emma is unsatisfied with the Canadian term system that requires students to enroll in an English language course for only one term a year. Her concerns stem from her belief that ESL students need continuous support to improve their vocabulary; a progress which she believes cannot be accomplished without a regular conscious educational focus on developing academic words through special courses. The following quote explains her thoughts:

I think at least they should provide workbooks or worksheets that just focus on vocabulary. Some words, vocabulary, you cannot use them in daily life. They are advanced vocabulary, and you never use it when you, maybe when you take advanced courses, so in that portion I think they should just focus on vocabulary development. They will never learn from anywhere else (2017).

When asked about actions or activities that teachers or the school are doing that support her son's vocabulary learning, Emma shares the benefits of a program that her son participated in. ADA had incorporated a program where once a week, students are taught about word stems that Emma feels expanded her son's academic vocabulary knowledge. She relates that the program is part of her son's grade 5 to 8 Language Arts program. She sees great value in it and is disappointed that no such program exists in grade 9 to support academic vocabulary progress.

***Communicate and collaborate.***

Emma also highlights the importance of a "good" teacher who is willing to communicate with parents. She said, "The teacher just sent me a long email. Oh, I was so moved; I think she is so good. She takes the time to communicate with me". She is equally eager to share that this teacher was not only willing to communicate her child's progress with her, but also enthusiastic about working with the tutor Emma hired. Additionally, Emma reports that this teacher once took the

time to provide detailed feedback, “four pages of comments for each student” on a written assignment. Such experiences reinforce her happiness to have her child attend ADA.

### **Lucy**

Lucy is a mother whose desire to be actively involved in her son’s learning is obvious by her willingness to participate in the parents’ focus group despite her low English proficiency. She and her husband are of Chinese origin and arrived in Canada seven years ago with their young son. She viewed the focus group discussion as an opportunity to share her concerns. She values her Chinese roots but also cherishes having her son learn about other cultures.

#### **L1 linguistic strategies.**

Lucy and her husband started out speaking only Chinese with their son to build his proficiency in Chinese. Chinese remains Lucy’s main language of communication with her husband, friends and family, as well as, with her child. Additionally, Lucy’s husband regularly spent time reading Chinese textbooks with their son to build his proficiency. However, as her child got older, she started speaking English with him, not only for his benefit, but for hers as well since she is looking to improve her pronunciation. Nevertheless, whenever she speaks English with her son, he responds in Chinese.

#### **L2 linguistic strategies.**

Lucy puts high responsibility on the home and family environment to enrich both language and cultural affiliations. For example, she regrets not focusing on English literature, choosing to focus on mathematics due to her, as well as her husband’s, engineering background which resulted in her son’s exceling in STEM subjects. She blames her son’s lack of interest in reading on her family’s habits, “the reading, we didn’t read a lot at home, we didn’t hold book. I never in our living room, in our kitchen keep reading”.

Lucy sees value in having her son learn multiple languages and deems every new language he learns an opportunity for a new way of thinking and of exploring the world. At home, she and her husband continue to support their son to improve his Chinese language proficiency and to understand the Chinese way of thinking. She hopes by developing his English proficiency in school, he would also acquire an English mindset that would enrich his knowledge and thoughts. She encourages her son to learn a third language, but he shows no interest. She also tries to reinforce the value of languages when they go on trips, as in the following case when they entered a French bookstore in Montreal,

When I took my son to Montreal, we visited several big bookstores and we could not read these books at all and I said, ok you see, this is knowledge world, because we do not have that language ability, so we put that kind of world behind us, we could not understand at all (2017).

She struggles to think about the reasons behind his lack of interest in learning new languages and refers to him being a boy and that perhaps some boys may not see value in languages and what they have to offer.

### **Linguistic identity.**

Lucy, whose son was not born in Canada, feels that his resistance to learn different languages is affected by his identifying with the Canadian culture. Despite his ability to speak, read, and write Chinese, and his equal understanding of the Chinese and Canadian cultures, both she and her son view him as a Canadian; the Chinese culture becoming “only a culture for grandma and grandpa”.

### **Concerns.**

### ***Writing.***

Lucy is also worried about her son's writing and has tried everything she could think of to help him improve. From sharing her own experiences writing her PhD in English, telling her son to "attract the readers' attention and keep them interested", to detailing her way of thinking about writing as "keep the sauce and explain everything clearly", she shares that she has reached a point where she cannot help her son anymore. However, she remains optimistic and reasons that perhaps he is not be interested in writing, a detail that she feels is typical of boys his age or that he needs more time to develop the skills or language proficiency needed to write well.

**Special aptitudes.**

***High ability learner.***

Lucy chose ADA for the enriched environment it offers. Her son showed advanced mathematics skills that she felt the regular system was not enriching. She did not think a Chinese-English bilingual school was necessary due to her husband's regular Chinese enforced tutoring to ensure their son continues to build linguistic proficiency. An enriched environment that catered to her son's talent in mathematics seemed more important.

**School's role.**

***Home/School communication.***

Despite being happy with the school environment, Lucy's experience with ADA is not comparable to Emma since her son had a different teacher. She shares that she rarely hears from her son's teacher and seldom sees any comments besides the grade on her son's written assignments.

***Share resources.***

Lucy adds that she is a bit disappointed as there is a lack of communication between parents and teachers and hopes that,

the teacher could have time for sharing more information with the parents, what they (the students) are learning in the school and share more information regarding key to writing. I still think my son is not very good at writing, or how to open a nut, perhaps my son's shell is too thick, too strong and he has to be opened. We have to work both parents and teachers together to open this nut. I just would like to know some details (2017).

Her comments stem from concern that she may not be supporting her child in an appropriate way due to her own low English proficiency. She is wary about sharing her concerns with the teacher; she worries that such actions may reflect negatively on her son who is quiet and does not appreciate such attention.

***Provide support.***

Lucy feels that she lacks support and needs personal encouragement to continue to scaffold her son's language learning. Despite this, she admits that her child's lack of interest in developing his own language skills may be what is holding him back. She also concedes that a child's personality plays an important role in developing a language, perhaps regardless of the support he or she receives.

## **Appendix M**

### **Teacher Focus Group Discussion**

Three teachers consent to participate and provide a rich mix of data from three unique linguistic backgrounds. Ms. Sara, Ms. Allison, and Mr. David (pseudonyms) engage in discussions and respond to prompts with the same deep passion they share for supporting the diverse needs of their gifted ESL community. Each of them has concerns about their young students' linguistic journey and social-emotional issues and share what they do to ease students' frustrations.

#### **Ms. Sara**

“You have to meet them where they are and help them find that spot where they can learn best”

(Ms. Sara, 2017).

Ms. Sara is a young and caring ESL teacher whose ambition to support each individual student is clear throughout the discussion. She is a native speaker of English who has experienced the challenges that come with learning a new language by taking French and German in school as well as Spanish in university. Her passion for teaching is evident in her eagerness to participate in this study and in staying beyond the allotted hour to detail a personal experience. She shares linguistic strategies, personal concerns working with a dual special needs group, and advice to parents and teachers that stems from a particular incident that she hopes would be a learning moment to them as it was to her.

#### **Teacher strategies.**

#### ***Classroom resources.***

Ms. Sara values the use of resources to expand students' vocabulary with caution and careful scrutiny. For example, she welcomes the use of *dictionaries* and *thesauruses* in the classroom but worries that some students may not always use them correctly. She advocates scaffolding when



students look up and use new words. She expands that she notices some students' tendencies to look up a synonym for a word and employ the synonym without searching its meaning, thus missing on comprehending its nuances. This is when she takes the time to scaffold them to look up the definition of the new word and deliberate whether it is the best fit for the context.

She also reports the positive impact of having a *word wall* if a teacher has her own classroom. Here, she again notes that it is crucial to put a lot of thought into the words posted on the *word wall*. She wonders, for example, whether the tendency to focus on big academic words would scare students from using simpler words that may be stronger in expressing what they are hoping to convey. She suggests revisiting the *word wall* and experimenting with different word classes besides nouns, such as adding verbs, sentence starters, and transitional phrases.

#### ***Deliberate instruction.***

A third resource that she shares is the *Word Within a Word* series (Thomson & Kemnitz, 2014). This series is implemented in grades 5 to 8 in her school and teaches students to dissect a word looking for prefixes, suffixes, and roots before searching its meaning. Students start learning the meaning of these dissected words including their origin, whether Latin or Greek, which arms them with a knowledge base to build their vocabulary. Ms. Sara adds that while some students may not immediately see the benefits of this program, they usually see value in such knowledge once they get to high school and university and have to deal with complex academic words.

#### **CALP development.**

##### ***Main issue.***

Ms. Sara highlights that the main issue that arises from working with gifted ESL students is facilitating their move from BICS to CALP. She describes their situation as such, “verbally they seem very competent because they know certain words very well, which they can use to get their

message across. But making connections and organizing their information has been a little bit of a challenge”. Additionally, she notices that within that particular stage, some students are dealing with having to learn new intonations and sounds, as well as words that may not exist in their first language such as “on” or “of” which makes it harder for them to form higher level sentences.

### **Concerns.**

#### ***Acceleration.***

A concern arises when teaching in a school that allows acceleration and the balancing act required to ensure that gifted students who have an interest in excelling remain challenged without being overwhelmed. The following quote details Ms. Sara’s concern:

You can’t just chuck a harder book on an ESL student who wants to accelerate. Do they have the right vocabulary to understand and discuss the nuances of what’s going on, the maturity level of the themes? That’s something that I am still trying to wrap my head around because I definitely agree with acceleration, I’m just trying to figure out what that’s going to look like for ESL students moving forward (2017).

### **Teaching strategies.**

#### ***Whole child.***

Ms. Sara reminds teachers and parents alike to always look at the whole child’s experience, as he or she may have other exceptionalities or special circumstances that may be hindering his or her progress. She asks parents to be aware and understanding of their child’s needs and not put too much pressure if they sense that their child is not performing to their expectations.

The push to look at the whole child comes from a personal experience. As a teacher starting out, she worked with a young ESL boy who was neither motivated to study nor participate in classroom or extracurricular activities. As his ESL teacher, she believed that her first priority was

to engage him in classroom activities that would develop his English language skills. She tried every approach she could think of but was not able to capture his interest. She recruited help from other teachers and staff, and even arranged out of school excursions but the boy remained uninterested. It took support from the counselors at Student Services, who encouraged him to open up and discuss any concerns he had, to discover that his emotional wellbeing was the number one priority, not language acquisition. She views this as a lesson acquired in her early years of teaching and now starts her journey with new students by focusing on the whole child and considering their priorities, to “meet them where they are and help them find that spot where they can learn best”.

### ***Interest and motivation.***

Ms. Sara insists that motivation is key to progress and that even at a young age, students would be able to plan their learning once they find a passion. Hence, both parents and teachers should cultivate students’ interests, not only to shed light on their passions, but also on what might cause them to underperform. Building on these convictions, she deeply values collaborative parent teacher communications and is concerned that some ESL parents may not meet with her due to language barriers.

### **Parents’ role.**

When asked about what parents are doing or can do to ensure their child expands L2 academic vocabulary, her advice is to continue developing awareness of L1 vocabulary and culture. She adds that discontinuing the use of L1 at home could be “detrimental” to L2 development. She also encourages speaking and reading in English at home to build on that L1 vocabulary.

### **Ms. Allison**

“You’re always growing if you’re always asking questions. If you think you know everything then what is there to learn” (Ms. Allison, 2017).

Ms. Allison is the school’s French teacher whose participation adds a distinct perspective through her experience teaching a third language to gifted ESL students. She is a strong supporter of tailoring teaching to students’ interests. She is also a keen contributor who shares her personal and in-class linguistic strategies and does not shy away from sharing her thoughts on ESL parents’ role.

Ms. Allison is a trilingual speaker of English, French, and Spanish, but she may also be considered a multilingual as she can manage in Italian and Portuguese as well. Her background provides her with a plethora of experiences learning and developing multiple languages. Additionally, she lived in Argentina for a couple of years further enriching her skills with an immersion experience that she can fall back on to relate to ESL students’ circumstances. Moreover, her confidence in three languages allows her to experiment with expanding her Italian and Portuguese vocabulary by building on the grammatical formulas and sentence structures from French and Spanish. This linguistic passion directs to pick up on some students’ abilities to do the same.

### **Linguistic strategies.**

#### ***Background knowledge.***

The building on language knowledge is clear in Ms. Allison’s French classroom where for example, she finds it easier for ESL students from Spanish background to understand the concept of gender nouns and different verb tenses. This is particularly evident with the older arrivals to Canada who bring their cultural and proficient L1 knowledge identifying and applying those skills to improve L2 and French proficiency. Thus, she highlights the importance of developing L1 at

home, calling it an “asset”, since it allows students to develop L2 or even French by building on L1 knowledge. She couples this advice with reference to research that suggests that “your second or your third or your fourth language will only ever be as strong as your first language”.

### **Special aptitudes.**

#### ***Willingness to learn.***

Ms. Allison describes students’ willingness to “push themselves” as a learning advantage, “With the gifted population, they pick up so fast if they are ready to learn it they will. So, if you read them a story or if you give them their own time to read, it’s insane how many new words they’ll pick up just from sitting down and reading for 20 minutes. It’s almost like they push themselves (2017).”

This aptitude to exceed limits is also evident when she asks students to write about topics of interest to them. She notes that some students are willing to dedicate time and effort to work on their pieces. She facilitates their writing, “hinting where corrections need to be made and they have to figure out what it is, and like, seeing the difference in how they push themselves”. Ms. Allison explains that such exercise enriches students’ vocabulary as they devote the time to think about their writing and explore the nuances of different words to present the perfect writing piece.

#### ***Willingness to excel.***

Another advantage of working with gifted ESL students is seeing students excel and take charge of their learning despite their low language skills. She shares the accomplishments of a young boy who in Grade 7, not only sat for some Grade 12 diploma exams but independently learned French and surpassed his current grade. While she admits that the boy’s mother did push him to practice, she is certain that his outstanding progress is a result of his interest, curiosity, positive attitude, and his love for learning.

**Concerns.*****Writing.***

Writing exercises also prove frustrating to some of Ms. Allison's gifted ESL students. These students are usually enthusiastic about sharing their countless ideas but lack the language skills necessary to make connections and or format complex sentences. She usually deals with students' concerns by reminding them that developing a language takes time and scaffolding them to write their ideas in simpler sentences that match their language level.

**Teaching strategies.*****Interest.***

Her strong belief in fostering student curiosity to inspire motivation is evident through most of her responses. Whether asking students to write a story on a topic of their choice or giving them the freedom to explore a city of their liking, she clearly gears the learning to students' passions. She places great value on building curiosity by encouraging students to ask questions to learn. Her support of students' interest stems from relating progress in language learning to investment and motivation, looking at "how invested they want to get into it and how much they do care about learning a new language. Motivation is such a big factor".

***Classroom resources.***

Ms. Allison's eagerness to share her in-class linguistic strategies meant that she was willing to stay after the completion of the one-hour focus group discussion to ensure that her strategies were documented. Her recommendations include *song of the week*; students listen to a song of their choice for the whole week and pick up new words while enjoying listening to the song. Students build on these words by experimenting with them in various activities on the last day of the week. Building vocabulary activities around *French videos* that students watch with subtitles

is another successful strategy she uses. She also incorporates classroom games such as *battleship* and *dice games*, where students play these games and effortlessly learn different parts of speech. She emphasizes that these activities appeal to students of all ages and enable them to expand their vocabulary while having fun.

### **Parents' role.**

#### ***Build on interest.***

When asked about her relationship with parents, Ms. Allison states that some parents have high expectations of their children and expect her to push their children to work “harder and faster”. She recognizes that their cultural backgrounds perhaps dictate such expectations, yet she does not shy away from explaining to parents that, while the Canadian education system may seem lax, it is successful in ensuring students' progress. Her advice to parents is to focus on building on their children's passions, rather than push them to work hard and achieve. She believes that students will excel if they find what interests them. She has tested this theory in her French class, where identifying a child's passion led him to excel in French simply because he enjoyed putting in the hours to practice.

### **Mr. David**

“It's (developing the high gifted potential) partly inborn, partly nurtured by families, and partly by opportunity too” (Mr. David, 2017).

Mr. David has spent many years teaching students from diverse backgrounds and brings a mix of personal experience and valuable expert insights to the focus group discussion. A self-described “unilingual”, he has been exposed to French, Cree, and Chinese environments. He is in favor of providing choice as a way to differentiate learning in the classroom. He believes that

parents play a major role in their child's school progress, from exposing them to their L1 heritage to providing opportunities to develop academic language at home.

Growing up and working across different regions in Canada affords Mr. David a distinctive awareness of what it takes to land in a new community and decipher an unfamiliar language, which enriched his ability to relate to ESL students' experiences. He grew up in an English-speaking home in Ottawa, a bilingual city, and took French in school. While dating his future wife, who was eager to practice her French, he tried to pick up French but lost interest once he moved to northern Canada. Once there, he was also exposed to Cree as it was being taught at the school he was teaching in. Finally, he taught in an ESL school and attempted to learn Chinese to better connect with his students, but quickly found out that he "did not have the ear for it".

#### **CALP development.**

##### ***Main issue.***

Reflecting on his experience teaching gifted ESL students, he describes it as a "two-edged sword". He views their cultural backgrounds as opulent with topics that could enrich classroom discussions and relate to curriculum expectations. Yet, he is aware that these discussions may require a high level of English proficiency, where understanding the nuances of academic words and or expressing complex thoughts becomes important. He worries about students who may not be at a linguistic level that allows them to painlessly get engaged. He describes his reaction as a teacher noticing this situation as follows:

You have an obligation to try and intervene on couple of levels. One of them is how do you help them get past the language barriers. Second thing is about helping them to get past the social-emotional stuff that happens as a result (2017).



He is also concerned about their ability to handle academic language, wondering whether they were being exposed to it in L1. It seems clear that most of his students can easily manage at the conversational level in English. It is getting them to develop the more complex academic words and to understand the nuances of words with abstract concepts that becomes challenge. He typically guides them to use a thesaurus, specifically if he observes them getting frustrated when they cannot express themselves at that higher level in L2.

### **Teaching strategies.**

#### ***Classroom resources.***

Mr. David's practical experience taught him that using a thesaurus may lead to new challenges where he highlights that, "the thesaurus can be and can't be a good idea". While a thesaurus exposes students to different possibilities for expressing their ideas, he recognizes that it may not be enough for ESL students to understand the nuances that come exclusively with exposure to the language.

He dislikes memorizing words for a test and so he usually deals with this situation and introduces new vocabulary by incorporating *storytelling* about the nuances and history of words into his classroom routine. He engages students by opening up opportunities to discuss *word* or *quote of the day*, as well as, including *books* and *novels* that reflect on the meaning of words. Finally, he credits his ESL students for the idea to use *subtitles* when watching movies in the classroom which allow them to visualize the overheard words, increase exposure and hence the possibility of remembering new words.

#### ***Independent reading project.***

An approach that Mr. David uses to engage students gives them the option to choose any book for an *independent reading project*. The condition for this free choice is that students pick a

book that challenges them and engages them. Students are also allowed to change their minds about a book if they can justify their second thoughts. They usually select to challenge themselves at different levels that are not limited by their language proficiency, but by their interest and their passion to learn as well. He finds that this activity not only nurtures vocabulary development, but also takes away any feelings of inferiority that ESL students may feel due to having a lower language proficiency level.

### ***Choice.***

Additionally, Mr. David stresses the importance of choice in motivating students to engage in their learning. He sees it as his way of differentiating in his classroom. His students do not realize that they are “doing work” to the extent that they wonder when he is going to assign homework.

### ***Engaging tasks.***

Mr. David shares vocabulary development strategies that nurture word consciousness varying from *playing scrabble*, to *creating word lists using the dictionary*, *watching movies*, *reading while highlighting unknown words*, and *talking to older students*. He is also willing to incorporate *direct teaching*, if he thinks a student needs it or if the parents ask for it. Additionally, he likes to *share and discuss the latest research* on language learning with his students, since he can clearly see some of his students relating to the research. In short, he views any opportunity where students are engaged and willing to linguistically challenge themselves within his classroom as well as at home, as a promising prospect for learning new words and enhancing proficiency.

### ***Parents role.***

### ***Overcoming linguistic barriers.***

Having two grownup gifted children of his own and having had to change cities to accommodate for one of his son's gifted needs, Mr. David identifies with some of the parents' exasperations; he is always willing to meet with them to ensure students have a successful learning journey. He is also willing to use an interpreter to communicate with parents who do not speak English. He uses these meetings to learn about his students' home environment and parental expectations, and to inform parents about the expectations of the Canadian education system.

***Develop L2.***

Mr. David sees value in parents speaking and reading L2 at home to help students develop it. However, if they are not proficient in L2, he recommends parents engage their children in their first language, heritage, culture, and literature. One example is when a student read a book in L2 about his parents' culture that the dad was eager to have his son read so that they could discuss it together. He relates how such a practice enriched the conversation between parent and child which he considers a straightforward vocabulary enrichment strategy.

***Develop L1.***

In Mr. David's opinion, other educational moments arise when parents take their children to visit their home country. Parents could use these trips to discuss their local traditions and cultures. He shares the story of a gifted student who was a native speaker of English and who took it upon himself to learn his family's L1 because "he didn't want to look bad when he went to visit in that Christmas break". While his description of the boy's achievement highlights this particular student's gifted aptitude to develop a language on his own, it also serves as an example of how parents can use similar cultural opportunities to build their children's linguistic proficiency. He admits that some students may find it hard to handle 2 languages, but this is where being

continuously aware as a teacher and as a parent, that what works for one student may have a different effect on others, becomes relevant.

**Concerns.**

***Acceleration.***

Mr. David's thoughts on acceleration in the classroom are guided by studying the reasons for it. Particularly for L2 vocabulary development among gifted ESL students, his focus goes beyond confirming that they understand the meaning of many academic words. With acceleration, he is careful to ensure that students are also able to analyze the content of what is being read. He adds that, "there's no problem with revisiting stuff they've read before; that helps with that language development".

## **Appendix N**

### **Student Focus Group Discussions and Interviews**

The voices of Andrew, Melody, Jody, and Kathy (pseudonyms) provide rich insights into the strategies they use to develop linguistic proficiency. Each student shares unique strategies and particular experiences advancing his or her knowledge of one, two, and for some, even three languages.

#### **Andrew**

I think the best way that I learn is when something is actually happening to me or whatever and something that is interactive, then, to actually find a way to solve or to clear something up. That's the best way I learn (Andrew, 2017).

Andrew, aged 14 years and 6 months at the time of data collection, is an easygoing young man who is an eager participant. He was born and raised in Canada to Chinese parents who made speaking Chinese a priority in their home. What follows is what he shares with regards to his language learning experiences as well as strategies that he uses to improve language proficiency.

#### **Linguistic strategies.**

##### ***Speaking.***

As indicated on his background survey, Andrew confirms that he speaks Mandarin at home and sometimes English. He does not recall speaking English at home when he was young and credits his comfort speaking Chinese to his parents' continuous support. He always communicates in L1 with them and they support him by providing vocabulary of words he does not know. While he is confident in his use of both languages, he mentions that he should increase his efforts to develop both languages and specifically focus on L1 as "it certainly will be helpful for the future".

His advice to ESL students trying to develop their L2 proficiency is to use it to communicate

on a daily basis. He encourages them to find ways to interact with newly acquired words and place a conscious focus on the language they learn and use. His reference to interaction comes from his experience learning both English and Chinese by having everyday conversations with parents and friends which led to his confidence in using both languages.

### **Resources.**

#### ***Dictionary.***

When speaking about developing his L2 proficiency, Andrew admits that he can do better, even though he feels that he has “improved over the past couple of years”. Andrew would look up a word he does not know “if there is a computer or a dictionary nearby”.

#### ***Television.***

He shares a favorite strategy he uses when he watches Chinese television. He chooses programs of interest to him and focuses on being aware of new words that come up. He uses a dictionary or a thesaurus to look up new words he encounters in these circumstances.

#### ***Word Within the Word series.***

Andrew also praises the *Word Within the Word* series (Thomson & Kemnitz, 2014), a program used in his school to expand one’s academic vocabulary which he describes as, “it’s like you get to know the stems in everything in English and sometimes if you know where the word comes from, then you know what it means and it’s a lot easier”. Finally, he emphasizes the importance of comprehending that every word has a certain context that it can be used in. He advises language learners to understand the meaning and not “try to force the words. I feel, so like if it sounds awkward, sometimes some people try to use big words and sometimes it kind of, it just doesn’t go with the mood”.

#### ***Knowledgeable others.***

Andrew listens to others' suggestions when he asks them for advice; he does not hesitate to ask for help if he needs it; and is usually willing to work to improve his learning if it bothers him. For example, he was concerned about having a non-native accent for a while until he was told by a friend that it wasn't his accent that was the problem but the fact that he spoke too fast, so he started focusing on slowing down until he felt confident about his accent. He also shares that he reviews teachers' comments, tries to understand what he did wrong, and usually gets annoyed once he figures out his mistakes. He sees this experience as a learning moment and shows growth by accepting feedback as part and parcel of progress.

### **Concerns.**

### ***Choice.***

For Andrew, learning a language has to be a choice because "you like don't want to learn a language, if you're forced to learn it, probably won't learn it that well". He likes learning other languages besides English and Chinese and describes learning French as a choice he made because he thinks "French is a pretty cool language". Learning languages to him is also a gateway to future academic and professional opportunities which drove him to develop three languages. He adds that one is not born a language learner since learning a language requires commitment.

He illustrates how his commitment to learn French looks like. His decision to study "everyday a bit" helps him learn and improve his French proficiency. He uses online websites and apps regularly as he finds them very helpful in expanding his vocabulary. He acknowledges that knowing only one language "is probably fine" but looks at learning more than one language as providing "more opportunities probably in the future for work".

### **Melody**

To be honest, I think, reading parts of the textbooks is useless, since I know tons about the Aztecs, Japan, and all that stuff and I find it pretty useless, but this year has been more fun than other years (Melody, 2017).

Melody had just turned 14 on the first day of the study. Her responses reflect that she has many dreams and is on a mission to fulfill them. Below is a description of her linguistic experiences and strategies.

### **Linguistic strategies.**

#### ***Reading.***

Melody mostly reads in L2 despite her ability to read in L1. She states that she is confident in her English language skills but is hesitant to transfer this confidence to Mandarin, adding that she speaks “English with my mom and sometimes Mandarin with my dad”. She credits her confidence in L2 to it being her first language of choice for communication as well as for catering to her love of reading and creative writing.

#### ***Making connections.***

Melody describes how making connections facilitates her deployment of knowledge in one language to develop another. For example, she references in a couple of statements the value of Pinyin (a system of writing in Mandarin Chinese that uses the Latin alphabet to ease pronunciation) in developing her English and adds that any student can do it since all they have to do is “remove the speaking marks from it and just sound it out”. She also shares an alternate way, “if you speak Chinese, then you could compare the words and find a way to remember its pronunciation”.

Melody’s ability to make connections is also evident in a sequence she follows to remember new words she comes across. “First, I would try to understand it and then usually I go to the internet and find out what it means and the synonyms and then use that instead”. She adds, “I read



synonyms, so like words that mean the same thing, so like if the word was *crimson*, then I would use *red* or *dark red*, then I remember it that way”. She is always trying to find other connections and details her strategy to remember the word *crimson* as an example, “that’s how you would probably describe something like blood, it would be either *crimson* or *blood red* and yeah, but if I was describing an apple that had a dark color, I would use *dark red*”.

#### ***After school routine.***

Melody factors in time to do English homework after school and is usually left with time to participate in other activities.

#### **Resources.**

##### ***Apps.***

On learning and developing languages, Melody sees value in attending school to develop a language. She also suggests using online apps such as Duolingo, which is an app that students can download on their phone or computer and study any language whenever they have time. However, she asserts the value of perseverance and the idea that language learners have to “be very dedicated” in order to develop their linguistic skills.

#### **Special traits.**

##### ***Values challenges.***

On learning more languages, Melody would choose a language if she sees value or added motivation to learn it. She would for example learn “French or Finnish, because Finnish is the hardest language in the world and I like challenges, and then French because I need it for Cadets”.

#### **Jody**

Jody did not consent to be recorded and her responses reflect the researcher’s observations and ability to take notes. Jody is able to communicate in her parents’ L1 using it all the time with

her parents and occasionally with her brother but speaks mostly L2 with friends. While she is confident speaking both English and Cantonese, she asserts that learning a second language has to be a choice.

**Linguistic strategies.**

***Write it down.***

Jody likes learning new words in both English and her parents' native language and tries to remember them by writing them down. She does not recollect having difficulty learning Cantonese as she had been hearing it and speaking it since she was little. If she comes across a new English word that she likes, she might discuss its meaning and the word that captured its essence in Cantonese with her parents.

***Conscious focus on language.***

Jody believes that learning L2 is easy once a student learns the alphabet and the stems. She recalls that growing up, most of her L2 exposure was in daycare. While she is confident in her L2 skills, she recognizes that she needs to continue developing her proficiency, for example, by putting conscious effort into acquiring new words. She feels that she already does this by writing new words in a document that is now full of academic words to help her remember them.

***Speaking.***

In order to succeed in learning a language, Jody recommends that language learners attempt to communicate their ideas effectively. She also sees value in their conscious use of the language in everyday situations such as naming foods when eating.

***Reading.***

She is confident in her L2 language skills and likes reading in L2.

***After school routine.***

Jody suggests that language learners need to find what motivates them to work hard. For example, they could plan time for homework and complete it by prioritizing the work they are itching to do. She suggests they regularly review their notes and use apps, such as Duolingo, to practice. Additionally, students need to be flexible in their learning as in even though she prefers working alone, she would work with friends to gain an outside perspective.

### **Resources.**

#### ***Television.***

Jody enjoys watching television in different languages to expand her vocabulary. She prefers subtitles when watching Chinese series or other foreign movies such as Japanese anime movies.

#### ***Knowledgeable others.***

Jody reports the value of capitalizing on any encouragement and or mentoring opportunities received from people around her including parents, teachers, friends and mentors.

### **Concerns.**

#### ***ESL label.***

Jody does not identify as an ESL student since in her opinion the label reflects a student who requires support learning English. She worries about ESL students being teased for their accents or mocked for their low language proficiency. Thus, if she calls attention to her friends' L2 errors she does it almost jokingly, careful not to offend them. However, she comments on her dad's English and he usually takes it to heart and mocks her urge to call him out. Furthermore, Jody enjoys helping her mom who is learning L2 and is open to being corrected.

### **Kathy**

It depends if I'm actually interested in the language, because like if I'm not interested in the language, then I don't have any motivation to learn it. So, if it was like a place that I really

wanna go to and I really wanna know about it, then I would most likely say yes and do it with them, but if it was something that I don't have any interest in, I'd probably pass it up (Kathy, 2017).

Kathy shows up on time eager to share her ideas. Her responses quickly reveal her firm belief that her actions are guided by her interests. A summary of her perspectives on her future plans, her personality, and her language learning and development style is presented next.

### **Linguistic strategies.**

#### ***Speaking.***

Kathy has always lived in a bilingual home and speaks both English and Vietnamese with her family. She adds that “English was a little bit ahead of Vietnamese”. She is therefore fairly comfortable speaking Vietnamese and adds that she could read a few words but does not know how to write in Vietnamese. Even though she is “pretty confident” in L1, she prefers to speak, read, and watch television or movies in L2.

### **Resources.**

#### ***Word Within the Word series.***

Kathy states that she is always interested in expanding her English lexicon and proceeds to describe a vocabulary development strategy she is being taught in school. This strategy involves using the *Word Within the Word* series which she describes this way; “so we get like bits of the word. So, I'll try to find out the meaning like into the context but if it really puzzles me, then I'll search it up”

#### ***Online.***

Whether developing any of the three languages she is already familiar with, or talking about learning a fourth language, Kathy looks favorably on researching and using available online

resources. When asked about her linguistic strategies, she reports that her first go-to strategy is to enlist the help of friends, but if they could not provide her with clear explanations, she searches the meaning of the new word online and uses dictionary and thesaurus websites. She finds these online resources are also particularly convenient when writing; they allow her quick access to the precise word that denotes the meaning she is thinking of. Kathy's strategy to improve her L2 writing skills and memorize new words involves using the internet to look up new words as she writes which allows her not only to present high-quality work but also to enhance her writing style.

***Knowledgeable others.***

Having grown up with ESL parents, Kathy knows to go to friends and teachers for L2 support.

*Teachers.* Kathy shares that she is proficient in English and Vietnamese and speaks a little bit of French. She describes herself as “interpersonal” and highlights that she likes to work in groups. She adds that her personality emboldens her to reach out for support, whether looking for ideas regarding her future plans or language development resources. Her primary strategy for learning a language involves working with “someone who knows the language really well and someone who has had experience teaching it, or like helped out with it”.

*Parents.* Kathy is aware that her parents are great resources despite their low English proficiency and usually goes to her Mother when she needs writing tips since she is “really good at writing”.

*Friends.* Kathy adds that she rarely has any issues expressing her thoughts in L2, but if the odd situation arises, she reaches out to her friends for support.

***Opportunities.***

*Travel.* Kathy is confident in her L1 proficiency level having tested her capacity to speak it during several family trips to Vietnam. Despite her awareness that she may not know some basic L1 words, she feels certain of her ability to communicate and manage when needed with this touristic and familial immersion experience under her belt.

**Special traits.**

***Interest.***

Kathy shares, “I’m not really a big writer, I don’t enjoy writing, but I still can do it, I just don’t find any interest in it”. This significance that she places on interest to undertake a task is consistent with her other responses. Her lack of interest in writing means that she has to put more effort to complete her assignments. Yet, her work ethics drives her to complete these tasks once she concentrates on the goal of completing them.

The importance she places on interest is also evident when she shares how she handles being asked to read a book she is not eager to read. She first underscores her passion for reading saying, “when I was little, I was a big reader so I’m not really picky”. Next, she admits that she would be keener to read a book if the topic is of interest to her. She reiterates that, similar to learning and developing a language, her interest is key in how soon she would start reading and completing the designated book.

***Investment.***

Kathy places a high value on L2 proficiency for school success through her view of language as a means of communication. She states that the language of the country where one lives dictates which language the different academic subjects, such as mathematics and social studies would be taught in. To her, advanced L2 proficiency is vital for student success in Canada since it is an English-speaking country.

When asked about developing proficiency in a third language, Kathy is quick to list the many reasons for her choice of French providing the following response,

I'd probably learn French because French is Canada's second language, so it'll be easier for me if I were to travel to France or Quebec or something like that. I'll be able to understand, and it'll also help me like if I wanna work in the government, I can find a job more easily, and I can understand people. Yeah, so I would probably join French again and since I've been doing French, I was like a child. I haven't been doing it enough, I'm not fluent in it, but like I can pick out a few words, like I sometimes go to the teacher and have like a French to English, English to French dictionary. I try to, like, decipher the meaning, cause sometimes words are like similar in English (2017).

She adds that if she were to develop French on her own, her plan would involve staying in contact with the school's French teacher for support.

## Appendix O

### Themes Emerging from Parents' Focus Group

- | Emma  | Lucy  |
|---|---|
| 1. Valued multiple language learning yet understood it is a choice  | 1. Valued multiple language learning yet understood it is a choice  |
| 2. L1 spoken at home most of the time, L2 occasionally  | 2. L1 spoken at home most of the time, L2 introduced recently when due to Lucy's need to practice L2              |
| 3. Provided resources (books, educational computer games, TV shows and tutors) to develop L1 and L2   | 3. Provided resources to develop L1 (father read to child every night), regretted not using them to develop L2    |
| 4. Suggested school implements continuous uninterrupted focus on language development; one that is not bound by one school term per school year | 4. Suggested school scaffolds parents to ensure language development resources and strategies are used at home    |
| 5. Would like to see school instruction of academic vocabulary development strategies continue past grade 8                                     | 5. Would like to see school share writing resources that parents can use at home to better support their children |
| 6. Shared a personal example of a successful parent teacher collaboration   | 6. Shared personal frustrations regarding parent teacher communication  |



## Appendix P

### Themes Emerging from Teachers' Focus Group

Ms. Sara	Ms. Allison	Mr. David
1. Concerned about students' academic language level	1. Concerned about students' academic language level	1. Concerned about students' academic language level
2. Social-emotional issues may hinder language development	2. Low language level may lead to student frustration	2. Low language level may lead to students feeling inferior
3. Values parent teacher collaboration	3. Values parent teacher collaboration	3. Values parent teacher collaboration
4. Supports ESL parents to show up at parent teacher meetings by using interpreters and breaking down language barriers	4. ESL parents need guidance to help their children find their interest	4. Supports ESL parents to let go of the feeling of looking bad if their child is not performing to their expectations
5. Encourages parents to speak and or read in L2 at home while not letting go of L1	5. Encourages parents to speak more than one language as it allows for L2 development by building on L1	5. Encourages parents to read and discuss L1 literature
6. Uses a variety of daily academic vocabulary enriching activities to cater to individual student's needs	6. Uses a variety of daily academic vocabulary enriching activities to cater to individual student's needs	6. Uses a variety of daily academic vocabulary enriching activities to cater to individual student's needs
7. Student motivation is key for learning and should be sought by parents and teachers alike	7. Motivation to invest the time to build vocabulary should be directed by student interest	7. Motivation gets students involved
8. Having goals is key	8. Attitude is key	8. Chance is key

## Appendix Q

### Themes Emerging from Students' Focus Groups and Interviews

Themes	# Students Making Reference to Theme
1. Use the language daily	4
2. Dictionary, thesaurus	4
3. Use apps/going online	4
4. Commitment (drive, patience, persistence)	4
5. People around you	4
6. Self-awareness	3
7. Interest (want, eagerness, willing) to learn	3
8. Attend a school/class/private lessons	3
9. Ability to make connections	3
10. Self-management	3
11. Understand meaning from context	3
12. Task commitment	2
13. Social/emotional sensitivity/awareness	2
14. Daily effort	2
15. Learning a language is a choice	2
16. Word Within the Word	2
17. Think about the word	2
18. Empathy	2
19. Daily study (review notes)	2
20. Ask for help	2
21. Repeat new words to memorize	1
22. Afterschool activities (Daycare/Clubs)	1
23. Watch television	1
24. Investment	1
25. Write new words down to memorize	1
26. Language learning requires motivation	1
27. Availability of resources	1
28. Word awareness	1
29. Interactive activities	1
30. Use index cards	1

## Appendix R

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**From:** Hetty Roessingh <hroessin@ucalgary.ca> **Tue, Nov 10, 2015**  
**Subject:** RE: Critical review (First draft)  
**To:** The Kilanis <hodakilani@shaw.ca>

Reply Reply All Forward Print

Hi Hoda,

I have had a bit of a go at this ... have a look. I am attaching Katie Crossman's research proposal as a template for your own writing. Hers was clear to follow and successful. I will attach a couple of other things for you, including an article I co-published in 2003 – this is where you can find the visual representations I have pasted in. You can use them to illustrate your key concern/question ... this will make your work easier to read/follow.

Thanks,  
Hetty

---

**From:** The Kilanis [mailto:hodakilani@shaw.ca]  
**Sent:** Monday, November 09, 2015 9:36 PM  
**To:** Hetty Roessingh <hroessin@ucalgary.ca>  
**Subject:** Critical review (First draft)

Hello Hetty,

Please find what I have so far of the literature review attached.

I now have 2 research questions and I am proposing a mixed methods approach. Please let me know what you think.

The material currently under the different headings provides an idea of where I am trying to go with each section. So while it is by no means complete, I would appreciate thoughts on whether you think I should expand on the headings or if you think I should delete one or all. Some of the resources are dated but only because I wanted to provide a history before adding the recent research. What do you think?

I struggled on how to present the Theoretical Framework as my thoughts and views are influenced by many theories but I managed to narrow it down to 3. Do these 3 make sense?

Thanks again for meeting me last week and I will be contacting to set another appointment soon.  
Hoda Kilani

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