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'It was all connected': Understanding and addressing early school-leaving among learners of English as a second language

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"IT WAS ALL CONNECTED":

UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING EARLY SCHOOL-LEAVING

AMONG LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

By:

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THESIS

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Abstract

Existing literature related to English as a second language (ESL) students'

perceptions of their educational experiences is limited. More scarce is that which

pertains to the perceptions and experiences of those ESL youth who leave school early.

The goal of this research project, therefore, was to develop an understanding of the

educational experiences of ESL youth so as to identify the facilitators and inhibitors of

early school-leaving.

I gathered the voices of ESL youth in two focus group interviews with current

students and in five in-depth interviews with ESL youth who left school early. All

participants had attended schools in the Kitchener-Waterloo area. Participants shared

their recognition of the value of education. They also spoke of the ways in which

negative interactions with teachers and peers, inflexible school practices and policies,

financial responsibilities, lack of time, and perception of low levels of English-language

proficiency negatively affected their educational experiences. For some of these youth, a

number of these factors converged to result in their early school-leaving. Insofar as the

youth experienced their education as neither integrating nor accommodating, their access

to equitable educational opportunities was limited.

Among the factors facilitating a positive educational experience were teachers

who went out of their way to provide the youth with extra assistance and to integrate

them into the school; peers who provided academic, linguistic, and social support; and

limited or no financial responsibility. To the extent that the participants' felt that their

needs were met and they were integrated in the social and academic world of the school,

they were facilitated in accessing the available educational opportunities.

Based on these findings, our understanding of the educational experiences of ESL youth is advanced. So too is our knowledge of the multiple factors that facilitate and inhibit equitable educational experiences and opportunities. The implications of these findings are discussed with potential recommendations for practice and policy.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

I. Introduction

Preface

Little Bay: a rural outport in southeastern Newfoundland. Not a place to which one could refer as heterogeneous by any stretch of the imagination. So how is it that a native of Little Bay became interested in exploring with English as a second language (ESL) youth their educational experiences in Canada? [1] I ask that you join me on a brief description of the long and winding path that led me to this project. I believe that my personal and subjective location (i.e., gender, social class, ethnicity, culture, race) provides a lens through which I view, understand, and interpret the world. In sharing pieces of my journey and orienting the reader to my personal location, I hope to contextualize my choice of research topic and methods and provide a framework in which the research and its interpretation can be understood and critically examined. Through personal reflection on my subjective location, and feedback from colleagues, I was able to remain aware of the ways in which my background affected my choices, feelings, thoughts, and interpretations throughout the research process.

As the youngest daughter of devoted, caring, and well educated parents I was surrounded by love and encouragement throughout my life. My parents placed a strong emphasis on the values of liberation theology, social justice, compassion for others, and leading a deliberate life. My parents led by example. Their devotion to their family extended to others through work and in their involvement with community development

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[1] In keeping with the practice of researchers in the field, I will refer to those who drop out of school as either early school-leavers or non-completers. This decision is due to negative connotation of the term dropout, often associated with individual failure. Research has shown that the heterogeneous nature of those who leave school early makes this label highly inappropriate (Tinto, V., 1987 "Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition" as cited in Human Resources and Labour Canada, 1993).

and local service organizations. Their example, combined with my being surrounded by copies of the *New Internationalist*, *Catholic Worker*, *Catholic New Times*, and *National Catholic Reporter* (all left-wing social justice publications) sparked my passion for social justice and equality. From an early age I was involved in groups such as Amnesty International and the International Red Cross. At age fifteen I made a solo journey to New York City where I hoped to gain a better understanding of homelessness through exploring with these individuals their experience of living on the streets. I felt an urgency to supplement my "book" knowledge with practical experience. Intuitively, I believed that this experiential knowledge would be the basis upon which I could choose the most relevant career path.

The strong value I placed on experiential, or grounded, knowledge came to the fore once again during my undergraduate years when I became increasingly frustrated with an education system that I experienced as largely disconnected from the "real" world. I found it difficult to connect my university life to my passion for social justice and desire to *do* something. This passion and frustration led to me spend a summer as a volunteer at Romero House, a refugee resettlement organization in Toronto, where I was profoundly moved and inspired by the lives of those with whom I lived and worked. My experiences at Romero House not only altered my understanding of myself and my privileged position but also my understanding of Canada and, indeed, the workings of the world. I saw the individuals with whom I lived and worked as role models; their faith, hope, and resiliency in the face of unspeakable difficulties was inspirational. My time at Romero House heightened my sensitivity to Canada's response to newcomers and the resulting perceptions of and experiences in Canada.

Returning to university after such a profound experience was exceedingly difficult. It was only through my involvement with the Women's Studies program and Community Psychology coursework at the University of Prince Edward Island that I was encouraged to complete my degree. The emphasis and value that these disciplines placed on grounded knowledge, personal experience, social justice, and action inspired and motivated me. I immediately felt comfortable with and connected to Community Psychology, a value-based and action-oriented discipline. I was excited that this was a discipline within which my passion for justice was shared.

Although confident that I would pursue a Masters degree in Community Psychology, my past experiences had taught me that the lessons learned outside of the classroom were equally important, if not more so, than those within. I decided to continue my education in the "real" world: working in, volunteering in, and visiting various parts of the globe including Japan, Thailand, Botswana, and the Yukon Territory. My year in Japan, where I taught conversational English, was my first experience as a visible minority and of being "valued," or excluded, on the basis of my minority status. It was an eye-opening experience when a good Japanese friend referred to me as having blonde hair and blue eyes (I have dark brown hair and eyes)! The profound feelings of alienation, isolation, and frustration that I experienced as a minority and a *"geijin"* (foreigner) were also a first. I was reminded of the struggles faced by those refugees with whom I worked at Romero House.[2]

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[2] In making this comparison I hope not to imply that my experience of being "over-valued" as a white Canadian is equivalent to that of individuals belonging to groups that have been, and continue to be, devalued. However, as a minority when in other nations and as a woman, I have experienced various forms of oppression throughout my life. I believe that these experiences have increased my understanding and awareness of oppression and fueled my passion for social justice.

During my year in Japan, I became involved with the Karenni Rainbow Foundation (KRF). This group of volunteers worked collaboratively with the Karenni, an indigenous people in Burma, in their struggle for independence and survival. I joined a delegation to Thailand where we met with various political, military, social action, and humanitarian groups. The experience that most impacted me was my stay in two Karenni refugee camps where delegates had the privilege to bear witness to the lives and stories of a virtually forgotten people. We heard and recorded the stories of these individuals, letting their voices guide our future actions. Upon return to Japan, the KRF implemented numerous awareness-raising activities and established a project to sponsor the university education of a small number of Karenni youths. This experience sparked my interest in what I later learned was called Participatory Action Research, an approach to research that consists of the maximum participation of stakeholders in the systematic collection and analysis of information for the purpose of taking action and making change (Nelson, Ochocka, Griffin, & Lord, 1998).

Subsequent experiences in Botswana, at a day centre for adults with HIV/AIDS, and in the Yukon Territory, working with female survivors of domestic violence, also had a profound impact on my life and choice of career path. In Botswana, I was confronted with overwhelming levels of poverty, suffering, despair, and hopelessness, and in the Yukon, the devastating effects of years of sexual, racial, and other forms of oppression. Once again I became keenly, and disturbingly, aware of my privileged status and the injustice of the distribution of wealth and power. Although privileged with the opportunity to befriend, comfort, and support some of those who used the services at both organizations, I felt immobilized by my inability to effect change on a larger scale. My

lack of practical skills, in terms of writing funding proposals, evaluating programs, mobilizing communities, and facilitating groups, reminded me that, although passion was a vitally important part of my work, to effect change I would need to supplement this passion with practical skills and knowledge. Hence, I decided that the time had come to continue my studies in Community Psychology.

While returning to the world of academia was not without its challenges, the practical component of the program helped to ease the transition. My involvement as a practicum student at the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services, a non-profit social research organization in Kitchener, was the highlight of my academic experience. The strong values that guide the Centre's research, as well as the abundance of cross-cultural work, made it a perfect fit with my interests and passions.

It was during my time at the Centre that I became interested in the issue of the educational experiences of those ESL youth who did not complete secondary school. On several occasions throughout the year, the Centre was approached by both the Waterloo Region District School Board's ESL consultant and the executive director of the local Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP) with concerns of perceived high rates of ESL early school-leaving. These concerns were echoed at a provincial conference of settlement workers (personal conversation with L. Pearson and M. Alvarez, June, 2003). The anecdotal evidence acquired by the ESL consultant and ISAP executive director required additional information to better understand the issue and guide any potential future action.

I developed an interest in understanding ESL early school-leaving from the perspective of the youth themselves. My personal, volunteer, and work experiences with

immigrants and refugees, as well as my experiences of oppression, have heightened my awareness of the multiple and pervasive inequities encountered by these individuals. That ESL students may be dropping out of school at a rate disproportionate to other students suggests that their educational needs are not being met. A failure to meet the educational needs of ESL youth can be considered an issue of inequitable educational opportunity. Consequently, I felt it was important to not only further explore this issue, but to do so in a way that gave "voice" to these individuals, who as members of non-dominant groups (linguistic and/or visible minority youth), may not have previously had an opportunity to "publicly" voice their concerns or thoughts on the subject. I believed that the educational experiences of these youths, and the way in which factors within larger society affect their experiences, were topics that needed to be addressed. As a community and as a nation, I feel it is our responsibility to follow through on our national immigration policies in supporting the integration of newcomers and responding to the needs of all of our youth.

In this thesis, I have described the purpose of the research and provided an overview of the relevant literature. I have also included a description of the stakeholders, research methodology, methodological orientation, ethical considerations, analysis plan, findings, interpretation and discussion, and recommendations and implications.

Rationale for Research

As noted, I initiated this participatory action research project in response to the concerns of community members after an assessment of need, the importance of which has been stressed by Posavac and Carey (2003). The ESL consultant and ISAP executive

director recounted anecdotal reports of high dropout rates among ESL secondary school students and vocalized the need to develop a better understanding of this phenomenon so as to guide future action. I hope the action that results from communication of the research findings will promote equitable educational opportunities for ESL youth. In addition to encouraging educational equity, actions that promote ESL student retention are important in consideration of Canada's reliance on a highly educated and literate labour force (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1991).

As the issue of ESL secondary school-leaving in Waterloo Region had never been systematically examined, information was lacking in regards to the educational experiences of these youths. In focusing on the voice of ESL youths I was able to develop an understanding of the participants' perceptions of their educational experiences and the facilitators and inhibitors of early school-leaving.

I designed the research so that the steering committee assumed increased leadership during the last phase of the project. During this Action and Implementation phase, the steering committee was "handed the torch." With my support and encouragement, the steering committee assumed responsibility for communicating the research findings and any other resulting actions. Our hope is that sharing the research findings will facilitate discussion and action on the topic of early school-leaving among ESL students so as to enable these youths to continue their education and fully participate in the social, economic, and political life of Canada.

As my review of the literature made clear, information related to the educational experience of ESL youth is not only missing in Kitchener-Waterloo but within Canada as a whole. Volumes of literature exist on second language acquisition and instruction

(Larsen-Freeman, 1991). Lost in this discussion is the experience of the ESL student; particularly neglected is that of ESL youth who leave school early. Similarly, the abundance of research related to school dropouts has rarely focused specifically on youths with English as a second language. The virtual absence of ESL youths' voice in the literature indicated the marginalized status of this group and pointed to the necessity of my research to help fill this gap in knowledge and add their voice to those guiding future action.

Other researchers have highlighted the need to qualitatively explore with ESL students, or newcomer youth, their educational experiences (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; Burnaby, James, & Regier, 2000; Nieto, 1992; Watt & Roessingh, 1994). Such information is considered "vital to completing [the] understanding of the statistical trends" (Watt & Roessingh, 1994, p. 295). Burnaby et al. (2000) stated that "more knowledge is required not only about those immigrants who do not participate in existing educational activities because of barriers but also about needs they might identify that the mainstream or even their own communities have not recognized" (p. 42). And finally, Nieto (1992) noted that "only by listening to students can we learn how they experience school, how social and educational structures affect their learning, and what we can do to provide high-quality education for all students" (p. xxvi). This research was needed not only within Kitchener-Waterloo but also within the larger field of academic studies on ESL learners and newcomer youth. Consequently, I discerned three main purposes for this study:

➤ To explore the lived educational experiences of those ESL youth who left high

school early and those who are currently attending high school so as to better

understand high school non-completion among this population

➤ To identify the perceptions of both those ESL youth who did not complete high

school and those who are currently attending high school regarding the facilitators

and inhibitors of a successful educational experience

➤ To engage local stakeholders in communicating the research findings so as to

create awareness of and address the issue of early school-leaving among ESL

learners

My review of the literature will illustrate the virtual neglect of ESL youths' voice

and some of the issues surrounding ESL education and early school-leaving.

II. Literature Review

Background

Canada's demographic landscape has changed rapidly and visibly as a result of

recent immigration patterns and federal policies that aim to increase the number of

immigrants arriving annually from the current 250,000 to 300,000 (Duffy, 1999). More

than 18% of all Canadians are immigrants, giving Canada the world's second highest

percentage of immigrants. Of those immigrants arriving in Canada, approximately half

come to Ontario. In each of the past few years, Ontario has received over 100,000

immigrants from 180 different countries (Statistics Canada 2001 Census).

The local population is also becoming increasingly diverse. Waterloo Region,

home to approximately 450,000 people, has the fifth highest per capita immigrant

population in Canada. Twenty-two percent of Waterloo Region residents (or 99,000

people) are immigrants (Statistics Canada 2001 Census), 42% of these below 20 years of

age (1996 Census, as reported in Janzen & Ochocka, 2003). Between 1996 and 2001,

14,304 new Canadians came to the region from other countries. Major recent immigrant

groups include those from Yugoslavia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, Romania, Poland,

Croatia, China, India, and Pakistan. Of these recent immigrants:

- 8,390 went to Kitchener

- 3,760 went to Waterloo

- 1,820 went to Cambridge and

- 335 went to the four townships in the region (Statistics Canada 2001 Census).

The large number of new arrivals under the age of 20 years and with a first

language other than English has significantly impacted student demographics. The

number of students from an ESL background in Canada's large urban high schools is

estimated to range from 20-50% of the student population (Rinehart, 1996; McInnes,

1993; Dawson, 1998; Dempster & Alberts, 1998). The education system is facing the

challenge of responding to this increasingly diverse student population.

Currently, both English as a second language (ESL) and English literacy

development (ELD) courses are provided to those students arriving in Ontario with

limited or no previous experience with English, limited access to schooling, un- or

underdeveloped first-language literacy skills, exclusive use of other varieties of English,

as well as to those students from areas of Canada with limited access to English. ESL

and ELD courses are designed to assist students to learn English and/or develop the

literacy skills necessary to continue their education and contribute to the social,

economic, and political life in Canada. Ontario's Ministries of Education, and Training,

Colleges and Universities (1999) aim to "provide language programs to ensure that all

students develop the level of proficiency in English required for success at school and in

postsecondary education and the workplace" (p. 42).

Unfortunately, evidence suggests that this goal is not being met. Past research has

found that Ontario's ESL high school students have a very high dropout rate (Radwanski,

1987). Within Waterloo Region, and throughout Ontario, concern exists regarding a

perceived disproportionately high dropout rate amongst ESL secondary school students

(George, Cumming, & Daciuk, 2003; personal communication with L. Pearson & M.

Alvarez, June, 2003). Concerns have also been expressed regarding Toronto's 60% cut

in ESL teachers during the same period as a 63% increase in the number of schools with

ESL students (Ivison, 2003). Massive cuts to Ontario's public education system within

the past six years have resulted in fewer specialist teachers, educational assistants,

resource staff, and support services. Coulman (2003) points out that these cuts make it

impossible to address inequities in the education system and create fair funding practices

across the province.

It is often considered the responsibility of schools, important social institutions for

absorbing and integrating newcomer youth (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; McLeod, 1975;

Rong & Preissle, 1998), to ensure that new Canadian youths are provided with

educational opportunities that facilitate their integration into Canada's social, cultural,

political, and economic world. I believe that although schools are ultimately responsible

for the education of our youths, we must recognize that factors outside the classroom

have a significant impact on what happens inside. The sociopolitical climate, which

affects the goals of immigrant education, the available funding, and other relevant

factors, impacts educational practices and students' experiences. Schools, for instance,

cannot be held responsible for the inadequate funding that results in one teacher for every

73 ESL students in Toronto (Ivison, 2003). Inadequate funding and community support

services were also highlighted by Coulman (2003) who stated that classroom teachers

alone are unable to provide the individualized support required by many students.

Equitable educational opportunity is the responsibility of all. It is unreasonable and

unrealistic to place the sole responsibility for students' education on our educators and

the education system.

Indeed, all citizens should be actively concerned about the education of our

youths. Equitable educational opportunity affects our entire community. As Rong and

Preissle (1998) have noted, the uneven distribution of literacy and education across ethnic

and nationality groups threatens the democratic principles of equality, equity, social

mobility, and political stability. More utilitarian arguments relate to the social and

economic cost of dropouts and Canada's economic reliance on a well-educated labour

force (Canadian Centre for Adolescent Research, 2000; Johnson, 1997; Nunes, 1998;

Employment and Immigration Canada, 1991).

To respond to the issue of early school-leaving among ESL students in Kitchener-

Waterloo, I felt that it was first necessary to develop an understanding of their

educational experiences and their perceptions of the facilitators and inhibitors of

educational success. I explored these issues with both those ESL youth who left school

early and those who remain in school. In providing a space for the voices of these

individuals to be heard, I feel I was able to both contribute to the small body of literature

on ESL early school-leaving and suggest directions for action strategies.

Introduction to the Literature

My first step in developing a better understanding of the educational experiences

of ESL students involved conducting a literature review. I included literature related to

the movement toward integrative education, theories of academic underachievement

among minority students, the position of minority youth within the Ontario education

system, second language acquisition, early school-leaving, and the academic success and

educational experiences of ESL and other minority students. [3] This research made clear

that ESL students' academic success is related to both their proficiency in English and

cultural adaptation. The desire and ability, or perceived ability, of ESL learners to

integrate with native English-speaking peers has been shown to affect second language

acquisition. Some researchers have shown that discrimination and racism affect

educational and social integration, and in turn, academic success (Anisef & Kilbride,

2000; Dei, Mazzuca, McIssac, & Zine, 1997; Hilliard, 1991; Silver & Mallett, 2002).

These authors argue that academic failure among ESL and other minority students has

less to do with language and other differences than with the discrimination against them

resulting from these differences. These researchers suggest that subtle, institutionalized

racism within schools and society can disempower students and lead to academic failure.

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[3] My literature review commenced in May, 2003 and was completed in September, 2004. PsycINFO, ERIC, and Sociological Abstracts were among the databases I searched for information pertaining to my research. Primary sources were located and cited whenever possible and to the best of my ability. Given the scarcity of recent research on issues relevant to my research, in particular qualitative research with ESL youth, I included in my literature review some dated sources. The dearth of research on the educational experiences of ESL youth further highlighted the importance of the current study.

Although evidence suggests that changes are needed in our education system, the efforts of individual teachers, students, and schools alone are insufficient. Schools do not exist in a vacuum, but can be considered microcosms of the larger society. Societal inequities result in the unequal distribution of conditions that support academic success among different groups (Schofield, 1997). A review of the literature made it clear that addressing and responding to ESL youths' perceptions of their educational experiences required a consideration of the way in which the broader societal context affected these experiences. In considering multiple levels of analysis to develop an understanding of early school-leaving among ESL students I followed a well-established practice within the sub-discipline of community psychology (see Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2000). In placing the experience of the individual ESL learner within the larger context, I was able to develop a more thorough understanding of their experience and suggest recommendations for change.

To understand the issue of early school-leaving among ESL students, it is necessary to consider the historical and current policies and practices related to immigrant/minority education.[4]

Immigrant Education: From Forced Assimilation to Integration

Given the effect of the sociopolitical climate on the education system, it is important to briefly review the history of immigrant education in Canada. Historical reviews of immigrant education in Canada highlight the gradual movement away from assimilation and toward cultural pluralism or integration (Burnaby et al., 2000; McLeod,

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[4] While the policies and practices related to immigrant education were also applied to other minority groups in Canada, for readability sake I will hereafter make reference to immigrant education, rather than immigrant/minority education.

1975). It is clear that the attitude toward, and goals of, immigrant education have had a

significant impact on the educational experiences of these youths. As late as the 1960s,

immigrants were expected to reject their own cultural practices and beliefs in favour of

adopting the English language and Canadian values. Schools and educators were seen as

"natural assimilators" whose job was to "Canadianize" students. Homogeneity through

assimilation was considered a necessary precondition for national consolidation and

cohesion (Burnaby et al., 2000; McLeod, 1975). The destructiveness of forced

assimilation is evident in an examination of the long-term effects of the educational

history of Canada's Aboriginal population (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003).

It was not until the 1970s that pluralism began to influence both government

policy and public consciousness. Prompting the shift from assimilation to pluralism was

rapid demographic change and the introduction of the federal multiculturalism policy,

Official Languages Act, Heritage Languages Program, and Immigrant Services and

Adaptation Program. It was also during this period that Ontario's government recognized

the specific educational needs of immigrant students and introduced training programs

and certification for ESL teachers, ESL guidelines for high school courses, and funding

to school boards with high immigrant populations (Burnaby et al., 2000). Despite an

official movement toward pluralism, or multiculturalism, researchers in the mid-1970s

observed that classrooms often retained the concept of and belief in assimilation

(McLeod, 1975).

In the 1980s, growing racial tensions in the Greater Toronto Area led to increased

discussion of inequity and racism. These discussions resulted in a recognition that the

needs of immigrant students went beyond linguistics. A continued focus on anti-racism

and educational equity in the 1990s led to increased interest in the effectiveness of ESL

programs in meeting learners' needs. Unfortunately, poor record-keeping has often made

it difficult for researchers to evaluate ESL programs (Burnaby et al., 2000). Recent

research suggests the needs of newcomer youths are going unmet and that, due to a lack

of information and understanding, settlement services are infrequently utilized (Anisef &

Kilbride, 2000; Janzen & Ochocka, 2003; CASRnews, 2002). In response, Ontario

Administration of Settlement and Integration Services (OASIS), along with local partner

organizations, have established the Settlement Workers in Schools program in select

southwestern Ontario communities. As the education system is a point of entry for many

newcomer youth, locating settlement workers within schools is hoped to increase their

accessibility.

Within Waterloo Region, the recently established Settlement and Education

Partnership in Waterloo Region (SEPWR) provides initial settlement services to

newcomer students and their families to adjust to Canadian society and Ontario's schools.

This program has been positively evaluated by newcomer parents and students, both

appreciative of the support, information, and resources provided during the adjustment

process (George, Cumming, & Daciuk, 2003). Partnership building with community

agencies and cross-cultural sensitivity training are also included among the activities of

school settlement workers (George et al., 2003).

In the past forty years, educational programs for Ontario's immigrant students

have shifted from changing immigrants (i.e., through assimilation) to influencing the

wider society (i.e., the introduction of anti-racism and –discrimination foci). The

responsibility for immigrant education has also shifted from local school boards to the

Ministry of Education. Policy intentions, while once assimilationist, have moved toward

integration, accommodation, and anti-racism. Although these changes appear positive,

evidence of disproportionately high numbers of ESL and minority student who leave

school early calls to question the degree to which they have been successfully

implemented. Whether the educational system (and larger society) currently "practices"

multiculturalism, and how this is experienced by the ESL learner in the classroom, is

unclear. The complexity of the issue and the fact that there is no recipe for putting

multiculturalism into practice creates difficulty in answering these questions.

Prior to delving into the literature specific to ESL youth and early school leaving,

I will briefly review some of the theories on the educational underachievement of

minority students. Although none of these theories focuses specifically on ESL youth, it

may be useful to develop an understanding of this literature.

Theories of Educational Underachievement among Minority Students

Theories related to the relative lack of school achievement among minority

students are multiple and have changed over time. These theories have developed from a

focus on individual and cultural deficiencies to considering how the cultural mismatches

between students and teachers, perceptions of and reactions to social injustice and

inequality in the broader society, perpetuation of the status quo, and racism and

discrimination might contribute to minority students' underachievement (see Erickson,

1987; Nieto, 1992; Ogbu, 1987, 1991, 2003). While each of these theories adds to our

understanding, alone they are insufficient in explaining the academic underachievement

of so many minority youth. For instance, although some of these theories can account for

the success of some immigrant minority students, they fail to explain that of domestic, or involuntary, minority students. Some of these theories only account for the success of particular teaching strategies, and still others result in cultural- or economic-determinist positions that present a mechanical view of society with virtually no room for human agency. Without considering the complex interplay between the multitude of factors that together affect the educational experiences and success of minority youth, these theories are incomplete. Nieto (1992) provided a more comprehensive analysis of the issue through considering the ways in which teachers, schools, communities, and society interact to contribute to students' failure and early school-leaving.

Among the multiple factors Nieto (1992) found related to the process of academic underachievement were the sociopolitical context (including poverty, racism, and other forms of discrimination), unproductive practices and policies of schools (including tracking, discriminatory disciplinary practices, lowered expectations, narrow pedagogical practices, and disempowerment of students, teachers, and parents) and factors related to the individual (including the way in which students and communities perceive and react to school, and cultural and linguistic discontinuities between schools and students that, resulting from the way in which the school is structured and these differences are valued, can make school uncomfortable or impossible). Although each of these factors may contribute to academic achievement and progression, alone they do not constitute causal explanations. The complex interplay of these factors can help us understand the academic underachievement of many youth. Nieto (1992) stated that no simple explanation, or no one theory, provides an adequate explanation of minority youths' academic underachievement.

Minority Youth in the Ontario Education System

As later reviewed, research specific to ESL learners is uncommon. Rather, these individuals are often included under the broader categories of minority or immigrant student. Research on immigrant and minority youth in Ontario's education system indicates that in addition to linguistic struggles, ESL learners may face challenges related to their minority status. Some of these studies (Anisef & Bunch, 1994; Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; Cummins, 1989; Cummins, 1994b; Dei et al., 1997; Employment and Immigration Canada & Statistics Canada, 1990; Janzen & Ochocka, 2003) suggest that conflicting cultural values, changes in roles and identity, poverty, intergenerational conflict, the traumatic experiences of many refugees, disempowering education, racism, and discrimination are among the stresses experienced by these youths in their effort to integrate. These stressors may lead students to mentally withdraw from academic effort or contribute to their decision to leave school prior to completion (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; Cummins, 1989; Cummins, 1994b; Dei et al., 1997; Employment and Immigration Canada & Statistics Canada, 1990).

In his review of the literature, Nunes (1998) found that for over two decades, students from certain racial and ethnic groups in Ontario have consistently experienced a shorter and less than adequate education. Canadian research on youth who do not complete high school has shown that among the racial and ethnic groups disproportionately represented in the dropout figures are Aboriginal (Human Resources and Labour Canada, 1993; Silver & Mallet, 2002), Black (Dei et al., 1997), and Portuguese-Canadians youths (Nunes,1998). Other studies from both Canada and the United States reveal that some ethnic groups, specifically certain Asian groups, have

experienced a high degree of academic success (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; Beiser, Shik, &

Curyk, 1999; Hudson, 2003; Rong & Preissle, 1998; Swanson, 2003). Beiser and

colleagues (1999) have theorized that cultural differences in the respect for education

may play a role in the differential outcomes among ethnic groups. Research has also

found that "ethnic resources" (family, association with traditional culture and values,

involvement with and sense of belonging to an ethnic community, support in negotiating

an identity in a new culture) can also have a positive effect on the adaptation experiences

and academic performance of immigrant youth (see overview in Anisef & Kilbride,

2000).

Studies considering race, ethnicity, and identity suggest that disengagement from

school is a complex process involving factors related to the individual, their families, the

school, community, and societal discrimination and oppression. These findings point to

the need to consider the way in which factors beyond the individual and operations of the

school system affect the educational experience of ESL youth who leave school. For this

reason, I have interpreted my findings through an ecological lens, considering factors at

the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels.

Through this research I hoped to learn how, and if, ESL learners experience and

perceive an "integrative, accommodating, and anti-racist" education system. In this

examination, I attempted to remain cognizant that the degree to which these factors are

experienced and practiced in schools relates to what is happening outside the school.

Rothermund (1986) stated that, although educational institutions play a role in improving

the condition of disadvantaged groups, they cannot be "expected to cope with problems

which are beyond [their] reach, such as widespread poverty and extreme social inequality

or deeply engrained ethnic differentiation" (p.11). He noted that unless political solutions to inequity are found, the education field will be unable to contribute to resolutions.

Following is a brief overview of research trends and a further exploration of early school-leaving, the academic success of ESL students, and ESL youths' perceptions of their educational experiences.

Research Trends

There has been a virtual explosion of research on second language acquisition and ESL education in recent decades (Larsen-Freeman, 1991). Initially, this research focused on a descriptive analysis of the nature and rate of second language acquisition and the factors affecting the language learner. Later, the focus shifted to how acquisition occurs, how learner factors result in different levels of success, and the development of pedagogical approaches to support language acquisition. There has been a small, but increasing, focus on the sociopolitical aspects of immigrant education (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; Dei et al., 1997; Larsen-Freeman, 1991; Watt et al., 1996). Included in this latter focus is the increasing number of studies that have shown disproportionately high rates of early school-leaving among ESL students (Alberta Education, 1992; Radwanski, 1987; Watt & Roessingh, 1994).

Largely missing in this growing body of literature is the educational experience of ESL youth. Less still is known about ESL youth who do not complete school. A brief overview of the research on the general population of youth who leave school early helps to illuminate some of the factors related to disengagement from school.

Youth who Leave School Early

There is extensive literature on the subject of early school-leaving in Canada. The multiplicity of definitions and methods for calculating dropout rates produce different dropout profiles and rates (e.g., *annual* rates of *confirmed* dropouts produce much lower figures than *longitudinal* rates of *apparent* dropouts). For instance, Canadian studies have reported school non-completion rates varying from 12% to 33% of the general population (Alberta Education, 1992; Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Calgary Board of Education, 1993; Human Resources and Labour Canada, 1993). Although this variance makes comparison between studies difficult, Watt and Roessingh (1994) claim that when one sorts through this data the dropout rate remains fairly consistent at approximately 33% of the general population.

Much of the research on early school-leaving is related to determining causative factors and identifying those most susceptible (Human Resources and Labour Canada, 1993). Various sociocultural factors, such as parental education and occupation, family background characteristics, socioeconomic status, and marital or parental status are associated with non-completion of high school (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Employment and Immigration Canada & Statistics Canada, 1990; Human Resources and Labour Canada, 1993). Although a combination of several characteristics may place individuals at "high risk," the large number of youth who leave school that do not come from a high risk background indicates the complexity of early school-leaving. It is clear that early school-leaving cannot be explained by background characteristics alone. Various documents have reported that other factors, including school performance, employment status, and educational experience, are also related to the non-completion of

high school (Anisef, 1998; Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Employment and Immigration

Canada & Statistics Canada, 1990; Human Resources and Labour Canada, 1993).

The 1991 School Leavers Survey found that the educational experiences of youth

who leave school early and those who graduate differ immensely. Those who did not

complete school, for instance, were less likely than graduates to have friends attending

school, enjoy school, participate in extracurricular activities, regularly attend or

participate in classes, or feel that they fit in at school (Human Resources and Labour

Canada, 1993). Similarly, research has shown that both Black and ESL youth who leave

school had very different perceptions of their educational experiences than teachers,

graduates, and peers who were members of the dominant group (Dei et al., 1997; Watt et

al., 1996).

Academic Success of ESL Students

The above mentioned differential experiences and perceptions highlighted for me

the importance of exploring with both ESL students and those who left school early their

educational experience. These studies pointed to the necessity of looking beyond

demographics to understand the issue of early school-leaving. I felt that a more complete

understanding required an exploration of the educational experience of youth who leave

school early. Although these studies offer a glimpse of this experience, most are

quantitative and fail to delve into students' perspectives. In addition, the statistical

information on immigrant students fails to inform us specifically of the ESL learner. For

these reasons, this research project, that included the educational experiences of ESL

youth who left school early, might be an important contribution to the literature.

The degree to which the educational and social needs of ESL students are being

met within the education system has been the focus of a small, but growing, pocket of

research (Alberta Education, 1992; Derwing et al., 1999; Early, 1992; ESL Task Force,

2000; Foscolos, 2000; Gentry, 1988; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995; Ngo, 2002; Watt et al.,

1996; Radwanski, 1987; Watt & Roessingh, 1994). One aspect of the educational

experience of ESL learners is illuminated in research on their academic success. This

research has found that ESL students tend to perform poorly on exit exams, receive lower

academic scores than other students, and comprise a disproportionate number of those in

non-academic secondary school programs irrespective of their academic competence

(Alberta Learning, as cited in Ngo, 2002; Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; see Nikiforuk, 2004;

Roessingh & Watt, 1995; Watt & Roessingh, 1994). Watt and Roessingh's (1994) five-

year tracking study of ESL secondary school students found that of the 26% who

graduated, 90% received a general diploma rather than an advanced. Of all graduates in

the system, 42% received a general diploma and 55% an advanced. The levels of course

work at the secondary level include basic, general, and advanced (moving progressively

from least to most academic). Within Ontario, the terminology differs: students are

"streamed" into courses taught in either an applied (practical) or an academic

(theoretical) manner. Research indicates that in addition to the frequent inappropriate

placement of ESL students, other visible minority and immigrant youth are also often

found in lower academic levels (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; Dei et al., 1997; National

Association of State Boards of Education, 2001; Ramcharan, 1975; Walker, 2002; Wong

Fillmore & Meyer, 1992). That other visible minority youth are also streamed into

applied, or basic, courses suggests that the academic success of ESL students relates only in part to their proficiency in English.

Academic Success as Related to Proficiency in English

Although English language proficiency alone does not determine the academic success of ESL students, it appears to be a contributing factor. For this reason I will briefly review the literature on second-language acquisition. In the past, the language acquisition process was often oversimplified. For instance, it was commonly assumed that children able to converse fluently in a second language were completely proficient in that language. The explosion of second-language acquisition research since the 1970s has created awareness of its complexity (Larsen-Freeman, 1991). It is now widely accepted, within the ESL field, that conversational fluency is insufficient for academic success and that "school language" is unique from, and far more complex than, conversational English. As youth progress through grade levels, their language becomes increasingly complex and less connected to contextual clues (Collier, 1989; Collier & Thomas, 1989).

It is generally believed that, although ESL learners take approximately two to three years to develop basic interpersonal communicative skills, it takes five to seven years to develop cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1981; Cummins, 1994a). Research suggests that during the time it takes for students to learn English, they may fall behind academically (Collier, 1987, 1989; Johnson & Peters, 1994). Collier (1987, 1989) found that for those students entering an ESL program at a later age the increased academic and intellectual demands of the higher grades may cause more difficulty. These students may require as many as six to eight years to attain national

grade-level norms in academic achievement. These studies not only draw our attention to the complexity of second-language acquisition but also point to the difficulty of losing time in academic development while acquiring a second language.

Achievement is just one aspect of the academic success of ESL students. A more comprehensive view also considers students' progress from one grade to the next.

ESL Youth Who Leave School Early

There are just a handful of researchers who have focused on the academic progress of ESL students in Canada. These researchers have found a consistently high dropout rate among ESL secondary school students. In a study of the educational success of ESL learners in two Edmonton secondary schools, Derwing and colleagues (1999) found that 60% did not receive their high school diploma. Approximately 46% of their sample dropped, or were pushed, out of school, while another 14% completed 100 credits without achieving a diploma.[5] Radwanski (1987) also reported a high percentage (53%) of ESL secondary school dropouts. Similarly high non-completion rates (61%) were found in an Alberta Education (1992) study of ESL students between grades eight and twelve. The Alberta Education study has been critiqued by Watt and Roessingh (2001) for excluding a large number of records due to missing data. The inclusion of both junior and senior high school students also complicates its comparison to other studies that look only at senior high school students (Watt & Roessingh, 2001).

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[5] For the purpose of comparison, I reported Watt and Roessingh's (2001) adjustments for the differences in definition of ESL and educational success.

In their five year study, Watt and Roessingh (1994) tracked the educational progress of ESL high school students and found a blended dropout rate of 74%.[6] Their analysis revealed that English language ability at entry to high school was the only consistent predictive variable, with beginners leaving school at a much higher rate (95.5%) than intermediate (70%) or advanced students (50%). Among those most likely to graduate were older arriving students who were academically competent in their first language and who took, on average, four and a half years to complete a three-year program. These researchers also noted significantly different patterns among those who did not complete secondary school. They proposed three distinct categories of "dropout", "fall-out", and "push-out" to refer to those who did not complete school; these categories relate in part to the students' quality of school experience. For instance, an active decision to drop out of school was often related to perceptions of impending failure and their teacher's lack of interest or concern, whereas falling out of school occurred because students were not "held-in" with sufficient personal and educational support in the early stages. "Push-outs" were those students who were successfully progressing but left school after the removal of necessary support services.

In subsequent research, Watt and Roessingh (2001) examined the long-term effects of diminished support for Alberta's ESL students. They found that, although the dropout rate for both pre- and post-budget cut students remained stable at about 74%, the educational success of intermediate ESL students appeared compromised by budget cuts. Following the budget cuts, ESL students not only entered the mainstream English courses earlier but were often placed in the nonacademic stream irrespective of their academic

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[6] A *blended* dropout rate reflects the average of the *confirmed* (those students who participated in a formal dropout procedure) and *apparent* (those students who left school without making known their intention to leave) dropout rates.

competence. Given the accelerated dropout of intermediate ESL students after the budget

cuts, it appears that they were failed by the resulting quicker integration into mainstream

classes. As students above the age of 19 years were no longer permitted to attend high

school, the time ESL students required to develop sufficient proficiency in English and to

fulfill high school graduation requirements was no longer available. Their research

indicates that school practices and policies can negatively affect ESL students'

educational achievement and progression.

These studies on the dropout rate of ESL students help illuminate the incredible

challenges these youth face. Yet, the nature of much of this research does not provide an

in-depth understanding of ESL learners' perceptions of their educational experiences.

Missing in the large statistical samples is the lived experience of the ESL dropout.

Because the voice of ESL youth who left school early has been virtually ignored in the

literature, I will look first to the small body of qualitative research on the educational

experiences of ESL students in Canadian schools.

ESL Students' Perceptions of Their Educational Experiences

Although the experience of those ESL students who remain in school is likely to

be distinct from those who leave school early, understanding their educational

experiences will help illuminate some of the joys and challenges of being an ESL learner

in the Canadian education system. As previously noted, ESL research has rarely focused

on the learner's educational experience. Kanno and Applebaum (1995) suggest that this

gap in the literature may reflect the tendency for second-language acquisition research to

emulate natural science. Natural science research focuses on measuring and controlling

learner variables rather than exploring and interpreting their lived experience. As we have seen, this tendency translates into a rather narrow research focus on the phenomenon of second-language acquisition. Students' relative lack of power may also factor into the absence of their voice in the literature. Given their age, minority background, and lack of English proficiency ESL students are triply liable to be overlooked. Cultural norms may also contribute to the silencing of ESL students who may not be aware of their right to voice their opinion. Also contributing to this gap in the literature is the methodological challenge of recruiting and retaining ESL youth research participants. In my research, accessing interested youth and negotiating their busy and often influx schedules proved especially difficult, as I describe later.

Although sparse, some researchers have explored ESL students' perception of and experience in Canadian schools. Gentry (1988) found that most of the 25 academically successful ESL student participants valued their ESL classroom learning experiences, were disciplined in their studies, and held high future aspirations. Academically, the students continued to rely on their first language and previous knowledge to understand content information. Upon examining the social aspects of their school experiences, Gentry found that while these students recognized the value of friendship, few were socially involved with their native-English speaking peers. Although noting the lack of interaction, Gentry did not relate its absence to the degree of success of the move toward integrative education, nor did she place it within the broader sociopolitical context. Gentry also asked the participants to consider the advice they might give to peers and teachers to increase the academic success of ESL students. In doing so, Gentry appears to emphasize the ability (or inability) of particular schools or individuals to provide

support. Although support is necessary, in failing to consider the ways in which societal

inequity and discrimination get played out in the classroom, it is insufficient when

considered alone.

Although Gentry's (1988) research offers a glimpse of the educational

experiences of ESL students, it is likely that this sample of academically successful

students represents neither the general ESL population nor those who leave school early.

In a later study Early (1992) included the perspectives of both more and less

academically successful ESL students. In this research, she explored with 26 recently

arrived ESL learners their perceptions of the factors that contributed to or accompanied

their academic achievement. Five themes emerged: time, help, strategies, purpose, and

power. Successful students spent considerably more time on homework and disciplined

studies than did the less successful students. The more successful students, who averaged

one year older, were less likely to have experienced an interrupted education than those

who were less successful. Although all students reported seeking help, the more

successful students were likely to rely on teachers, while the less successful students

tended to turn to friends or family for assistance. Seeking assistance from teachers was

difficult for many students, as this practice was unfamiliar and inconsistent with their

cultural norms that sometimes portray teachers as less approachable. Early also noted

differences in the types of coping strategies employed: the less successful students relied

on memorization, while the more successful students tended to depend on developing an

understanding of the information. The themes of purpose and power developed as the

successful students spoke of their future educational or career plans. The less successful

students did not have clear goals for the future. The author focused exclusively on the

characteristics of the individual and classroom that contribute to academic success; including the amount of time spent on disciplined study, where help is sought, and students' future goals and plans. Although Early used these findings to suggest implications for educational policy and practice, she did not examine the broader sociopolitical or sociocultural context that may create barriers to success (e.g., inadequate funding for ESL programs or a tendency to see ESL students as "deficient" and requiring remedial help).

In response to the virtual absence of student voice in the discussion of ESL education, Kanno and Applebaum (1995) conducted a three-year exploratory study of ESL curriculum as experienced by three Japanese students living temporarily in Canada. These students' stories were analyzed in terms of Schwab's four curriculum commonplaces (learner, subject matter, milieu, and teacher), thus reflecting the interplay of internal and external conditions in shaping experience. Although an examination of the same curriculum from four different angles allowed Kanno and Applebaum to shed light on the complex nature of the relationship between learner and educational context, these researchers neglected factors outside the classroom that affect what happens inside. Despite a narrow contextual focus, Kanno and Applebaum's (1995) research provided information about aspects of their participants' educational experiences. The main theme that emerged was related to the connection between the learners' search for a peer group and their English learning. The priority of learning English appeared to be related to the perceived feasibility and ability to gain entrance into native-English speaking students' peer groups. The importance of motivation to integrate on second-language learning has long been noted (Gardner & Lambert, 1959). A second theme that emerged was the

discrepancy between the theory of ESL education and its practice. In theory, ESL

education aims to provide students an opportunity to successfully integrate into both the

school and community. Yet, the participants felt that the ESL program failed to prepare

them for mainstream classes. This failure was due to lack of connection between ESL and

general programs in terms of content and level of difficultly. Other investigators have

noted this "disconnect" and the accompanying difficulties (Glenn & de Jong, 1996;

Roessingh, 1999; Watt & Roessingh, 1994). Kanno and Applebaum (1995) also found

that in separating the students from their Canadian-born peers, ESL programs may be an

impediment to integration. A similar conclusion was reached by Foscolos (2000) in her

research with ESL students from the Pacific Rim.

Kanno and Applebaum (1995) also highlighted the role the school can play in

integrating and empowering students. This role is possible when students are provided

with intellectually challenging work and when their abilities are adequately assessed.

Least conducive to ESL students' education was a sociocultural climate that pushed them

to the margin by failing to integrate minority and majority students and by viewing ESL

classes as remedial and ESL students in terms of a language "deficiency."

Kanno and Applebaum's (1995) final level of analysis involved teachers and their

role in helping students feel part of the school community. Teachers had the potential to

both facilitate and hinder ESL students' growth. Vital to ESL students' success and

growth is a caring teacher who enables these students to acquire social and academic

English skills sufficient for integration. Kanno and Applebaum highlighted the

importance of collaboration between ESL and mainstream teachers, as well as enhanced

professional development. Other researchers have also emphasized the need for

increased teacher training in second language learning and collaborative modes of teaching (Cummins, 1994a; Elson, 1994; ESL Task Force, 2000; Glenn & de Jong, 1996; Meyers, 1994; Ngo, 2002; Zanini, 1994).

Kanno and Applebaum (1995) found that for the ESL student, the curriculum cannot be treated separately from the larger issues of personal and educational growth. Therefore, the support provided to ESL students by a curriculum focusing solely on academic skills may prove insufficient. Without additional support, these students run the risk of marginalization and prematurely reaching a plateau in their English acquisition. Although this research contributes significantly to the body of literature on ESL students' educational experience, it is not informative about the perceptions and experiences of those ESL students who are permanently living in Canada. The motivation to learn English and the educational experiences of those students who intend to stay in Canada permanently are likely to differ from those who plan to return to their country of origin.

Two subsequent qualitative studies on ESL students' perceptions of their educational experiences (Foscolos, 2000) and their educational success (Roessingh & Field, 2000) focused on those students from the Pacific Rim intending to permanently stay in Canada. Foscolos (2000) found that the quality of these students' learning experiences was related to their perceived level of proficiency in English. This finding is consistent Watt and colleagues' (1996b) conclusion that proficiency in English is the "essential and determining feature" of educational and positive cultural adjustment. Time, instructional support, sociocultural factors, and personal motivation were all found to influence English proficiency, and thus the quality of education (Foscolos, 2000).

Roessingh and Field (2000) reached similar conclusions. They found that students' academic success was related to time, with participants perceiving themselves as very busy people. The participants also emphasized the importance of ESL support at all stages of their educational progress. These studies shed light on the experiences and challenges of Pacific Rim ESL students in the Canadian education system. Given the likelihood that the educational experiences of those ESL students who remain in school are distinct from those who decide to leave school early, it is important to examine with those youth who leave school early their educational experiences.

Although hinting at the benefits of integration, Kanno and Applebaum (1995) did not explore the social, cultural, and political factors that may prevent the full adoption of a "whole school approach" to integrative education (see Glenn & de Jong, 1996; Meyers, 1994). Multiple researchers have suggested that institutional and systematic racism and discrimination within both schools and the larger society affect immigrant and minority students' academic success and ability to integrate (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; Dei et al., 1997; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003; Wong Fillmore & Meyer, 1992). Schofield (1997) emphasized the difficulty of achieving equal academic outcomes for all racial/ethnic groups considering the unequal distribution of conditions that support academic achievement among groups. In exploring the educational experiences of ESL learners, it will be important to place them within the context of these existing societal inequities. Failing to acknowledge racism, discrimination, and other inequities will result in an incomplete understanding of early school-leaving among ESL learners.

Educational Experiences of ESL Youth who Leave School Early

Very little is known about the educational experiences of those ESL learners who do not complete secondary school. As a matter of fact, in my review of the literature I uncovered only two such studies. In an effort to determine the underlying factors in students' perceptions of their educational experiences, Watt and his colleagues (1996b) conducted research with 40 ESL learners. The participants included fall-outs, dropouts, push-outs, and successful high school graduates. As previously mentioned, the three distinct dropout categories were related in part to the quality of school experience. Similar to the findings of other researchers (Employment and Immigration Canada and Statistics Canada, 1990; Anisef 1998), dropping out of high school appeared to be a process rather than an event. For most ESL students, this process was directly related to their cultural adjustment. Older research also found cultural adaptation as highly problematic for ESL students (Ashworth, 1975).

Watt and his colleagues (1996b) found English language proficiency and emotional reactions to the dropout experience to distinguish the categories of students from each other. "Fall-outs" were the least proficient in English and expressed sadness about their educational experiences. "Drop-outs", on the other hand, had either maintained or increased their English language proficiency and were frustrated about their time in school. In contrast, "push-outs" expressed anger and resentment about an education system that betrayed them by terminating their high school education.

Contrary to popular belief, these researchers found that cultural adjustment was related to experience rather than time. Few of the participants reported a sense of increasing acculturation. Rather, many felt trapped in environments in which diminished

social interaction precluded acculturation. Cultural adjustment was found to be largely dependent on educational experience, with those least likely to report positive adjustment also having experienced more severely limited educational success. Lack of proficiency in English was reported as the major factor limiting cultural adjustment and future aspirations. In addition, although education was perceived as the most efficient means for developing proficiency in English, many no longer felt that this option was available to them (Watt et al., 1996b).

Derwing and colleagues (1999) also examined the academic achievement of ESL youth. The authors spoke with 15 former ESL students, eight of whom had left school early. The participants in this study were most concerned about the age cap for high school attendance, the school climate, their personal relationships with peers and teachers, and their personal goals. The early school-leaver participants were less likely than those who completed high school to have positive comments about interactions with their native-English speaking peers. These youth were more likely to have friends from their own language group and to feel as if the school needed to take more responsibility in this area. Most of the participants expressed dissatisfaction regarding the quality of their relationships with teachers. Although the participants were appreciative of their teachers' support, they did not like to be singled out through differential treatment. Virtually all of the participants had planned to continue with their education.

Although both of these studies provide valuable insight into the educational experiences of ESL youth who leave Alberta's secondary schools before graduating, I believe provincial differences in the education system necessitate a local exploration of the issue. For instance, Alberta's age cap of 19 years and time limitations for ESL

support are different, or nonexistent, in Ontario. Additionally, given that the scope of each study was limited to participants drawn from one or two urban high schools, it is plausible that factors specific to these schools may result in conclusions unique to those participants.

III. Research Approach

Purpose of the Research

Through this research I explored the educational experiences of those ESL youth who did not complete secondary school, as well as those ESL youth currently attending secondary school. In privileging, and allowing myself to be guided by, the otherwise neglected voice of ESL youth I was able to better understand how their educational experiences contributed to a decision to leave school early. This research was a logical step in providing community stakeholders with information that allows for, and can guide, an informed response to the issue of disproportionately high dropout rates among ESL secondary school students.

Specific Research Objectives

1. To explore the lived educational experiences of ESL youth (those who left school early as well as current students) so as to better understand early secondary school non-completion among this population

   ➤ Capture the stories of ESL youth in Kitchener-Waterloo

2. To explore ESL youths' (those who left school early as well as current students) perceptions of the facilitators and inhibitors of a successful educational experience

➤ Identify the challenges faced by ESL learners that may, or do, factor into a decision to leave school

➤ Identify factors that ESL learners perceive would, or do, aid in school retention

➤ Identify best practices, as well as gaps, in the supports and services available to ESL youth

3. To engage local stakeholders in communicating the research findings so as to create awareness of and address the issue of early school-leaving among ESL learners

➤ Mobilize local stakeholders, through their involvement in the research process, to generate solutions for inequitable educational opportunities

Methodological Orientation

I followed an inductive orientation in designing the research and in analyzing and interpreting the individual and focus group interviews. That is, I used multiple qualitative methods to orient my research toward exploration and discovery. The relative lack of knowledge about either the lived educational experiences of ESL learners or the phenomena of early school-leaving among this population pointed to the importance of *developing an understanding* of the issue. Rather than test a hypothesis, in this research I assumed an exploratory, discovery-oriented approach. In contrast to the traditional hypothetical-deductive approach, my inductive analysis did not impose preexisting expectations on the phenomenon. Rather, I began with specific observations that emerged from the data and then built toward general patterns. With an emphasis on

inductive analysis, the qualitative research methods I employed allowed a rich, in-depth description of issues and experiences (Patton, 1990) and an examination of multiple levels of social context (Dalton et al., 2000).

I sought to understand and interpret the participants' educational experience within the context of the larger environment. In this research, by interviewing ESL learners' regarding their educational experiences and then interpreting their responses in an ecological framework, I was better able to understand the factors related to their early school-leaving. In my analysis, I made every effort to stay close to the participants' words so that my interpretation evolved from their responses.

Rationale for the Research Approach

To develop an understanding of the issue of non-completion of secondary school by ESL learners, I felt it was necessary to explore with these individuals their educational experiences. By involving ESL youth throughout the research process, as participants, steering committee and collaborative analysis team members, and a co-researcher, I was able to remain focused on their voice. My findings have been shared with the steering committee members who hope to use the findings to create awareness of the issues facing ESL youth and to possibly advocate for change.

Participatory Action Research

Given the dual need to both develop a better understanding of the educational experiences of ESL youth, and to take action towards creating equitable educational opportunities, a participatory action research approach was well-suited. Nelson et al.

(1998) have defined this approach as involving *"the maximum participation of*

stakeholders ... in the systematic collection and analysis of information for the purpose of

taking action and making change." (p. 885)

Stakeholder involvement in all phases of the research was vital to its success.

Taylor and Botschner (1998) have stated that the involvement of stakeholders not only

builds trust between the researcher and participants, but also ensures both the validity and

accuracy of the interpretation. One of the key ways in which I involved stakeholders in

this project was through the use of a steering committee to guide the research. The

steering committee not only ensured that the needs of those whose lives were most

affected by the research were addressed, but also enhanced the trustworthiness of the

research and increased the level of commitment from those involved (Taylor &

Botschner, 1998). Another advantage of working with stakeholders was the achievement

of investigator triangulation. Working collaboratively with a steering committee, a youth

researcher, and a collaborative analysis team decreased my potential bias and ensured a

richer interpretation of the data (personal communication, Ochocka, 2003).

The steering committee consisted of two ESL youth (one youth was currently

attending school and the other had left school early), the ESL consultant at the local

public school board, and two school settlement workers. Bennett (2003) has stressed the

importance of inviting *all* those affected to participate and give advice when planning.

As ESL youth have an understanding of the educational experience of ESL students

unavailable from other sources, it was logical to engage these individuals throughout the

research project. As members of the steering committee, and research and collaborative

analysis teams, their contribution in developing research questions and reflecting on the

data provided them an opportunity to develop new skills and understandings. The unique

perspectives of both those on the "front line" and in advisory positions made it important

to also include the school settlement workers and ESL consultant as steering committee

members. Although unable to speak directly of the lived experience of ESL youths, these

individuals offered "bigger picture" details and helped to place the youth's experiences in

context. These front-line workers also provided relevant documents and literature, and

assisted with recruitment and communication within the schools. I hope and expect that

the steering committee members will "carry the torch" and use the research findings in

their own work and in advocating for necessary changes and future research.

Including marginalized youth on a committee with adult professionals involved a

possibility that their participation would be limited. I attempted to have equal numbers of

youth and adult committee members so as to decrease the likelihood of the youth feeling

intimidated on a committee with professional adults. I felt that the youth would be more

inclined to vocalize their opinions and concerns with the presence and support of a peer.

Prior to the first steering committee meeting I met with the youth members so as to

introduce them to each other and discuss ways to ensure their power would be facilitated

in the structure of the meeting. As a group we decided on which adults to include as

steering committee members, an appropriate and comfortable meeting location, and ways

in which they could actively participate in meetings. We also discussed issues of power

and control in relation to who speaks when, and possibilities for empowering the youth in

meetings. The youth decided to assume responsibilities for specific roles in each

meeting, for example: reviewing with the committee the purpose of the research, flip-

charting, or co-facilitating.

In seeking the advice of the youth steering committee members in selecting additional members, I hoped to increase the youth's sense of ownership and active participation. I also hoped to avoid not only the exclusion of a potentially important committee member, but also the possibility of recruiting individuals with whom the youth may have had a negative experience. The youth were pleased to have input in choosing steering committee members and seemed happy that someone on the school board, someone whom they felt could help make a difference, was interested in being included.

While I consciously worked to ensure that the meetings were facilitated in such a way that youth voice was raised, heard, and valued, I found that the youth in attendance was far less vocal than were the adults. It is possible that the absence of the other youth committee member or the nature of the conversation, which at times was less about the youth experience and more about gaining entry into high schools or school policies, may have prevented her from more actively participating at times. In retrospect, it may have been beneficial to include more youth committee members.

The values of participatory action research, including empowerment, supportive relationships, social change, and learning as an ongoing process (Nelson et al., 1998), guided my research. I took multiple steps during the research process to ensure congruency with these values: the hiring and training of a youth researcher, and the involvement of ESL youths in all phases of the research, contributed to their empowerment as they developed new skills. My use of a steering committee to guide the research was also in keeping with the values of participatory action research. In including ESL youth and professional adults on the same steering committee I hoped to promote links between the committee members as they worked collaboratively toward a

common goal. I attempted to foster supportive relationships by capturing the stories and

experiences of ESL youth, initiating and supporting links between steering committee

members, and through encouraging the steering committee members to be the "torch

bearers" in communicating the research findings in the community and advocating for

change. Given the organization of my research into different phases, with the findings of

one phase informing action in the next, the value of learning as an ongoing process was

inherent in the design (Nelson et al., 1998). The flexibility of the research also

contributed to empowerment as the steering committee had a voice in determining the

actions taken in each phase. More details on research flexibility can be found in a later

section, Reflections on the Emergent Nature of Community-Based Research.

Allowing the research process to include time for committee members' and

participants' self-reflection and feedback was an important aspect of stakeholder

involvement. I presented this opportunity to my youth researcher and steering committee

members by providing them with verbal or written summaries of gathered information

and drafts of the research questions and information flyer for their input. Additionally, I

offered to provide each participant with an interview transcript and an opportunity to

provide feedback, including clarification and verification. Although a few participants

expressed an interest in receiving copies of their transcripts, none provided feedback.

Prior to writing my thesis, I presented my collaborative analysis team (composed of a

youth and adult steering committee member) with the themes generated through my

preliminary analysis. Sharing these themes and providing an opportunity for discussion

and feedback provided me with alternative interpretations of the data, increased my

understanding of some of the participants' stories, and also served to increase the

trustworthiness of my analysis. Finally, the participants received a summary of the

findings along with a reminder of my contact information should they have any questions

or concerns about the research or wish to view the thesis in its entirety.

Given that the final phase of the project involved raising awareness of the issue of

inequitable educational opportunities and possibly mobilizing for action, social change

was an inherent part of the research. I planned for an educational and action component

of the research through encouraging my steering committee members to share a summary

of the research findings in the broader community (Nelson et al., 1998).

Through the inclusion of multiple stakeholders, promotion of their active

participation, and the other steps outlined above, I aimed to ensure that my research was

congruent with the values of participatory action research.

IV. Methodology

Methods

In choosing qualitative research methods I was able to provide richer information

with more relevant insights than would be possible with quantitative methods alone

(Darlington & Scott, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2004).

Nelson and Prilleltensky (2004) have stated that through a shared emphasis on diversity,

understanding people in context, and collaborative research relationships, qualitative

research offers much to community psychology. In my research I used multiple

qualitative methods to gather the voices of ESL youth so as to explore and provide in-

depth information regarding their educational experiences. Such an in-depth

understanding was essential considering the built-in action component involving the

steering committee's use of the research to create awareness and mobilize the community

in response to ESL secondary school non-completion. In giving voice to stakeholders,

the qualitative methods I employed can contribute to feelings of empowerment and

ownership, thus increasing the likelihood that the research findings will be used beyond

the completion of my thesis research (Taylor & Botschner, 1998).

In collecting information, I used both focus group and in-depth interviews. The

use of triangulation, or a multi-method approach, allowed for an in-depth understanding

of the issue and served to increase the understanding and credibility of the findings. The

findings from each method were used to complement and validate each other (see

Reinharz, 1992). Additionally, through use of multiple methods, including an action

component, I increased the utility of the research both for those involved throughout the

process and for those who will read the final report or summary at a later date.

After careful deliberation, I concluded that interviewing was the most appropriate

information gathering tool for an exploratory study with ESL youths. Interviews

provided me with an opportunity to develop an increased understanding of ESL youths'

perception of their world as well as the significance attached to their understanding.

Patton (1990) reminds us that "We cannot observe how people have organized the world

and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people about

these things." (p. 278). In utilizing interviews, I developed an understanding of the

participants' experiences and perceptions through accessing their ideas, thoughts, and

memories *in their own words*. This advantage of interviewing was perhaps particularly

important for ESL school-leaver participants, who as less-educated and perhaps semi-

literate youth of minority status, have been spoken for or overlooked in traditional research.

I used a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 7), developed with feedback from my youth researcher, in both the focus group and in-depth interviews. Although this approach specified in advance the issues to be addressed, the particular order and wording of questions varied between individuals and groups. A semi-structured interview allowed a more free-flowing, conversational style of interview. This interview style helped to increase the extent to which the participants guided the direction of the interview and became "co-researchers." Indeed, by the second or third interview, I tended to refer to the interview guide only at the end of the interview so as to ensure that all areas had been covered. In allowing for the adaptation of questions to each participant or group, a less structured interview not only served to increase the participants' comfort level but also permitted me flexibility in exploring unanticipated topics, thus maximizing discovery (Patton, 1990; Reinharz, 1992). One such unanticipated topic included some participants' fears about the value of a diploma from certain schools or academic streams.

Potential disadvantages of using an interview guide include the possibility that I may inadvertently omit certain topics or experience difficulty comparing responses (Patton, 1990). My familiarity with the literature on ESL education and newcomer youth helped to offset the problem of omitting certain topics. I also avoided this problem by using the interview guide as a checklist to ensure that all the desired topics are covered in the interviews.

Research Objectives	Research Questions	Source of Information	Methods
Explore the lived educational experiences of ESL youth so as to better understand early school-leaving among this population	What can the educational experience of ESL youth tell us about early school-leaving within this population?	ESL youth	- Literature review - Two focus group interviews (10 male and nine female students) - One focus group/in-depth interview (two male youth who left school early) - Four individual in-depth interviews (two male and two female youth who left school early)
Explore the facilitators and inhibitors of a successful educational experience	What do ESL learners perceive and experience as facilitators and inhibitors of a successful educational experience?	ESL youth	- Literature review - Two focus group interviews - One focus group/in-depth interview - Four individual in-depth interviews
Inspire the steering committee members to be "torch-bearers" in communicating the research findings to create awareness and mobilize the community around improving the educational experience of ESL youth	Can the research findings be disseminated so as to engage stakeholders in taking action?	Five steering committee members	- Steering committee involvement - Communication of the research findings

Document and Literature Review

To familiarize myself with the particulars of ESL secondary school education in Kitchener-Waterloo, I reviewed any relevant documents I could find within the schools or published by the Ontario Ministry of Education. These documents included information about the school settlement worker program, ESL instruction, and the criteria for ESL support. The steering committee members guided me toward relevant documents and literature.

I conducted a literature review to gather information relevant to the educational experiences of ESL youth who leave school early. I used this literature to guide my research design and to help build a foundation on which to understand and analyze the qualitative information gathered in the interviews. I added additional literature throughout the first two phases of the research project whenever it surfaced. I summarized this literature for the steering committee members at our first meeting.

Focus Groups

I used focus groups to gather information from ESL secondary school students. Focus groups are a form of group interview considered by many researchers as highly conducive to gathering information from traditionally oppressed peoples; interviewing in a group setting not only reduced my influence on the participants by balancing the power toward the group (Madriz, 2000) but also gave voice to participants by providing them with a direct opportunity to share their experiences and identify their needs and concerns (Pancer, 1997). These benefits made the use of focus groups particularly appropriate in

my research with ESL youth, who as youth, linguistic, and possibly visual and racial

minorities are likely to have experienced marginalization.

In the focus groups, I prompted participants to reflect on their opinions. Posavac

and Carey (2003) have stated that participants are more thoughtful and reflective in their

focus group responses than when interviewed alone. Focus groups also provided an

opportunity to respond to others' ideas; such spontaneous responses from group members

helped ease participant involvement in the discussion. These factors resulted in an

exchange of richer, better thought-out ideas. An additional benefit of focus groups is the

collection of a large amount of information in a short time (Madriz, 2000; Patton, 1990;

Posavac & Carey, 2003). In their research on the needs of newcomer youth, Anisef and

Kilbride (2000) found that focus groups provided the most insightful findings. They

attributed this benefit of focus groups to the fact that as a form of interviewing, focus

groups allow the participants to explain their needs and issues from a very personal

perspective. I expected focus groups to be particularly useful with ESL learners, as

concerns regarding their proficiency in English were expected to lessen when speaking

with a group of peers rather than in a one-on-one interview with an English-speaking

researcher. Contrary to my expectations, the only participants who appeared nervous

were a few focus group participants. Each ESL youth interviewed individually was

highly vocal and appeared comfortable in conversing with me. It is possible that those

who chose not to become involved with the research were those who were more self-

conscious about participating in an interview with a native English-speaker.

Two focus groups, each composed of approximately ten current ESL students,

convened for a one-time discussion on a small number of key questions. I recruited these

participants with the assistance of teachers, school guidance counselors, school settlement workers, and my youth research assistant. My youth researcher and I advertised my research, and potential ways to participate, through the distribution of an information flyer.

I hired and trained Hayan Yassin, an ESL youth who had left school early, to assist in the recruitment and facilitation of the focus groups. I felt that hiring Hayan would provide him with skills and knowledge beneficial to future employment and academic endeavors. I also believed that the presence of an ESL early school-leaver would help facilitate a free flow of conversation in the focus group and increase the participants' comfort level. As my co-researcher, Hayan also aided in the development of the interview questions. I feel that his personal experiences contributed to developing appropriate questions for the interviews. While I had hoped and expected Hayan would be involved in the collection and analysis of data, various factors converged to make this impossible. I discuss this issue further in a later section, Reflections on the Emergent Nature of Community-Based Research.

With the advice of Hayan, the steering committee members, and some students and school staff, the focus groups were held in a comfortable room on the university campus. While I initially was concerned that the university might be intimidating for the participants, various stakeholders stated that, because the location was both on a bus route and relatively close to a number of secondary schools, it would be a convenient location. These individuals also felt that exposure to the university would be beneficial to the youth; indeed, some participants were prompted to ask me questions about university and even arrived early to their interview so as to tour the campus.

The focus groups were conducted in English and began with an initial

introduction to its purpose. After this brief introduction, I stepped in only to ask open-

ended questions and facilitate the participants' discussion. In this way, I took a backseat

role while the participants did most of the talking. I used a semi-structured interview

guide in the interviews.

Following the focus group interviews, I provided the youth with a thank you card

that included my name and contact information should they wish to contact me with any

questions, concerns, or feedback on the interview. I also provided each participant with a

list of community supports and services. Shortly after the interviews, I attempted to

contact each of the participants and offered to provide them with a copy of the transcript.

In providing the participants with a copy of the transcript, I hoped to not only ensure that

I had correctly documented their words but also to provide them an opportunity to add

information and reflect on whether they would prefer to have anything omitted. Of the

four youth who were interested in receiving a copy of the transcript, none provided

feedback. Upon completion of the research, I was able to contact 14 youth and 13 of

these were interested in receiving a summary of the research findings. In appreciation of

the time and energy the youth put into the research, I provided them with a small

honourarium.

In-Depth Interviews

Through qualitative in-depth interviews I explored the experience of six ESL

secondary school-leaver participants in depth and detail, contextually and holistically

(Patton, 1990). Although most of these interviews were conducted on an individual-

basis, one included two male early-school leaver participants. These interviews allowed

me to develop an in-depth understanding of the participants' perception of their

educational experience. I felt that it would be impossible to develop a complete

understanding of the educational experiences of ESL youth who leave school early in

isolation from the areas that have an influence on their lives. For this reason, I explored

with the participants multiple factors influencing their decision to leave school, including

their relationships with peers and teachers, their perception of whether ESL youth are

valued in the school, their English-language proficiency, and other factors. During the

analysis phase, I interpreted the participants' educational experiences within the context

of their peers, family, school, and the broader community.

Although I had originally planned to conduct focus group interviews with ESL

youth who had left school early and to recruit participants for the in-depth interviews

from this group, I experienced difficulty in doing so (see Reflections on the Emergent

Nature of Community-Based Research). Consequently, I recruited participants for the in-

depth interviews from referrals from school staff, settlement workers, and Hayan. I met

with each of the participants on one occasion. I provided the participants with a number

of options regarding meeting location (including the YMCA, my school office, or an

office in downtown Kitchener) and gave them the option of choosing an alternative

location. Each of the participants chose to meet in my office.

Given the financial constraints of the project, I was unable to hire translators, thus

I conducted the interviews in English. With the participants' permission, I audio-recorded

the interviews to ensure accuracy in my later analysis. To obtain a complete sense of the

quality of each conversation, I transcribed the interviews verbatim, making efforts to

represent changes in participants' tone and behaviour as they spoke.

Informal Data

In addition to the formal means of data collection, I had multiple informal

opportunities to increase my understanding of the broader context influencing the

educational experiences of ESL youths. I spoke with teachers, educational assistants,

guidance counselors, school settlement workers, and other members of the community

who work directly with ESL, or newcomer, youth. These conversations, although not a

formalized part of data collection, provided some of the contextual information I required

to develop a better understanding of the participants' experiences. Patton (1990) has also

acknowledged that such informal data can provide rich and valuable insights.

Sampling and Selection Criteria

Given the ineffectiveness of my information flyer, I selected the participants

through convenience sampling, or referral from well-informed people (e.g., steering

committee members, ESL students and teachers, guidance counselors, settlement

workers, and Hayan). In providing me with referrals, these individuals acted as "gate-

keepers" into the ESL student and dropout community. Often unable to receive the direct

contact information for potential participants (given that the majority was recruited

through the schools) I relied on my gate-keepers to contact the individual on my behalf.

The ineffectiveness of the information flyer may have been related to: ESL youth's

hesitancy in becoming involved in research with a stranger; misunderstanding about the

purpose of the research due to the flyer's lack of clarity; a failure to locate the flyers in appropriate places.

Participants needed to meet following criteria to participate in the research:

1) between the ages of 16 and 20 years,

2) either left a Kitchener-Waterloo secondary school prior to completion or is currently attending,

3) previous or current recipient of ESL support,

4) able to communicate in oral English.

In choosing to include participants above the age of 16 years, I hoped to ensure a certain level of maturity and ability to think about and articulate their experiences in a more reflective manner than could younger students (see Nieto, 1992). In working with older youths I also hoped to avoid what can sometimes be cumbersome parental consent procedures required for those under 16 years of age (this was especially important in light of the time constraints of the research). However, given the necessity of recruiting participants almost entirely through the schools, and the schools' older age of consent, I was unable to avoid parental consent procedures for any current students. In selecting the age range for participants, I determined that those above 20 years of age may be too distant, temporally, from their secondary school experiences to provide the type of in-depth and current information I was seeking. As I was interested in the educational experiences of, and early school-leaving among, ESL secondary school learners in Kitchener-Waterloo, it followed that potential participants must attend, or have attended, a secondary school in this area in which they received ESL support. As mentioned, the

required ability to communicate in English resulted from the lack of funding for this

project, which might have otherwise permitted translation services.

Diversity of Participants [7]

The participants in my study were remarkably diverse: they immigrated to Canada

from over 14 different countries, from the busy streets of Cairo to war-torn Sudan. There

were almost equal numbers of African and European participants, slightly fewer Middle

Eastern participants, and an even smaller number of participants from South America and

the Pacific Rim. The participants ranged from highly educated individuals to those

whose academic potential remained undeveloped prior to immigrating to Canada.

Although most participants had been enrolled in school prior to immigrating to Canada

(the majority had at least five years previous education), four youth had no previous

experience with formal education. The education level of the participants' parents also

ranged from no formal education to a university education.

I spoke with 14 male and 11 female youth from each of the seven Kitchener-

Waterloo schools offering ESL programs. Of the six early school-leaver participants, two

were female. Among the current student participants, nine were female and ten male.

The participants ranged in age from 15-21 years. More than two-thirds of the participants

were between 16-18 years old. The length of time since immigrating to Canada ranged

from three and a half months to seven years, with the majority falling in the two-five year

range. At least half of the participants were working while a student. The same number

of participants had at least one parent employed in Canada.

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[7] Please note that this description is based on information shared by 22/25 (or 88%) of the participants.
Using a small sample from a relatively small community increased the risk of participant identification.
Therefore, to protect the anonymity of participants I included only a general description.

This diverse group of participants is not a randomly selected representative sample but an example of a variety of ESL youth in the Kitchener-Waterloo area. Therefore, the participants' experiences should be considered examples of the ESL youth experience, rather than models by which all ESL youth should be understood.

Information Collection Procedure

I used a multi-phased research process in which lessons learned in one phase informed subsequent phases. During the first phase of the study, the Getting Started Phase, I familiarized myself with the issues of ESL youths and early school-leaving by reviewing relevant documents and literature. This phase also involved hiring and training the youth researcher, recruiting the steering committee members, drafting the interview protocols, and preparing and holding the first steering committee meeting. In this meeting I provided a thorough explanation of the project and asked members to consider possible research participants. I also presented to the committee a summary of the literature, my suggested research methods, and the drafted protocols and information flyer. I provided the committee members with an opportunity to provide feedback.

The second phase of the research was the Information Gathering Phase. In this phase, Hayan and I distributed the information flyers and prepared for two focus group interviews. I conducted all of the focus group and in-depth interviews during this phase. I used the information gathered during the early interviews to refine subsequent interviews. At the end of this phase, I summarized all of the gathered information and prepared for the collaborative analysis meeting.

The Analysis and Feedback Phase involves analyzing the information gathered in the focus group and in-depth interviews and literature review. I presented my preliminary analysis to the collaborative analysis team and together we discussed the possible meanings of the data. I held a second steering committee meeting after further analysis and incorporation of the feedback and discussion from the collaborative analysis team. In this meeting, I presented the findings to the committee and we discussed the research implications. Initial discussion of future actions and communicating the research findings occurred in this phase.

In the final phase of the research, the Action and Implementation Phase, I completed my thesis. I also prepared and made available a brief summary of my findings for the research participants, steering committee members, and others involved throughout the research. It is during this phase that a role reversal occurred: I took on a supportive role while the steering committee assumed leadership. During this phase, I encouraged and supported committee members to communicate the research findings, possibly through a media release or summary bulletins delivered to teachers, principals, and school board trustees. The steering committee members may later decide upon additional, or alternative, ways in which to distribute the research findings and advocate for action.

Ethical Considerations

All research involves some degree of risk. It was my responsibility to ensure that these risks were kept to a minimum and did not outweigh the benefits. I took a number of measures to ensure that the research was conducted in the most ethical manner possible. Use of an informed consent form ensured that the participants understood the

research purpose, their rights, and the potential risks and benefits involved with

participation (Appendix 3). To further ensure that both participants and their parents are

fully informed about the research, I sent information letters and consent forms to the

parents of those youths recruited through the schools (Appendices 4, 5, & 6).

Prior to the interviews, I provided participants with copies of both the informed

consent form and the interview guide, thus giving them ample time to reflect on the

research and their willingness to participate. To further ensure their full understanding of

the research, as well as to provide an additional opportunity to ask questions or voice

concerns, I reviewed with the participants the main points of the informed consent form

immediately prior to the interview. Considering the strong possibility of illiteracy or

semi-literacy in English, I believed a verbal review of the consent form was especially

important. I also provided each participant with a telephone number and email address at

which I could be reached either prior to or after the interview if they had any questions or

concerns.

An open-ended qualitative interview allowed participants to delve as deeply into

the issues as they felt comfortable, thus providing them with some control. To increase

feelings of comfort and safety, I arranged the in-depth interview locations with each

individual participant. I relied on the youth researcher, steering committee members, and

other gatekeepers for advice regarding the most appropriate location for the focus groups.

I ensured confidentiality by destroying the audio-taped interviews when the

research project was complete. I also omitted all names and other identifying information,

and ensured that the interview transcripts were accessible to only myself and my thesis

advisor.

Following each interview, I took additional safeguards to ensure minimum risk and maximum benefit to the participants. There existed numerous opportunities for participants to benefit from the research. I provided all participants information as to how to obtain my thesis as well as a brief summary of the findings, thus enabling them to gain knowledge of the research process and to learn that they are not alone in their experiences. In being given an opportunity to voice their experiences, and in learning of similar experiences faced by others, it is possible that participants were empowered to generate their own solutions or new coping strategies. Increased knowledge also has the potential benefit of mobilizing people into action; for instance, hoped-for actions might include a return to school or working on behalf of other students toward positive educational experiences. An additional benefit of participation involved the potential for participants' increased clarity regarding their experiences and the ways in which these experiences have impacted their lives. I provided the participants with a list of local agencies or services, including those providing support to youth who have left school or those who wish to complete their high school education. This effort attempted to raise participants' awareness of the available options and to ensure that they are not left alone with the emotions that may come forth during or after the interview. As participants may not have been previously aware of available community services, receiving this list may have proven highly beneficial, enabling them to seek out and obtain any necessary supports.

Risks also accompany sharing information about personal experiences. In voicing their experiences and perceptions, there was potential for participants to feel either regret regarding their revelations or emotionally distraught following the interview. To address

the potential of regret, prior to writing my thesis I provided the participants with an opportunity to access their transcript and provide feedback (including the possibility to correct, clarify, verify, or omit anything they may have shared), thus increasing their control. Sharing the transcripts served to ensure the participants' understanding and agreement regarding the information potentially included in my thesis. The comfortable, participant-chosen interview location, as well as the informal, conversational nature of the interview helped minimize the risk of emotional distress.

To further ensure the research benefits outweigh the risks, I submitted my research proposal to the Wilfrid Laurier University Ethics Review Board. I also submitted the proposal to the local school boards' ethics review staff and committees. Based on the noted risks, safeguards, and benefits of the research, the study was approved by all review boards. Their approval increased my confidence in the appropriateness and comprehensiveness of the ethical measures taken.

Roles and Responsibilities

Research Team

I worked with a youth researcher to develop the interview guide and make decisions related to interviews and steering committee meetings. Although we had planned to work as a team in conducting the focus group interviews and later in analyzing the data, various factors converged to prevent his involvement in these stages of the research (see Reflections on the Emergent Nature of Community-Based Research).

In utilizing a participatory action research approach I was guided by and held directly accountable to the steering committee. I summarized the research methods and

findings for the steering committee and incorporated their feedback in each phase of the research. Given the participatory nature of the research, and the steering committee's and participants' greater control of the research process, my role as researcher differed from the traditional. During the focus group interviews I played the role of facilitator. Nelson and Prilleltensky (2004) have reviewed Stoecker's (1999) three possible roles for the critical researcher: initiator, consultant, and collaborator. In inviting individuals to participate in this research I played the role of initiator. As the "doer" of research, I acted as a consultant to the steering committee that maintained "ownership" of the research. In working in partnership with the participants and steering committee I was collaborator. As such, my role may have been considered that of a critical researcher. The distinguishing feature of critical research relates to its *process* and *goals*. Critical research involves the active participation of all community members, including oppressed persons, for the purpose of working toward social change and justice (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2004).

Steering Committee Members

As a researcher I acted as the "doer," actually conducting the research, while the steering committee was the "compass," providing guidance throughout the research. The steering committee members were responsible for attending the meetings and providing advice and feedback on the research process, including information on whom to include, data collection methods, and discussing the implications of, and communicating, the findings. Some of the steering committee members were able to provide me with information on the educational context of schools in Kitchener-Waterloo. Their insider

knowledge of school practices and policies helped to interpret the participants' responses

in an ecological framework. The variety in the committee members' skills and knowledge

provided me with a "mini-laboratory" of the community where I was able to obtain

feedback and guidance before acting (Centre for Research and Education in Human

Services, July 2002).

In the final phase of the research, the steering committee took on an increased

leadership role and, with my support, became responsible for communicating, and

advocating for utilization of the research findings.

Collaborative Analysis Team Members

Although I was ultimately responsible for the analysis of data, I worked with a

collaborative analysis team composed of a small group of stakeholders from the student

and immigrant-serving population. Their responsibility included participating in a one-

time meeting in which I presented to them my initial categories and together we

organized the data, and discussed additional categories and some of the implications of

the findings. Given their different experiences and knowledge bases, the collaborative

analysis group members' insights and contributions provided me with new information,

challenged my assumptions, and allowed me to see the data through a different lens.

Their contextual knowledge aided me in understanding and interpreting the participants'

educational experiences within the context of the larger environment.

Analysis

Inductive and Thematic Analysis

I used inductive and thematic analysis to gain a deeper understanding of my data. The use of inductive analysis means that I allowed categories, patterns, and themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing them prior to data collection and analysis. In focusing primarily on the content of the interviews when analyzing them, my approach can be characterized by a thematic analysis, rather than a specific analytic technique such as grounded theory. The process of analysis helped me to organize the data as such that it told its own story (Patton, 1990, p.393). I felt that through staying close to the data, focusing on using the participant's own words to tell the story, and receiving feedback and validation from both my collaborative analysis team and my steering committee I was able to fairly represent the youth who participated in my research.

My analysis was on-going: following each interview I wrote and reflected on my thoughts about the interview process and what I considered the main story shared by the participant. Later, these reflective notes proved valuable as I delved more deeply into the analysis.

I transcribed each interview, verbatim, within days, sometimes hours, of its completion. Allowing for only a short passing of time ensured that I could better rely on my memory for the meaning of certain pauses, or difficult-to-understand words. I enjoyed the experience of transcribing as it allowed me to "relive" the interview and pick up on subtleties that I missed while conducting the interview. Following transcription I added to my reflective notes further thoughts on the main points of the interview.

Upon completing transcription I proceeded to read and reread each of the interviews so as to re-familiarize myself with the participant and his/her story. Only after a thorough review of each transcript did I engage in open coding by making notes in the margins. The first round of coding involved making note of the quotations or excerpts that stood out as important. To remain as close to the data as possible, I used the participants own words in this initial coding. I then re-read the transcripts and wrote my own codes, or one-two word summaries, to capture what the participants had said.

I reviewed the interview guide questions prior to coding for use as sensitizing concepts. While I considered the way in which my interview questions were answered by my data, I used them only as a guide. This flexibility permitted a more thorough exploration of the participants' stories and allowed me to capture any emerging concepts, or unanticipated information and insights.

Following completion of coding, I listed and filed the codes for each participant. Codes that I felt were similar, or speaking to the same issue, were then collapsed into categories (e.g., all codes relating to teachers were placed together under teacher impact). Doing so helped to summarize the core meaning of these points. I made category files and matrixes, including both the category name and direct quotes, for each participant. This organization helped to ensure a "fit" between categories and the participants' words. I placed many quotes in more than one category. At a later stage of analysis, examining the way in which certain categories often shared the same quotes better enabled me to see the links between categories. As I progressed in the analysis and continued to read through the transcripts, I added or renamed categories when appropriate. To begin my cross-participant analyses, I worked from the category matrixes I had developed. The use

of matrixes helped me to organize my thoughts and increased my clarity about the links

between the categories.

At this point I felt ready to share the list of categories with my collaborative

analysis team. The addition of multiple perspectives not only helped me to verify my

preliminary analysis but also provided insights regarding new categories, relationships

between categories, and the relative importance of categories. Our discussion helped to

validate and corroborate the importance of the categories I had identified (Bernhard,

Freire, Pacini-Ketchabaw, & Villanueva, 1998).

Overarching themes seemed to emerge from the links between categories.

Although some of the themes were based on questions found in the interview guide, I

remained open to emerging themes which captured unanticipated insights. As themes

emerged, I returned to the original data to verify my analysis. In this way, I moved from

what Patton (1990) refers to as discovery mode to verification mode. When I reached the

point of "saturation," or when no new themes seemed to emerge from the data, I

presented these themes to my steering committee and provided an opportunity for

feedback. Soliciting their feedback helped to ensure that my analysis was credible and

the final report was ready to be written. To further verify the extent to which the research

findings are consistent and dependable, I established an audit trail whereby I documented

my analysis steps. This audit trail includes my reflective notes on changes that occurred

during the research, thoughts and reflections following interviews, and information on

how I developed my codes, categories, and themes (including matrixes and the

collaborative analysis team's interactive, visual displays). Recording this information

enabled me to demonstrate the rationale and process underlying my findings and link

them to the original quotes.

Although I initially focused on understanding the uniqueness of the participants'

experiences and perceptions, I later sought out commonalities between the participants. I

interpreted the data in relation to the literature that helped orient my research, thus

ensuring the consistency between it and my results.

Patton (1990) outlines two ways to represent the patterns that emerge from data:

through use of "indigenous concepts" and "sensitizing concepts." My themes were

presented in both ways. I used indigenous concepts, or the categories developed and

articulated by the participants, to organize the themes related to the value of education

and the social context of school. I used sensitizing concepts, or those concepts that I

brought to the data myself, to represent the inflexibility of schools and inequitable

educational opportunities. These themes emerged as I became aware of, and developed

terms to describe, inductively-generated categories for which the participants did not

have labels or terms. Relating the sensitizing concepts to the literature I had previously

reviewed helped to guide me and provide "a general sense of reference" (Patton, 1990, p.

390-391).

While organizing and analyzing my data in this way was a time-consuming

process, it allowed me to immerse myself in the data as I listened to the interview tapes,

transcribed, read the transcripts multiple times, integrated related information from my

reflective notes, and worked collaboratively with my analysis team.

In the presentation of my research findings I made extensive use of the

participants' own words. Highlighting the participant voice allowed me to provide a

description "thick" enough to allow others to understand the results and draw their own

conclusions (Patton, 1990). I feel that since "readers of the report make the final

interpretation" (Crist & Tanner, 2003, p. 204), the extensive use of direct quotes was

especially important. In providing a thick description, readers will not be limited by my

analysis but can make their own interpretations.

Trustworthiness of Data and Analysis

The trustworthiness, or validity, of my research can be considered in regards to its

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Wellesley Central, 2004).

The issue of credibility refers to including the right people in the research. I feel that in

speaking with 25 ESL youth with diverse backgrounds my sample was rich and broad

enough to satisfy this requirement. My study can be considered to meet the requirement

of transferability. Although transferable, this does not mean that the findings can be

generalized to the entire ESL youth population, and indeed this was never my intention.

However, I can say with confidence that the thoroughness of this localized and time-

specific study ensures that some of the information can be transferred. The dependability

of research relates to whether I asked the correct questions to address the research

purpose. I feel that receiving feedback from multiple individuals, including my thesis

advisor, my youth researcher, my steering committee, and other community stakeholders,

ensured that my research questions were appropriate. And finally, confirmability relates

to whether my interpretations are supported by my data. Again, I feel confident that my

research met this requirement. Working together with a collaborative analysis team, and

the receiving feedback from steering committee members, helped to ensure that my

interpretations evolved from the data. Additionally, including a large number of quotes in the findings section enables the reader to reach his/her own decision regarding my interpretations.

Numerous strategies can be used to optimize the trustworthiness of the research. In my research, the data itself can be considered trustworthy, as during its collection I used paraphrasing, mirroring, and clarifying questions to confirm with participants that they had been correctly understood. These and other previously mentioned "built-in" opportunities to confirm my understanding and interpretation of the educational experiences of ESL youth also served to increase the trustworthiness of the research.

I can also verify the trustworthiness of my data through my use of triangulation, or multiple methods to study a single issue (Patton, 1990). Through combining research methods, I strengthened my research by overcoming the bias present in any one data source. For instance, through triangulating sources (e.g., including both ESL students and those ESL youth who left school early) and methods (e.g., focus groups, in-depth interviews, and informal conversations) I increased the reliability, validity, and accuracy of the data.

Although I was ultimately responsible for data analysis, working with my collaborative analysis team and receiving feedback from my thesis advisor aided in highlighting, examining, and correcting my biases and oversights. In this way, I increased the trustworthiness of the analysis. The feedback and guidance I received from the steering committee also increased the trustworthiness of the research, its analysis, and my interpretations.

V. Findings: Raising the Voices of ESL Youth

The voices of a highly diverse group of male and female ESL youth, aged 15-21 years, are united in this research. The participants came from areas as varied as war-torn Sudan to the busy streets of Cairo. Their educational background ranged from zero to ten years of formal schooling and their parents' backgrounds from manual labourers to university-educated professionals. Some of these youths arrived in Canada as refugees after a long and lonely journey, while others excitedly immigrated to their new host country with their families.

In speaking with this diverse group of youth about their experiences in school, it became clear that when considering the circumstances around, and the impact of, these experiences each youth had a unique story to share. However, when taken together, their stories weaved a complex pattern in which multiple factors within and outside schools could contribute to a gradual process of disengagement, occasionally culminating in early school-leaving. The participants' school engagement was related to their perception and experience of an integrating and accommodating education. In so far as the youth were integrated into the school and classroom, and their needs were met within the school, they appeared better able to benefit from their education. However, for those youth whose needs went unmet in the schools, equitable education opportunities were limited.

The ESL youth participants shared with me stories of their struggles and challenges within the education system. They spoke of being viewed as "retarded" and "dumb" and of being isolated from their native English-speaking peers as a result of linguistic and cultural differences. They mentioned their teachers' lowered expectations, stereotyped beliefs, and patronizing and discriminating behaviours. The early school-

leaver participants spoke of inflexible school practices and policies that forced them to

prioritize financial and familial responsibilities, and their time and energy, over high

school completion. Rather than experiencing an integrative and accommodating

education, multiple barriers converged to create inequitable educational opportunities. In

the face of these challenges, the participants demonstrated strength and resilience in their

attempts to resist a stigmatized identity and assert their limited power. For some youth,

this resistance was demonstrated through avoiding situations in which they might be

teased by their peers; for others, it was demonstrated in their decision to leave school

prior to graduating.

The youths' stories made clear that their educational experiences and progression

cannot be considered in isolation from the social context and larger sociopolitical and

socioeconomic environment. The following diagram illustrates this embeddedness and

the multiple influences on ESL youths' experience in school.

Micro-Level:
Value of education;
perceived language
ability and cultural
knowledge; financial
and familial
responsibilities

Meso-Level:
Peers; family;
teachers; school
practices and policies;
minority
representation in

Macro-Level:
ESL funding;
socioeconomic
disparity; societal
discrimination;
follow-through on
immigration policies
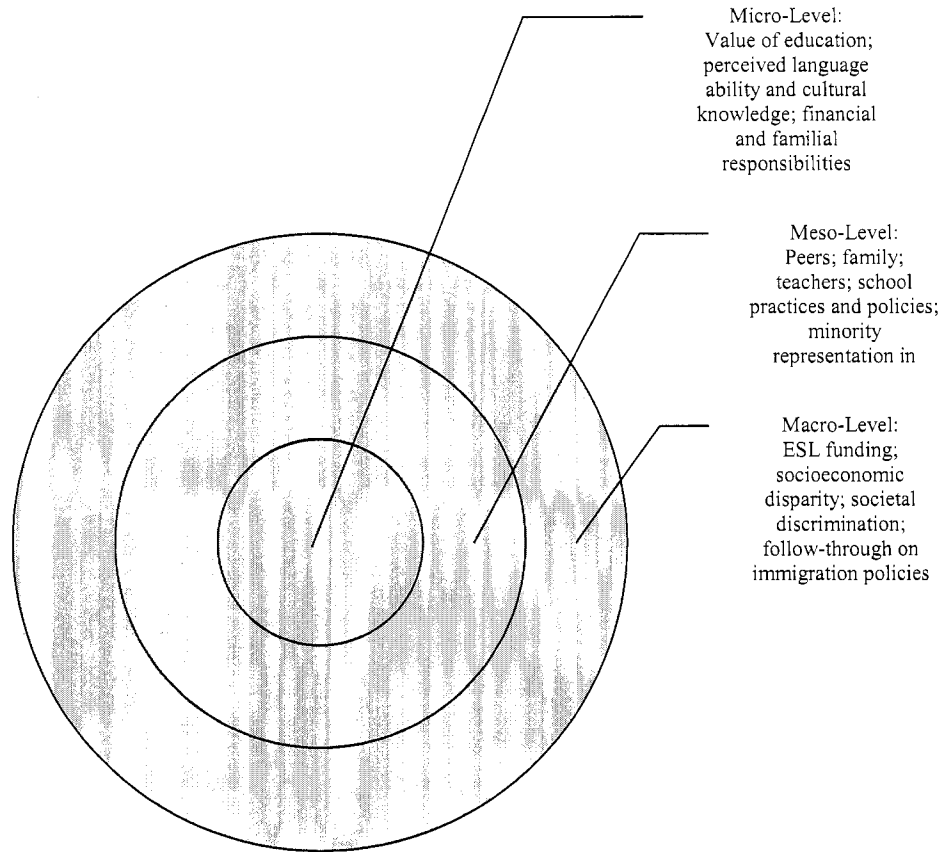
ESL youths' perceptions and experiences of education are embedded within the social context and larger sociopolitical and socioeconomic environment.

It is clear that youths' experiences in school are affected by multiple factors. The areas that emerged as most prominent in the ESL youth's stories of their educational experiences include: a) the value of education, b) the school's social context, and c) the school's inflexibility. These three themes support an ecological understanding of early school-leaving in which factors at the micro- (individual), meso- (social), and macro- (sociopolitical/economic) levels affect the youths' educational experiences.

Value of Education

"Without school you cannot do nothing.[8] So when you have school you can

do anything you want. No one can stop you when you have education."

(IESL04) [9]

Almost without exception, the participants recognized and highlighted the

importance of education in their lives. The value the youth placed on education was

demonstrated in the time and energy expended on studies, their efforts to stay in or return

to school, and the feelings of regret expressed by the early school-leaver participants.

Education strongly valued by ESL early school-leaver participants. Perhaps

surprisingly, those participants who left school early were more articulate and vocal than

were the current students regarding the value of education. All of the early school-leaver

participants began their school-lives in Canada with the desire to complete their high

school education. Many had planned to continue beyond high school.

"Of course I wanted to finish my high school here and then go to college or

university." (IESL03)

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[8] To stay true to the participants' voices, I have chosen not to correct the grammatical errors in their quotes.
I made only minor edits when deemed necessary for comprehension purposes, or for the sake of readability.
[9] I have referenced the quotes to their source within interviews to ensure that they could be traced with
greater ease if necessary.

"When he told me that [I would be kicked out for not attending classes] I was kind of scared that I'm not going to be in school anymore. Because my goal was to go to college or university and be something." (FGESL01)

The time and energy many of these youth invested in learning English and trying to succeed in their studies attest to the value they placed on their education. The participants spoke of spending a great deal of time on their homework and, when available, in extra help sessions. One early school-leaver participant even mentioned returning to school and repeating a course so as to improve her grade.

"When I come to home from school, first thing is I get my lunch and then if I get some homework I do that." (IESL02)

"The first month I went to school here in Canada, I used to go to library **every day** *after school to get help."* (FGESL01)

"My English school was done after one month... So I'm like 'Oh, I'm just going to go again for math.' I can get my mark higher with my math... maybe I can understand better." (IESL04)

One youth was so committed to his education that he falsified the age on his legal documents to be able to complete high school before reaching the age cap for enrolment.

Unfortunately this youth has since left school, "pushed out" by circumstances largely beyond his control.

Efforts to re-enter school. Recognition of the value of education is exemplified in the early school-leaver participants' attempts to re-enter school. Each of these individuals had either returned, or tried to return, to complete their education. One youth attempted, unsuccessfully, to return to his former high school and the other five youth attended adult education schools for varying lengths of time.

"Now I am trying for night school to get some more credits to finish." (IESL01)

*"I went back but some teachers wouldn't let me in [the ESL classes] ... I might go back next year and finish my school at [an adult education school] ...I **might** but I'm not sure yet."* (FGESL01)

"I heard one of my friends went to [an adult education school] and he told me, 'Just come there and you can do those 2 credits in almost 2 months' ... I started [that school in October] and... [finished in] January." (IESL02)

Regrets about leaving school. Approximately half of the early school-leaver participants expressed sadness or regret about leaving school prior to graduating. In

retrospect, these youth recognized that their difficulties could have been dealt with differently and that leaving school was not a wise decision.

"I feel bad but back then if I was smart I could have changed schools but I didn't. I feel stupid for leaving school... over that stupid teacher... I could have dealt with that. I could have just changed schools, go to a different school, have my education." (FGESL01)

"I know you need diploma, it is your future. But I wasn't needing it at that time, I was needing money more." (IESL01)

These feelings of regret were largely related to missed, or limited, opportunities. Both early school-leaver and current-student participants perceived education as creating opportunities for future employment, continued education, community integration, and for *"being somebody."* (FGESL01)

"If you want to go and work for yourself and become somebody in this community, go to school. Get your education done and then you'll have no problem." (FGESL01)

"I think for me it is important, the school, because when you have your diploma, even if you don't go to college, you still can find a job, you can work at the bank and other things with your diploma." (IESL04)

Although the value of education may be accentuated or more easily recognized following early school-leaving, the youth's stories make clear that a failure to recognize its importance was not related to their decision to leave school early. That recognizing the importance of school was unrelated to early school leaving was evident in the youths' early and multiple attempts to remain in, or return to, school and in some youths' expressions of fear and regret upon leaving school. The study findings indicate that some ESL students are compelled to leave school despite their and their families' awareness of its value.

Education valued by family members. The parents and relatives of the participants also seemed to place priority on their children's education. Most youth mentioned their parents' encouragement to do well in, and complete, high school. For these parents, school took first priority. A small number of the youth mentioned specifically that their family members linked education to future employment opportunities. Although most youth mentioned that their parents stressed the importance of education, two youth did not feel that their parents adequately encouraged or supported them to complete school.

"My dad, he always [said], 'Just go to school, finish school. The important thing is just to finish the school, you don't have to work, you don't have to do nothing, the important thing is to have good marks and to finish school and that's it.'" (IESL04)

"My mom, she really wanted me to finish high school... [she] is saying to

me... 'It's better for you to finish high school if you don't want to clean

hotels or washrooms.' ... I am really proud that my mom is saying [that]."

(FGCS01)

"After I dropped out of school, nobody talked to me about it except one of

my relatives... he was just telling me to go back to school... 'Go to school. If

you don't go to school you going to be like me, working for a company... but

if you want to go and work for yourself and become somebody in this

community, go to school. Get your education done and then you'll have no

problem.'" (FGESL01)

Despite the awareness of ESL youths and their families regarding the value of

education, multiple factors acted as barriers to some ESL youths' completion of high

school. For these youth, equal educational opportunities were limited.

Some skepticism regarding the value of education. The participants' statements

indicate that education is held in high esteem. While increased opportunities for

continued studies and employment are often attributed to education, some current

students expressed concern that education does not in fact create equal opportunities for

all youth. Approximately one third of the current students mentioned fears that enrolment

in their particular school or educational program would limit their future opportunities.

This concern led to a degree of skepticism among some current students regarding the importance of completing a high school diploma.

"I think it is not fair. I think when we grow up we're not going to have good jobs and stuff 'cause they are going to ask you what school you went to and if they hear X they [will say] 'No, we don't want you.'" (FGCS02)

"That credit not going to mean nothing. I'm not going to get to college or university with it so I don't really care about school no more." (FGCS01)

The students' cynicism about the value of education was also related to the number of individuals within their families or communities that were unable to obtain positions of status despite their qualifications and high levels of education. The observed unequal access to employment experienced by internationally educated professionals and tradespeople contributed to some students' skepticism regarding the value of education.

"[ESL students] look at people who go to college for years and years, like 5, 6, 7 years but they still don't get good jobs. So they think what is the chance for me? So they quit right away." (FGCS02)

"It is hard to get jobs in Canada.... People, in their country, they used to be doctors and now when they come here they have to go through a lot of stuff." "Yeah, they have to go wash cars here now. Big doctors who wash

cars here." "I have a cousin... [with] a PhD ... but now he works in a

factory." (FGCS02)

The participants' comments suggest that their perception of the value of education is influenced by the social and sociopolitical context. The current students' cynicism stemmed from their perception of the lower esteem in which particular schools or academic programs are held, their perception of inappropriate placement in a non-academic stream, and the lack of role models from their communities in high-status positions. Their comments highlight the importance of integrating ESL youth and their families in Canadian schools and society. The youths' stories indicate that a failure to make the accommodations necessary for their integration and participation can result in their inability to benefit equally from education.

Social Context of School

Given the importance of relationships in the lives of high school students, I was interested in the participants' experiences with the different groups of people within their schools. The youth's responses to my questions indicate that developing personal relationships with teachers and peers played a significant role in their level of comfort, integration, and engagement in the academic and social world of the school. Further, a failure to develop personal relationships, or experiences of negative interactions, contributed to the some participants' disengagement from school.

Relationships with Teachers

Relationships with teachers and other school staff emerged as an important element in the youth's experiences in and perceptions of school. These relationships were not only the most frequently mentioned aspect of their school experience but were often directly implicated in facilitating or inhibiting a positive experience.

"A year ago, I took grade 11 college English... and the teacher was extremely nice with me, she encouraged me. She said my English was not so bad, I can do well. And I did a project and... I aced it actually because when teachers are nice to me, I will do better." (IESL03)

*"I had a science teacher, he was funny. All of the students was going to class for him. 'Yeah! We have science right now! Let's go to class!'... The teacher makes a **really** big difference."* (FGESL01)

"I had a problem with teachers. Some of them told me... 'Don't come to class, there is no point, [you're] going to fail.'... I used to skip the class when they say that. So after a while, I had too many skips and I started skipping other courses too. I got so used to it that I dropped out of school." (FGESL01)

"I had really bad experiences with [this one teacher] ...so I was skipping his classes because I was having really hard time with him." (IESL04)

Positive impact of teachers. The youth were eager to share stories of the remarkable work of highly dedicated and compassionate teachers who had influenced their lives. These teachers were described by the students as those who made special efforts to assist them in their social, academic, and personal lives without alienating them by singling them out or acting in a patronizing manner. These special efforts often involved teachers spending extra time and energy assisting their students, listening to their students, and treating their students equally.

"[The ESL teacher] just stayed for me half an hour every day for a month. Just to help me. That was great. I am still appreciating that." (FGESL01)

"The thing that made me feel good all the time is when you ask the teacher something, you can ask her or him many times if you want. He is still going to show you and explain you 'til you get it. This helped me a lot." (IESL02)

"I also like [my] math teacher... he doesn't make me feel different from the other classmates." (FGCS01)

Quite often the youth participants mentioned as their favorite teachers those with whom they had a more personal relationship. The youth described these teachers as *"just like our friend"* (FGCS01) or *"like my mother"* (FGCS01; IESL01). These teachers often went beyond the call of duty in their expressions of genuine interest in and concern for their students' success and well-being.

"She was really helpful to me.... I really talked to her [about] everything

that hurts me in the heart and she really understand me... I remember one

day I said to her [that] my parents are not having money and she bought for

me the food.... I will never forget her because she is in my heart."
(FGCS01)

"[My ESL teacher] was always there. First when we come [to Canada]...

she would take me and help me with some stuff that I don't understand....

She has become a family friend. She still come to visit us, every birthday and

Christmas, she would come and celebrate. So now we are kind of close with

her family." (FGCS01)

ESL teachers hold a unique and special role. ESL teachers were frequently

singled out by the youth as particularly helpful. These teachers were commended for

their knowledge and use of special teaching methods, including repetition, adjusted

speech, visuals aids, individual help, and allotment of extra time. The youth also noted

that *"[ESL teachers] can understand you better"* (FGCS02) and that they are *"full of*

compassion to help" (FGCS02). Virtually all of the youth participants perceived ESL

teachers to have a better understanding of their special circumstances, including the

challenge of adjusting to a new culture while learning a language and trying to progress

in their studies.

"[The ESL teacher] respect I am working hard and need some money... ESL

teachers, they understand. But Canadian teachers: 'If you want to work,

work in the afternoon. Do your homework, come to school, that's your

life.'" (IESL01)

Several participants noted that those teachers who themselves were immigrants could be especially effective in working with ESL youth. These teachers' experiential knowledge, combined with their teaching skills, was considered particularly beneficial.

"It was an ESL teacher who really helped me because they understand your

situation...About 15 years ago or 20 she have to pass through the same

thing and it was even worse because it was even less people who came to the

country." (FGCS01)

"I think that the best thing that every high school can do about ESL students

is they need to hire a teacher... that's also [an] immigrant.... Canadian

teachers are really good and everything but they just don't know that feeling

that you have when you first come to class or when you don't understand

something. But that person that came to Canada 20 years ago, that person

have the same problem [so] she or he knows how to talk with you about that

problem and how to solve it, how to explain it to you." (IESL02)

Teachers' special efforts. The special efforts of teachers and other school staff who intervened when youth were experiencing difficulties with their peers or with other teachers were not only appreciated but were occasionally effective in preventing or resolving problems. One teacher was noted for facilitating the development of relationships between students from historically conflictual groups. Both teachers and counselors were noted for advocating on behalf of ESL students in their misunderstandings or difficulties with other school staff.

"In ESL [class] we have Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, other countries too but it was nice. Sometime we have problems, sometime not, but the teacher always trying to... [help us] understand not to fight here, not to argue, to work with each other... The teacher always going to make us partner with Serbian people just to see are we going to be nice to them or are we going to be rude...we did good, even we helped each other and talked." (IESL04)

"There was this one teacher I knew she would help me... I used to go to her and she would go talk to the teachers for me." (FGESL01)

Some youth expressed concern regarding the difficulty of understanding Ontario's education system with its credit system and different academic streams. They felt that their lack of understanding resulted in inequitable opportunities within their schools. Those teachers, counselors, and school settlement workers who assisted the youth in making suitable course selections were appreciated for their extra efforts.

"The [school] hired [a settlement worker] to help all the students to

understand some things better about credits, what they need to take for

college or stuff like that. That is a very nice thing... it is much easier to

explain in your language.... It was a little bit hard for me to understand [the

school guidance counselor] about those credits... that is a problem,

especially for ones who want to continue with their education... they need to

have good information to get well-informed.... You need to know what you

need to take... you need somebody to explain everything to you. You can't

just take a book and read. You can read the whole book but you still don't

understand anything." (IESL02)

"[My teacher] really helped me [to learn] how can I finish high school. He

was helping me what should I do and what is the best for me? And I really

appreciate it because I really didn't know what to do." (FGCS01)

Negative impact of teachers. The above statements indicate that teachers have

been powerful guiding forces and sources of strength and support in the lives of their

students. Unfortunately, the impact of teachers can be equally as powerful, or even more

so, when negative. While the youth felt that the majority of teachers were at least

satisfactory, and some even exceptional, each also had less favorable interactions with

particular teachers. The youth described experiences of being picked on, watched,

singled out, disbelieved, given up on, held in lower esteem, and unfairly punished.

"I was picked on a lot by the school. Anything that was going on in the school, I was the one who got picked on." (FGESL01)

"And when you have a problem from the teacher... and they say, 'You are not going to be able to do this just because you are English as a second language. You are not able to understand this just because it is at academic level,' you feel desperate. So why are going to stay and waste your time? Teachers told you that you are not going to be able to do it. You know [it's true] because they know better than you." (IESL03)

The participants' comments indicate that within high schools, there is a stigma attached to being an ESL youth. A number of youth felt that some of their teachers held lower academic expectations for them, viewed them as inexperienced and naïve, and held stereotyped views about ESL youth.

"I think that the teachers think a little bit lower of us because they think: If you don't know English then you don't know anything else." (FGCS01)

"[The teachers] thought I am not the right person for this course...it was academic because I wanted to go to university. It won't be hard if someone would help me... but they didn't." (IESL03)

"The teacher just asked [my friend], 'Did you even go to school back at home?' So that shows that they don't know what it is like to be in another country." (FGCS01)

The participants perceived these negative experiences with teachers as patronizing, discriminatory, racist, exploitive, and unfair.

"I think sometimes the teacher is patronizing, meaning if I came to a regular class from ESL...they say, 'Oh X, you only do 10 and the other students will do 20.' They were meaning 'You're only an ESL student and you can't do it.'" (FGCS01)

"The last couple months I was in school there was a little bit of racism from my math teacher. She was always getting angry at anything I do. If I want to work, wanted help in the class, no, she doesn't care, she doesn't want me in the class, she doesn't pay attention to what I saying, so you are getting mad and you start hating the school." (IESL01)

"[One teacher] used to always pick on me. Once he tell me to go clean the gym.... [He said], 'I am a teacher. I tell you what to do.' I was like, 'I don't care who you are to me. I am here to get my education, to study. I am not here to clean your gym.'" (FGCS02)

Unfortunately, even one or two negative incidences with teachers can have devastating consequences for some youth. Two youth mentioned that negative experiences with teachers directly contributed to their decision to leave school early.

"I didn't get kicked out, I dropped out 'cause I got tired of all that stuff. It's not all the teachers, some teachers are really nice. It is only a couple in the whole school that is racist... and they ruined it for everyone else."
(FGESL01)

"The only reason I dropped out of school was because of my teacher... I was failing so my teacher told me there was no point in coming to school anymore. So after that I started skipping the classes... to me there was no point in going to school anymore so I dropped out." (FGESL01)

Disengagement from school as a result of negative experiences or interactions with teachers was not uncommon in the participants' stories. While not necessarily leading to early school-leaving, this disengagement was evident in both current student and non-completer participants' stories of skipping classes, giving up on themselves, and ceasing to care about their grades.

"It was all connected. I only skipped classes once in a while but after couple times my teacher told me, 'Don't come to class, no point.' I start skipping their classes... I didn't want to go to them anymore 'cause I was going to

fail anyways. I got so used to it, I started skipping my other classes. So I

kept doing that 'til I stopped going to school, stopped going to classes. I

used to go to school in the mornings, hang out the whole day [and] because

of what [the teachers] say, dropped out. [I] came back the second year and

the same problem started...[with] teachers. So I said, 'Ah, who cares? If I

have this problem I don't want to be here anymore.'" (FGESL01)

"[The teacher] hates Middle East people. I had a few students with me from

the Middle East and we were having huge trouble with him. He would fail

us. He gave me 50% and he said he make me pass just because he doesn't

want me anymore in the course.... As long as I am not going to see [him]

anymore, I don't care!" (IESL03)

"I told the teachers I am going to quit the school if I have to go to that

school but they said, 'You should go there.'... I don't want to go to that

school because you get a different credit... That credit not going to mean

nothing. I'm not going to get to college or university with it so I don't really

care about school no more, you know?" (FGCS01)

Teachers need to provide extra time. Many of the youth emphasized the time

pressures they experienced due to their above grade-norm age, their lower level of

English language proficiency, and the resulting relative slowness in completing work.

They stressed the need for teachers to provide extra time for completion of school work.

"More time [is needed] to work on the projects... The people that are good

in English, they do it fast and the people that aren't, they are looking for a

chance for help. [The teachers] take [the projects] right away but [students]

are like 'I'm not done. I have to finish it.'" (FGCS02)

"I just needed some time, a few hours to get through the papers and that's it."
(IESL02)

"I've got one class that is very hard. It is my first academic English class...

I find it very hard because we can't match with all the Canadians. They

have better skills than us. Especially [doing an] in-class essay...my writing

skills are not as fast as Canadians so it is hard." (FGCS02)

Powerlessness in relation to teachers. Some participants expressed a pervasive
sense of powerlessness in their interactions with teachers and other school staff. Their
comments indicate that the nature of their relationships with teachers can foster or
contribute to feelings of powerlessness. Some of the youth felt that it was *"like me*
against the teacher and the principal" (FGESL01) and that *"we don't [have choices]... it*
is not fair" (FGCS02). The powerlessness they experienced had, in effect, silenced many
of the youth. Although not common among the participants, one youth tried to maintain
a sense of control through reacting with oppositional behaviour. This youth's behaviour
appears to have magnified his negative experiences and perceptions of being singled out

and unfairly treated. Whatever their response, the youths' powerlessness appeared to negatively influence their educational experience as well as their efforts to remain socially and academically engaged in school.

"He is a teacher so no one would listen to us. He is bigger than us, he knows a lot of the main office people...So why bother [to complain]?" (IESL03)

"You go sit by yourself and you start thinking what to do. And [there is] no one you can talk to [if the] teacher hurts you... it is not really easy for us in the school around the people. So you find it hard time, you sit or you go walk or you start thinking what to do 'I got this problem.' You don't show up to school, because you hate that no one can help." (IESL01)

"They told me to drop [the class] or you can go to the rec room to do your homework. I guess the teacher didn't want me to come back anymore. I didn't bother to ask for no reason, I just said 'okay.'" (FGESL01)

Feelings of powerlessness, related in part to experiences with teachers and to their English-language proficiency, caused some participants distress in their relations with teachers. The youths' comments indicate that this sense of powerlessness contributed to their hesitancy in actively participating in class and in seeking help from teachers when it was needed, thereby silencing many of the youth and negatively impacting their

educational experience. Some participants felt that it would be helpful if teachers took a

more active role in determining and responding to their students' needs. These youth felt

that teachers should make increased effort to understand their students' lives and

difficulties and to offer any special help that is needed.

"It's up to teachers to know when [students] need help and when they don't.

Because if you see that a student is failing, why don't you just go and ask the

student, 'Why are you failing? What is your problem?' Maybe you have

problems at home, maybe you don't understand something." (FGCS01)

"Teachers [are responsible for helping ESL students] ... they [should] be

there for you" and *"when they know you need help they should tutor you*

after school." (FGCS01)

Awareness of teachers' constraints. Despite their negative experiences with

teachers and other school staff, the participants rarely placed full responsibility or blame

on these individuals for their negative school experiences. Rather, the youth exemplified

compassion and insightfulness as they articulated their understanding of the constraints

and demands placed on their teachers. While in one breath the participants shared

experiences of isolation and disengagement resulting from a lack of teacher support and

confidence, in the next they acknowledged the difficulties confronting teachers who often

do not have the time, energy, experience, or support to provide the type of assistance that

students feel they need.

"Because there is a lot of students.... [If] you can't speak English or you

can't write that good, teachers can't help you alone the whole period."

(FGESL01)

"Some teachers, they don't want to explain to you, they don't have the time.

ESL teachers, they get bored with teaching, explaining so much everyday....

It is really hard for the teacher. I feel sorry and they did a good job for ESL

students. But they get tired of this so when you ask him something, he'll do

like he didn't hear you or something. So you feel this. You ask, 'What does

that mean?' and he won't look at you so you feel 'Oh, he is getting tired. I

don't think he wants to answer me.' So you will be quiet, you will leave the

question, you will go, go." (IESL01)

Participants' advice to schools regarding their teachers. In addition to the

previously mentioned request that teachers allot more time for individual help and to

complete course- and high school-requirements, the participants had further advice they

wanted to offer regarding teachers and other school staff: the participants felt that it was

important to hire *"proper"* teachers, to increase the number of ESL teachers, and to have

fewer students in each class.

"Especially for the ESL... they have to choose proper teachers... They have

to choose the right kind of teachers that can understand all ESL students

and understand that the people sometimes cannot express what they feel in

words, especially because it is a different language." (IESL03)

"[The school boards] need to hire more teachers, better teachers."
(FGESL01)

"For the ESL kids I think you should have...not a lot of kids, small classes,

because then you can pay attention to all of the students." (FGCS02)

"The best thing that every high school can do about ESL students is they

need to hire a teacher... that's also immigrant." (IESL02)

The participants were very vocal and articulate in regards to the impact teachers

and other school staff had on their educational experiences. The social context of school

was also important in relation to their peers.

Relationships with Peers

Relationships with peers also figured prominently in the youth's accounts

of their school experiences. Peer relationships varied along a continuum from

highly supportive to exclusionary, thereby having the potential to either contribute

to a sense of belonging, comfort, and safety or to isolation and disengagement

from the school environment.

"[School] was sometimes good, when you are with your friends and you meet new people. And sometimes they help you when you talk to them. Sometimes it is good but sometimes when you don't have friends and some people offend you, sometimes you have the worst day in school ever." (IESL04)

"I felt really, really scared to go to school. The first time I came to my classes everybody were looking at me, I felt so embarrassed and I didn't want to talk to anybody at all. And then the next day, I got lost in my school and I couldn't get to class for half an hour until somebody helped me out and they actually brought me to class and then everybody looked at me... I was so embarrassed 'cause I was late half an hour for class. And then one girl came up to me and she started [talking to] me... I was like wow!" (FGCS01)

Initially *"nervous," "shy,"* and *"scared"* in their classes, as the youth became more familiar with their classmates, their comfort in school also increased.

"After a few days [in school] it was easier because you got to know people and you get to know what you have to do in the class." (FGCS02)

"[I felt comfortable in school after] maybe a few days because I found friends... they were all from my country." (IESL02)

"At first school is scary but after a while you get to meet nice people, you

get to make friends." (FGCS02)

Relationships among ESL youth. Almost without exception, the youth

mentioned more positive and frequent interactions with other ESL or immigrant youth.

Friendships developed relatively quickly among newcomer peers, often within days of

arrival. Initiating and maintaining these friendships appeared easier due to shared

experience and the perception that ESL youth could better understand accented or broken

English. These relationships had the positive effect of alleviating loneliness, orientating

to the school and culture, and developing a sense of belonging and safety in the school.

"[We are friends mostly with other newcomers] because we have been

through the same things. We have to leave all our friends in our country and

be strong to start a new life. So that is why we mostly go with somebody

who speak our language or with somebody that is in kind of the same

situation." (FGCS01)

"[My ESL classmates] were cool. When you want help with something, we

always helped each other... someone can know better or someone not, so

trying to explain [to] them and trying to show the things how this goes."

(IESL04)

"Our cultures are different, all 190 degrees about Canadian culture. The way how we wear our clothes, they way how we do our hair, the way how we laugh, the way how we respect.... [In Canada] if you wear tight pants for a guy, it is not good. Guys they always wear loose pants but in some countries culture they wear tight pants... I explained to [a new guy]... why these people are giving you the weird look. See, you need immigrant people. If this [new] guy did not find me or find other guy, he would stay maybe whole days in the school [wearing those pants]. Every day he come with this thing and everyone making fun of him." (IESL01)

"I liked [school] but the only point that I was sad and I couldn't feel. I was just thinking about what happened back home. But that stayed one month, I still feel sad but sometime you have to move on... when I lost my four cousins and my best friend, at that time I was always feeling lonely...So [my friends] always [said] "Don't worry, we're always going to be here for you, whenever you need. We are your friends and if you want to go out now, we can go and chill." I think that's what helped. You know when you have someone to talk to? I'm sure everyone will feel better sometimes." (IESL04)

Peer supports. The participants' statements indicate that peer support with linguistic, social, and academic challenges had a positive influence on their educational experience. However, the participants felt that given the powerlessness of youth within the education system, their peers were unable to assist them with difficulties related to

their teachers or other school staff. The participants felt that because their peers *"are still just students"* and *"having the same problems"* they *"can't make a difference."* (IESL03)

> *"[Other students] are having the same problems so what are they going to do? Nothing, you know."* (IESL03)

> *"[If] teacher hurts you, even your friend can't do nothing... you don't show up to school, because you hate that no one can help."* (IESL01)

Relationships with native-English speakers. Numerous participants mentioned a desire to develop friendships with their native-English speaking peers. Some felt that interacting with people from cultures other than their own is an exciting growth experience. The youth also recognized the benefit of increasing their proficiency in English through contact with native-English speakers. Most participants mentioned that developing these relationships was related to their desire to be inclusive and non-discriminatory.

> *"It's really nice to understand different cultures, it is really nice... take it as something different you want to learn, like you feel you want to learn another culture as you are learning another language. You are learning thousands of peoples' minds; you are learning how they think. It's amazing."* (IESL01)

"When we be with the Canadians, they speak so much better English we

learn more. If you be [with] just ESL, you might learn wrong stuff."

(FGCS02)

"I am with everybody friend. Some people from my country [say] 'You are

so stupid, why are you friends with them?' And I'm like, '...I don't want to

be like you...I am sitting with everybody.'" (FGCS01)

Although recognizing potential value in developing friendships with native-English speakers, the youth experienced difficulty and felt powerless to do so. The challenge they faced in creating these links stemmed from a perceived insufficiency in language proficiency and cultural knowledge, inadequate opportunities to interact, the stigma surrounding ESL youth, and their subsequent mistreatment by peers. For youths in this study, the sense of isolation and exclusion that sometimes resulted from a lack of engagement with native-English speakers often proved detrimental.

"At lunch time I always go to the [coffee shop] beside the school... and do

my homework and if I have a test, I would review for it... I didn't know

anyone to sit with. Or I am not used to the kind of conversation they have at

lunch time, so I would rather sit with myself there... I didn't have any

Canadian friends because they were totally different than me...I have

different culture and different rules of life... that is why I didn't feel

comfortable...I started to have depression from the school." (IESL03)

"Sometimes [the Canadian students] are just like 'Go learn English and come talk to me.' I feel they don't want me in there." (FGCS01)

"In my [mainstream] religion class... one of the students came [and said] 'Oh no, those are just the ESL students', meaning retards or something like that. That kind of bothers me." (FGCS01)

"If I was alone and with only Canadian student, I wouldn't stay for three days there...because I don't think they can understand me." (IESL01)

"I said [to my friend] that it would be really cool if she would be in our ESL class because you get to know more cultures. And she's like, 'Yeah, probably I am going to be in one of those classes when I get dumber.'" (FGCS01)

"When you say something [other students would] be like 'Shut up, you go to ESL.'" (FGCS02)

Perceived language proficiency effects peer relationships. Most youth spoke of their feelings of anxiety around learning and communicating in English. This anxiety stems from both their experiences of being teased about their English-language abilities and accent and their personal displeasure and embarrassment regarding being seen as *"still a child."* (IESL01)

"The way you talk, your accent, anything you do that is different, [Canadian

students] laugh at you." (FGCS02)

"First when I came...I knew a little English but I was too afraid to talk.

Because of my accent, I didn't even want to speak." (FGCS01)

"After long time, you feel like you [are] starting all over again. You [are]

studying A, B, C, how to write, and you remember you were doing this when

you were a kid but at the same time, you don't know what to do... So you are

still a child, everybody looking at you like you don't know anything in this

country. But they don't know that [at] the same time... [some newcomer

youth] saw a lot of things in their lives, in their countries. So it is really

different when they come here." (IESL01)

    The anxiety expressed by the participants can prove detrimental to their

educational experience. For some youth, the anxiety contributed to their infrequent

contact with native-English speaking peers and hesitancy around participating in

mainstream classes and extracurricular activities.

"I am so shy, so embarrassed, I be in class so quiet. I wouldn't even say

nothing even if I didn't understand... If I think I am going to say it bad or

something, sometimes I just don't embarrass myself and I stay quiet and

then I tried to go home and do something but I could not, it was like 'just

forget it' next time I do better." (IESL04)

"[ESL classes] feel more safe than in Canadian classes. When I went to

Canadian classes I wanted to go back to ESL...because I felt like family in

that class." (IESL01)

Changes in peer relationships over time. Over time, the barriers limiting ESL

youth's interaction with their native-English speaking peers lessened. Developing

language proficiency and cultural knowledge, integration into mainstream classes, or

employment in English-speaking environments increased the participants' opportunities

to develop friendships with native-English speakers.

"I was kind of better in English [after a year] so [the Canadian students]

thought I was funny so they started liking me more." (FGESL01)

"It was really hard for [Canadian students] to understand me because I

wasn't... in Canada that long... But I am really different about before. I

know what is a good thing to do, what is the bad thing to do... they won't

make fun of [me] now anymore. [Now I know] the right time what to

say...sometimes you have to [be] quiet, sometimes noisy." (IESL01)

"The first people that I meet was some Persian people that were at school...

they started helping me with English and showing me around school. And

then I got some Canadian friends during the other [regular] classes."
(FGESL01)

"When you are new you [hang out with mostly other newcomers]. But

when... you are in Canada for long, then you usually start to hang around

with more Canadians and with people who were here for long... not only

Canadians or only immigrants. Both." (FGCS02)

Given the youth's many stories of being teased, stereotyped, or laughed at by native-English speakers, it appears that increased opportunity did not always result in larger friendship circles or more positive experiences.

"[The Canadian students think that we] are too slow and stuff like that." (IESL04)

"[In] the cafeteria... there is a big table for Hispanic and the Canadians

hang in the doorway. There is some people who mix but basically, it's like

that." (FGCS01)

The nature of peer relationships appears to strongly influence the degree of comfort and engagement within the school environment. For many youth, the support of their ESL peers created a comfortable environment in which they felt that they were with

"family" who had *"been through the same things."* For some, both the absence of interactions and negative interactions with native-English speakers contributed to a sense of isolation resulting in a gradual disengagement from school.

Inflexibility of School Practices and Policies

The participants' stories indicate that the inflexibility of school practices and policies can prove detrimental to a positive educational experience. For some, this inflexibility served as an impediment to the completion of school. In sharing their experiences and perceptions, the participants' painted a picture of a school climate relatively hostile to ESL youth. Their stories indicate an unarticulated understanding that the school system was designed neither with them in mind nor with the vision of empowering students or staff who felt that they *"had no choice"* (FGESL01) and couldn't *"do anything about it."* (IELS04)

Mentioned as particularly damaging to the participants' progression in school was the limited amount of ESL support, the difficulty or impossibility of attending school on a part-time basis, the rigidity of the timetable and the amount of time and effort required to modify it, the lack of support provided to employed students, and the provincial age cap for high school attendance.

Negative Effect of Limited Amount of Time and ESL Support

The youth spoke of the difficulty experienced by older ESL students who in just a few years must not only learn a new language but also keep up in content areas. They expressed the difficulty of doing so in such a short time.

"[My brother] has to work in the morning and he has to go night school...

for immigrant people who come at the high school time, they should give

them less than 30 credits...[it is] too much for 4 years... it takes us 3 years

to learn the language perfect, at least. It is not enough [time]." (FGCS02)

A few of the participants felt the available ESL support to be insufficient for adequate preparation for the mainstream classes.

"I was trying to get in ESL... [but the school] put me in some class that I

don't want to be in, that was no point in being in. So I dropped out again... I

wanted an ESL course for my English, for my writing and reading."

(FGESL01)

Potential Negative Effect of High School Eligibility Age Cap

Some of the participants felt they had been pushed out of ESL classes before they were adequately prepared for mainstream classes. Other youth mentioned the provincial age cap of 21 years for high school attendance and the necessity of lying about their age to complete their education.

"If you are 21 and you don't have enough credits [to graduate] they kick

you out of the school... Most ESL kids are old. When they get old [and] they

don't have enough credits, they get kicked out. We should give them more

time, more chances." (FGCS02)

"I think I might leave school in the middle because I'll be 22 and I still in

grade 11." (FGCS01)

Negative Effect of Limited Funding Allocated to Schools for Part-time Students

Perhaps the factor that most significantly and directly contributed to early school-leaving was the school practice of insisting that students enroll in enough courses to be considered a full-time student. Given that Ontario's schools receive a significantly smaller amount of funding for part-time students than for full-time students, principals often require their students to take a minimum number of courses per semester. This requirement appears to have a negative impact on those ESL students who have an "odd" number of credits to complete. Given the arrival of newcomers at various times throughout the school year, and the transfer of credits from their home countries, it is not unusual for ESL students to find themselves in their final year of high school with credit requirements differing from those of their same-aged Canadian peers. For instance, some participants needed only one or two courses, rather than the usual eight, in their final year of school.

"I just needed two more credits to finish the whole high school...And it was

the beginning of the school year, September... I got a timetable. For the first

half year I got the English I need, then a spare, then [another] spare and

cooking and one more class, gym or something.... The system here is you

need to have 3 classes, that is the minimum. [So I went to the guidance

counselor and said] 'Just give me those two [courses] I need and give me

one more so I am going to be done in December.' She told me, 'Oh no, this

is the timetable. I cannot change it....' And so on and so forth. What I'm

going to do? I'm not going to go the whole year for two credits, you know?

And she told me, 'Sorry, I would really like to help you but that's just the

way [it is]. I can't do anything about it.' I am not going to attend those

classe... One of my friends went to [the adult school] and he told me, 'Just

come there and you can do those 2 credits in almost 2 months.'... I went

there and [two and a half months later] I finished." (IESL02)

"[I left high school] because the only thing I was needing [was] only

English, nothing more else. So I didn't want to stay. If you have to stay,

you have to take three courses. You cannot take two, you have to take three,

so I didn't want to go there for all day to school. I'm like, well maybe I'll

just take night school and then I can work because I was planning to go this

summer back home [and needed money]... So that's why I left... I can be

done with [school] early because if you take night school it is only one

month and a half. So I left." (IESL04)

Negative Effect of Rigid Timetables and School Policies for Employed Students

As illustrated in the statements above, some school's insistence that their students

take a minimum number of courses per semester is not only inconvenient but also has a

negative impact on those who are required to work. In addition to some schools' practice

of requiring students to attend school on a full-time basis, the rigidity of the timetable can also create difficulties for employed students.

"I told my teacher I need to have the first and second class [off] ...so I can get some sleep or something because I can't show up for school because I am working. It took them about 6 months 'til they fixed it for me but by then I was done my job." (IESL01)

Many participants, in particular those who left school early, had financial responsibilities within their family units. While some worked to support themselves and avoid asking their parents for money, others contributed directly to the family welfare and income. One of the early school leaver participants worked to support his family back in his country of origin while another worked to raise the money required to bring his parents and siblings to Canada. Those participants who worked long hours found that their jobs often interfered with school. For one participant, long work shifts combined with poor scheduling and school inflexibility directly contributed to early school-leaving.

"If I ask [my parents] for the money, they will give it to me. But now they have to start from the beginning, to start a new life... so I don't want to [say] 'Oh, I want this' when I know it is nothing, you know?... I think it is hard so I started to work on my own... Sometime you have a lot of homework and you have to go to work... when you work every day and you

have school, I think your mark will go down and [you'll] probably fail the classes too. [My marks went down] a lot. " (IESL04)

"I have a fulltime job... I have to support my parents back in Iraq so I had no choice... I come home late, I would be tired in the morning for school. It was hard but I did it for a couple of years. " (FGESL01)

"Nine months ago I dropped school. Well actually, I didn't drop out... When I was a student, I was working [at a] gas station so sometimes I would have to work night shifts and go to school after that night shift... I always wasn't showing up at school Friday or Tuesday because I worked Thursday night and Monday. So it happens like 5 times, 6 times I didn't show up and I told my teacher I need to have the first and second class [off] ... It happened like 5 times, 6 times and they said, 'We don't need you in this school if you do not show up anymore.' First they gave me warning but I didn't want to leave the job...I was really good with money, I wasn't needing anything from my parents because I know my parents are really, well, they have enough money to buy food, something to eat, and the bus tickets, something like that. I didn't really want to ask my parents so I worked for that. [The school] gave me a warning first... and I told them the problem and they said 'It is not a part time school, you have to come Tuesday and Thursday too.' So I kept doing it, I couldn't stop, I had to work at that time...I got kicked out from school. "

Those participants who worked fewer hours, and who did not require changes in

the scheduling or number of courses, felt more support in remaining in high school.

VI. Interpretation and Discussion

The purpose of this section is to use the literature and current findings to develop

a clearer picture of the ways in which ESL youths' educational experiences might

facilitate or inhibit early school-leaving. I will demonstrate that despite a strong desire

and motivation to complete high school, graduating is difficult, if not impossible, for

many ESL youth. The participants told a story of struggle in an education system

experienced as neither integrating nor accommodating. Their experiences indicate that

inequitable educational opportunities exist for ESL youth. The following diagram

illustrates the educational experience of many current study participants.

Failure to Integrate

Failure to Accommodate

Inequitable Educational Opportunity
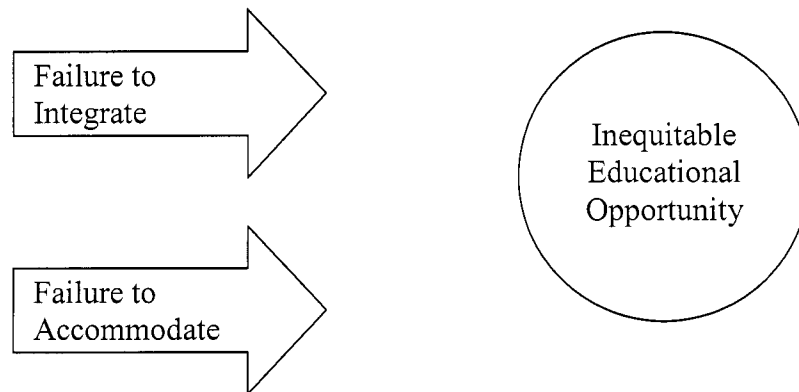
The participants spoke of multiple barriers in attaining equitable educational

opportunities. Limiting the youths' educational opportunities were negative interactions

with peers and teachers, inflexible school practices and policies, and financial difficulties.

The participants demonstrated remarkable strength in confronting these barriers: many managed to balance work and school, simultaneously learn a language and keep up in their subject-area coursework, and survive teasing, embarrassment, and exclusion. For those unable to progress through school, the decision to leave was related to their school's inability to make accommodations in response to their needs. These youth were forced to prioritize their personal, financial, and familial responsibilities over completing their high school education. For some youth, their only power in relation to their education was demonstrated in their decision to leave school: rather than expend time and energy in a school unable to meet their needs and in which success was deemed impossible, they focused elsewhere.

To fully understand and appreciate the educational experiences of ESL youth, as well as the contributors to early school-leaving, one must consider a multitude of influencing factors, some of which were highlighted in the current research. Simple causal explanations are inadequate in capturing the complexity of these youths' experiences. Rather, the barriers to success illuminated in the youths' stories lend themselves well to an ecological analysis in which factors at the individual, social, and sociopolitical/economic levels contribute to ESL youths' perceptions and experiences of their education.

For this reason, following a brief overview of how some past theories of school achievement among minority students relate to the current research, I have organized the interpretation and discussion section by ecological level. The micro-level addresses the value of education, the meso-level examines social context and inflexible school practices and policies, and the macro-level examines issues related to funding, socioeconomic disparity, and racism and other forms of discrimination.

Past Theories of School Achievement among Minority Students

Sociolinguistic theorists assert that the relatively low school achievement and morale of minority students are due to a cultural mismatch in communication style between the teacher and the student (see Erickson, 1987; see Nieto, 1992). The systematic and recurrent miscommunications and misinterpretations that result from these cultural differences are thought to contribute to minority students' relative lack of academic success. Sociolinguistic theorists attribute minority student underachievement to factors in the school itself rather than blaming the individual students or staff.

In contrast, the cultural-ecological, or "perceived labour market" (see Erickson, 1987) theorists explain academic underachievement among some minority groups by looking to the group's situation in the host society, its perceptions of and response to opportunities available in that society, and labour market opportunities (Ogbu, 1987, 1991, 2003). The problem of academic underachievement among some involuntary minorities (e.g., First Nations peoples) is considered a result of their history of subjugation and exploitation and their responses to this treatment. Ogbu (1987, 1991, 2003) believes that cynicism about employment opportunities and "getting ahead," resulting from generations of exploitation, leads to the academic underachievement of involuntary minorities. Immigrants, who do not have this long history of discrimination in the host country, are considered more resilient and likely to persevere in school due to a belief in the "folk theory" of equal opportunity (see Nieto, 1992; Ogbu, 2003). Cultural-ecological theorists state that differences in the two groups' community forces, that is, differences in the way they perceive, interpret, and respond to education as a result of

their history, lead to differences in academic achievement. Thus, the roots of academic

underachievement among involuntary minorities are traced back to their community

forces. Erickson (1987) has combined the sociolinguistic and cultural-ecological theories

to develop a resistance theory explaining minority students' academic underachievement.

He argues that both perceptions of inequity and conflictual interactions between students

and teachers can result in students' resistance to what they experience as an illegitimate,

oppressive system. Resistance theorists perceive dropping out of school as an extreme

form of resistance (Erickson, 1987).

Finally, reproduction theorists argue that schools reflect and reproduce the

economic and social relations of society, thereby serving the interests of the dominant

classes. As a result of the schools' invalidation of minority students' life experiences,

cultural values, languages, and communication patterns, their educational experiences

and achievement are negatively affected (see Corson, 1998; see Nieto, 1992). Society at

large is seen as responsible for students' academic achievement.

Findings from the current study suggest that factors at the individual, school, *and*

societal levels can contribute to negative school experiences and high school non-

completion among ESL youth. I believe that it is only through considering all these

factors, and the complexity of their interactions, that we can develop a thorough

understanding of academic underachievement among minority youth.

Although sociolinguistic theory accounts for academic success among those

minority students in schools incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy, it cannot

adequately explain the success of those students who do not benefit from such specialized

instruction (see Erickson, 1987; see Nieto, 1992). This theory also falls short in its

failure to examine factors in the broader society that can affect minority youth education, including poverty and discrimination. Additionally, we must be wary of the implication that cultural differences create difficulty while cultural similarities lead to harmony. For instance, Nieto (1992) has warned of the potential for this theory to be used as an argument to segregate students as a solution to educational failure, despite the historical evidence demonstrating that segregation does not work.

Clearly, neither cultural assimilation nor segregation should be a goal. However, the participants in the current research did note their more frequent association with ESL peers and attributed this tendency, in part, to their shared experience. They also noted that their less frequent contact with their native-English speaking peers was related to their being *"totally different."* Evidently, similarity, or perceptions of similarity, can help people communicate with increased ease and comfort. This comfort in school and in relations with peers was noted by some participants' as affecting their integration in school. Although the sociolinguistic theory provides insight into the effect of cultural similarity on minority students' underachievement, it assumes the inevitability of students' discomfort with the dissimilar. This assumption has led to proposals for the development of culturally appropriate teaching strategies, which are only possible or helpful when dealing with a relatively homogeneous immigrant student population. In Kitchener-Waterloo's diverse classrooms, such a strategy would be inappropriate. This theory is also problematic in failing to acknowledge the role that schools can play in facilitating relationships between students and reinforcing unity in diversity.

Similarly, although Ogbu's (1987, 1991, 2003) cultural-ecological theory helps explain academic success among *immigrant* minority youth, it cannot account for the

success of *involuntary* minority students. Indeed, given the amount of research suggesting ESL students experience disproportionately low rates of academic success (Alberta Education, 1992; Derwing et al., 1999; Radwanski, 1987; Watt & Roessingh, 2001; Watt & Roessingh, 1994), Ogbu's theory seems unable to account for differential academic achievement among even immigrant minorities.

As an economic determinist argument, the cultural-ecological theory presents a mechanical view of society and implies the impossibility of some involuntary minority students and their teachers successfully working toward a positive educational experience. However, the literature suggests that when schools adopt collaborative relations of power and approaches to learning (Cummins, 1994a, 1994b; Glenn & de Jong, 1996; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995; Lucas et al., 1997), when culturally responsive pedagogy is used (see Erickson, 1987; see Nieto, 1992), and when schools function in a supportive sociopolitical setting (Nieto, 1992), minority students can succeed at rates equivalent to majority students.

Resistance theorists take into account factors both within and outside the school in their explanation of academic underachievement among minority youth. My findings lend support to the argument that resistance to a stigmatized identity contributes to struggles in school and to early school-leaving. For some youth, this resistance involved avoiding contact with native English-speakers who teased them about their language, accent, culture, and clothing. For others, it meant choosing not to become actively involved in class so as to avoid being embarrassed or seen as "dumb" "stupid" or "retarded." Still others spoke "resisting" their teachers' predictions of imminent failure through leaving school, or no longer completing class work, upon learning that their

efforts would be fruitless. Finally, many participants' left school for very practical

reasons, including the difficultly of balancing work and academic responsibilities and a

desire to complete their education in a more timely manner than made possible by school

policies and funding restrictions. Their non-completion of school can not only be

considered an extreme form of resistance but also a form of agency. In leaving an

environment that failed to meet their needs, the youth were able to assert the little power

they had. Although resistance theory contributes to an understanding of educational

underachievement, and even highlights the youths' strengths, it fails to tell the complete

story.

        We can also look to social reproduction theory to increase our understanding of

early school-leaving among ESL youth. The participants experienced school as failing to

meet their unique needs as minority students. They tell a story of multiple barriers to their

academic achievement and progress resulting from school practices and policies designed

for an assumed Canadian-born middle class. Similarly, local school staff with whom I

spoke suggested that ESL students' educational difficulties are related, in part, to a school

system that was not designed to meet minority students' needs (personal conversations,

November, 2003-June, 2004). These comments, and the participants' experiences, are

consistent with social reproduction theorists' contention that the status quo influences the

practices and policies of educational institutes, thereby shaping students' educational

experiences. These theorists argue that the influence and interests of the dominant class

reproduce societal inequity within schools.

        Although social reproduction theory contributes to our understanding of ESL

youths' educational experiences, it is essential to recognize that multiple factors affect

their academic achievement. In its almost exclusive explanation of academic achievement as resulting from the reproduction of social classes within the school system, social reproduction theory is incomplete. Within this theory, school life is subordinated to the needs of the dominant classes, leaving little room for understanding how minority students and communities can influence school experiences. However, the current research indicates that changes at the individual, school, *and* societal levels have the potential to positively affect ESL youths' educational experiences and progression.

Although these theories provide insight into the relative lack of school achievement among minority students, they cannot paint a complete picture without considering the complex interplay between the multitude of factors that together affect these youths' educational experiences and achievements. Taken alone, each theory is incomplete. However, incorporating aspects of individual theories can further our understanding of early school-leaving among ESL youth. Nieto (1992) also rejects simple causal explanations of minority student underachievement. Her comprehensive understanding considers how teachers, schools, communities, and society interact to contribute to students' failure and early school-leaving.

I considered each theory as it related to my findings. Future research to develop an alternative theory that encompasses the multiple factors related to academic achievement would prove beneficial.

Micro-Level

The Value of Education

One of my main findings was the high esteem in which education was held by ESL youth. This finding is not novel. In fact, a great deal of other research has found that immigrant youth, and their parents, have high educational expectations upon arrival in Canada (see Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; Burnaby, James, & Regier, 2000; Chow, 2000; Early, 1992; Endo, 1980). What was intriguing about this finding was that the early school-leaver participants, rather than current students, were more vocal and articulate and expressed less skepticism about the value of education. These youth linked education to increased access to employment and to their aspirations to *"be something,"* as one participant emphasized. Although on first glance it seems counter-intuitive that those who stay in school longer are less able to recognize the importance and value of education, this finding can perhaps be explained in relation to the post-school experiences of those ESL youth who leave school early. All but one of the early school-leaver participants with whom I spoke was employed. The positions these youth held were low-paying or unstable, often involving long hours, shift work, and dirty or dangerous work conditions. One youth even spoke of physical abuse on the job. It is possible that these workforce experiences increased the youths' awareness of the value of education as it relates to future employment opportunities. Current ESL students may have expressed more skepticism about the value of education, because they are still struggling with the daily challenges of an unwelcoming and/or unaccommodating educational environment.

Some participants expressed regret about their decision to leave school early. Similarly, research on youth who did not complete high school found that recognizing the

value of education was an important reason for returning to school and regretting

dropping out (see Anisef, 1998; Human Resources and Labour Canada, 1993). Although

this research also suggests that awareness of the importance of education can result in a

decision to stay in school, my findings indicate that some ESL students are compelled to

leave school despite their awareness of its value. Their perception and experience of an

education system that is either unwilling or unable to integrate them and accommodate

their special needs resulted in their decision to leave school early.

What does this finding mean for those working with ESL students? I believe that

this finding negates the common perception of the lazy, rebellious, and uninterested

dropout. Rather than looking to or blaming the individual we must recognize that a

combination of factors interact to culminate in youth's disengagement from school and

early school-leaving. As one youth stated, *"it was all connected."* Therefore, rather than

simply trying to impress on ESL youth the value of education, it is necessary to focus

efforts on creating a society in which all youth have equitable access to education.

Value of education affected by perceptions of inequitable educational

opportunities. The main findings of this research indicate that, although the value of

education is widely recognized among ESL youth, there remains concern about the

ability of all youth to benefit equally. Participants' comments suggest that the social and

sociopolitical/economic context affects their evaluation of education. Particularly

troubling is the potential for some youths' cynicism regarding the value of education to

negatively impact their educational experience. These youths' skepticism took root in the

small number of community members who could serve as role models, their perceptions

of the lower esteem in which particular schools or academic programs are held, and their unwanted placement in a lower academic stream. Other research also points to the negative effect of lack of role models, stigma, or streaming on the educational experiences and success of minority youth (Dei et al., 1997; Demeis & Turner, 1978; Derwing et al., 1999; Employment and Immigration Canada & Statistics Canada, 1990; Glenn & de Jong, 1996; Nieto, 1992; Perez & De La Rosa Salazar, 1997; Vasquez, 1997; Walker, 2002).

Approximately a third of the current student participants mentioned experiences in which their school or program was referred to as being for *"bad," "stupid,"* or *"retarded"* people. Other researchers have also noted the perception of ESL classes as remedial and ESL students as learning disabled or deficient (Derwing et al., 1999; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995; Toohey, 1992). Some of the youth in this research expressed concern that negative perceptions of ESL students and programs would result in future difficulties. These youth were skeptical of an education that they feared would lead to neither future educational nor employment opportunities. One participant stated that leaving school prior to graduation was becoming a real option in light of her placement in a non-academic program. It appears that although ESL students value education, some perceive themselves as having less access to the "right" education.

Those current student participants who expressed skepticism regarding the value of education also referred to the small number of their ethnic group members who hold high status positions and could act as role models. Specifically, they mentioned the absence of immigrant teachers and the difficulties their parents and other immigrant

adults face in gaining access to their profession or trade.[10] With so many community members un- or under-employed, it is not surprising that some youth are led to think, as one youth disclosed, *"it is impossible... what is the chance for me?"* Lam (1994) also found the importance and value of education to diminish in the eyes of those minority youth whose parents, in spite of their qualifications, were unable to obtain employment in a high-profile occupation.

In sum, the participants' comments indicate that the value of education is widely recognized, often becoming increasingly apparent after leaving school. However, there remain concerns among students about the ability of all youth to benefit equally from education. It appears that perceptions and experiences of exclusion, within both school and society, can result in inequitable educational opportunities. It is essential that these concerns are addressed and that our education system is equally accessible, and beneficial, to all students.

Meso-Level

Social Context Affects Educational Opportunity

The participants highlighted the schools' social context as prominent in shaping their educational experience and influencing their ability to benefit from education. Relationships with teachers and peers were mentioned as having a strong influence on their level of comfort, integration, and engagement in school. Insofar as the youth experienced the school's social context as inclusive and integrating, they appeared better

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[10] The issue of access to profession and trades has been written about extensively elsewhere. For an overview of the local and provincial context please refer to Janzen, R., Lymburner, M., Case, R., Vinograd, J. & Ochocka, J. (2003). Voices for Change: Making use of immigrant skills to strengthen our communities (Waterloo Region). Kitchener, ON: Centre for Research and Education in Human Services.

able to benefit from their education. However, perceptions and experiences of isolation and exclusion from peers, teachers, and within classrooms contributed to the participants' disengagement from school, thereby limiting their educational opportunities. Similarly, other researchers found that ESL and other minority youths' relationships with peers and teachers had the potential to facilitate or hinder a positive educational experience (Calgary Board of Education, 1993; Dei et al., 1997; Derwing et al., 1999; Gibson, 2003; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995; Nieto, 1992; Vasquez, 1997; Zanger, 1994).

Teachers

Teachers' potential to facilitate a successful educational experience. The participants' stories attest to the profound impact teachers had on their school experiences. Teachers' ability to adjust their teaching methods in response to ESL students' special needs, and to integrate these students into the school's social and academic world, facilitated the equalization of educational opportunities.

ESL teachers were mentioned by participants as occupying a unique and special role. I feel that it is precisely because ESL teachers are more apt to be aware of, and able to respond to, their students' special needs and circumstances that they were judged so favorably by the participants. Frequently mentioned was ESL teachers' increased understanding of, and compassion for, newcomer students. The participants also spoke of the ways in which their ESL teachers addressed their unique academic and social needs, including the gradual introduction of new subject matter, provision of after-class support, and purposeful grouping of diverse students. That mainstream teachers were less often acknowledged in this regard is not indicative of a lack of good-will or positive

intentions. Rather, research suggests that mainstream teachers' failure to make the shift to a multilingual, multicultural classroom reflects their lack of specialized training, resources, time, and/or energy needed to integrate language minority students into their classrooms (Avery & Walker, 1993; Corson, 1998; Foscolos, 2000; Derwing et al., 1999; Glenn & de Jong, 1996; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995; Nieto, 1992; Zanger, 1994). Some teachers' failure to create a facilitative learning environment, in turn, may reflect the lack of funding and support necessary for teachers to develop these skills.

My research suggests that adjustments in teaching methods and practices in response to ESL students' specific academic needs can positively influence their experience of, and ability to benefit from, their education. Foscolos (2000) suggested that teachers could designate the last few minutes of class-time for students to start their homework. Making special efforts to "draw out" less vocal students and encourage classroom participation among ESL students appears important in light of my finding that youths' self-consciousness about their proficiency in English can prevent class participation and result in boredom. Other research has also found that ESL youths' concern about their language abilities can prevent them from participating in class (Watt et al., 1996a).

Another accommodation essential in ensuring that ESL students are provided with equitable educational opportunities is the provision of translation services. Study participants directly and indirectly indicated that translation into their first language is especially important when explaining complex subjects, such as those relating to credit and graduation requirements and academic streams. Similarly, Derwing and her colleagues (1999) found that the high school program and credit requirements need to be

explained more clearly to ESL students. Making such accommodations could help

ensure youths' ability to make informed decisions about their education.

The youths' stories also indicate that their teachers' role extended beyond

teaching the academic "basics" and into the social realm. For instance, the participants

spoke of their favorite teachers as being *"like a friend"* or *"mother"* who was *"always*

there." These teachers were appreciated for their efforts to integrate students, promote

cultural understanding, and eliminate discrimination. One participant said *"I will never*

forget [this teacher]... she is in my heart." Similarly, in Kanno and Applebaum's (1995)

study with ESL youth, they found that individual teachers' care and support had a

substantial impact on students. Especially appreciated by these students were the teachers

who went out of their way to ensure that ESL youth were recognized and their dignity

maintained. Personal contact among students, teachers, and other school staff has been

found to contribute to a sense of belonging in the school and student retention (Gibson,

2003; Vasquez, 1997). Findings from both the current study and past literature indicate

that positive interactions with teachers can increase ESL students' sense of belonging,

thereby facilitating equitable educational opportunity.

Teachers' efforts to bridge the gap between ESL students and their peers were

also appreciated by participants. Despite their desire to develop relationships with native

English-speakers, many participants experienced difficulty doing so. The youth not only

appreciated teachers' attempts to link them with peers but also expressed a desire for

increased efforts of this nature. The schools' role in linking ESL students with their

native-English speaking peers was also recognized by the youth in Derwing and

colleagues' (1999) study. Kanno and Applebaum (1995) state that managed classrooms,

in which teachers purposefully mix students with diverse language levels and backgrounds to work collaboratively, are especially important and beneficial for ESL students. These findings indicate the potential benefits of teachers' efforts to integrate language minority students into the schools' social and academic world.

The current research and past literature indicate that ESL students' sense of belonging in the classroom and school is increased by positive interactions with their teachers and by their teachers' efforts to facilitate integration. In contrast, a failure to integrate ESL students and make accommodations in response to their unique needs can result in inequitable educational outcomes as they disengage from school.

Teachers' potential to inhibit a successful educational experience. As illustrated, teachers had a profound impact on the participants' experience of school. That teachers' influence their students is hardly unexpected, indeed it is desirable. Perhaps more surprising, and less welcome, is that some participants' negative interactions with just one or two teachers had the potential to outweigh the far greater number of positive interactions. One early school-leaver participant mentioned that although most teachers were *"really nice,"* his experience of school was *"ruined"* by just two teachers. Similarly, Watt and colleagues (1996a) found that while the school's atmosphere may be respectful and accepting of ESL youth, the impact of a single negative incident can trigger students' silence or withdrawal.

Kanno and Applebaum (1995) have noted that teachers' protective attitudes, disinterest, and lack of shared sense of responsibility had the potential to hinder ESL students' growth. The current research suggests that teachers can influence their

students' actions and feelings of self-confidence: for those participants who felt that their

teachers effectively gave up on them, telling them that it was impossible to pass or that

there was no longer any point in attending classes, disengagement resulted. Seeming to

internalize, or resist, their teachers' discouraging comments and predictions, these youth

no longer saw the benefit of participating in class or school and subsequently withdrew.

Other researchers have found that interactions with teachers can affect students' identity

and self-esteem (Nieto, 1992; see Vasquez, 1997) and that students' perception of an

encouraging, supportive, and empathetic school and staff affected their sense of self-

worth (Watt et al., 1996a) and could increase student retention (Vasquez, 1997). Watt

and his colleagues (1996a) found that for some ESL students, withdrawal and a sense of

anomie resulted, in part, from their diminishing self-concept as an academically

competent student. Members of my collaborative analysis team also noted ESL students'

failure to actively participate in class as a result of their recently lowered success and

academic independence. These findings suggest that failing to provide a supportive and

encouraging environment for all students can result in inequitable educational outcomes.

Few educators would argue against equitable access to educational opportunities.

However, meeting the needs of ESL students can be challenging. Teachers sometimes

struggle to balance their students' social and academic needs. For instance, many of the

current research participants wanted and needed extra assistance. Yet, they also resented

being treated as naïve children or patronized by the assumption that they required special

assistance. Although I do not intend to imply that teachers hold full responsibility for their

students' engagement in school, and will later review in more depth evidence suggesting

that indeed they do not, a number of the participants stated their desire that teachers take

the initiative in ensuring students' active involvement. These youth mentioned their

hesitancy in seeking help or participating in class and related it to their fear of being teased

or misunderstood, or their belief that their teacher was too busy to assist them. My

collaborative analysis team also noted the difficulty many newcomer students experience in

acknowledging that they need extra help. This difficultly, they stated, was related to some

ESL students' pride and fears of being viewed as helpless or stupid. My finding is

consistent with Derwing and colleagues (1999) who found too that although ESL youth

sometimes desire their teachers' extra help, they fear that this extra assistance will single

them out. Unfortunately, evidence suggests that it is those most in need of assistance that

are the least likely to seek their teachers' help (Early, 1992). In their attempts to avoid

embarrassment or rejection, some ESL students miss the opportunity to benefit from

their teachers' assistance. This finding highlights the importance of creating a social

context in which ESL youth feel welcomed and supported.

In addition to not being singled out or patronized by offers of extra help, it was

important to the participants that academic support did not compete with their limited

amount of time to socialize in school. One participant, for instance, mentioned that

despite her need for assistance with schoolwork she chose not to attend the lunch-hour

tutorials because she wanted to *"chill"* with friends. Youths' decision to spend time with

their friends, rather than focus solely on academics, further highlights ESL youths' need

and desire to be engaged in the school's social world. Although youth must take

responsibility for their education, it is also important that teachers recognize and make

room for their students' social needs by not placing these needs in competition with

academics.

Another implication of teachers' profound influence on students' educational experiences is the necessity of teachers' reflecting on the ways in which racist or stereotyped beliefs get played out in their work. Some of the participants were frustrated by their teachers' presumptions about their lack of previous education and home country customs. Other participants were angered by what they believed was inequitable punishment. Researchers (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; Cummins, 1994; Dei et al., 1997; Derwing et al., 1999; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995; Ramcharan, 1975; Roessingh & Watt, 1995; Toohey, 1992; Watt & Roessingh, 1994; Wong Fillmore & Meyer, 1992) have noted the frequent inappropriate placement of ESL and other minority students in lower academic streams and the lower status in which ESL students, programs, and teachers are held. Both of these circumstances can be considered examples of the ways in which societal or institutionalized racism is reflected and maintained in schools. They can also be considered barriers to equitable opportunities within the education system.

Identifying and interpreting the presence of racism in my research was something with which I struggled. Although a few of the participants mentioned specific incidences of racism, it was the presence of institutionalized racism about which I was uncertain. Was the lack of adequate support for ESL students an example of racism - an attempt to reproduce the status quo and ensure that few minority youth excel? Or perhaps it was merely a reflection of inadequate funding within the education system as a whole that resulted in a failure to provide equitable opportunities for any student outside the "norm." Wanting to honor the voice of the participants, but feeling cautious about interpretations of racism, I consulted with my thesis advisor and collaborative analysis team. Together we decided that, although some youth have experienced racism within the schools,

discrimination against immigrants or any minority may be a more accurate portrayal of

the situation. In suggesting that schools' serve the interests of the dominant classes,

rather than minorities, this interpretation lends support to the social reproduction theory.

    Limitations of teachers' roles and responsibility. Other researchers (Nieto, 1992;

Radwanski, 1987; Roessingh & Watt, 1995), and indeed my own participants, remind us

that, although teachers influence their students' experiences in school, they do not bear

full responsibility for educational outcomes. I was both surprised and impressed by the

participants' ability to recognize the difficulties some teachers experience in meeting

their students' needs. I was touched by the compassion these youth had for their teachers

whose job is *"not really easy"* and who might *"[get] tired"* or have classes too large to

"take care of everyone." I am aware of just one other study in which ESL students

expressed such compassion for, and understanding of, the difficulty some of their

teachers experienced in meeting their needs (Foscolos, 2000).

    These youth remind us that while recognizing the importance and significance of

teachers' work, we must be careful not to overburden teachers or assume that they hold

sole responsibility for meeting all of their students' needs. Factors beyond the school,

including students' financial and familial responsibilities, are out of teachers' control.

Even with school-related issues, teachers are sometimes powerless to assist their students.

Researchers remind us that teachers are rarely involved in, and often at the mercy of,

policy and other decisions made far from their classrooms (Nieto, 1992; Roessingh &

Watt, 1995). Although teachers' impact on the educational experiences of ESL youth

cannot be overstated, it is expressed within institutional constraints. Other factors,

including interactions with peers are influential in ESL student experience.

Peers

   Peers' potential to facilitate or inhibit a successful educational experience.

Figuring prominently in participants' accounts, peer relationships had the potential to

positively or negatively impact educational experiences. Insofar as peer interactions

influenced the participants' resistance to actively participate in class or consistently

attend school, ESL students were unable to maximally benefit from their education. In

contrast, supportive and encouraging peer relationships increased the participants'

comfort in school, thereby furthering their ability to benefit from the available

educational opportunities.

   Most frequently mentioned by participants in relation to their peers was the

support of ESL classmates. The types of support provided by ESL peers included

linguistic, social, cultural, and academic. The participants' stories highlight their need to

be socially engaged and the potential negative impact of exclusion or isolation from their

peers. The importance of peer support, and the greater ease and frequency with which

friendships developed among ESL youth despite English being their only common

language, is consistent with other research in the area (Derwing et al., 1999; Foscolos,

2000; Gentry, 1988; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995). Given ESL youths' shared

experiences, greater proximity, and more frequent contact in their initial months or years

of school, it is hardly surprising that friendships among ESL youth developed more

readily than with native-English speaking peers.

Integration of ESL youth with their native-English speaking peers. Researchers have noted the concerns of both ESL youth, and their parents, regarding their infrequent contact with native-English speakers and its potential negative effect on their English-language development (Blakely, 1983; Derwing et al., 1999; Foscolos, 2000; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995). Numerous researchers (Blakely, 1983; Cummins, 1994a; Glenn & de Jong, 1996; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995; Schofield, 1997; Watt et al., 1996a; Wong Fillmore & Meyer, 1992) have cited the linguistic, social, and academic benefits of increased integration among language minority and majority youth. Among the benefits mentioned are increasing opportunities for pro-social development, reducing feelings of isolation and exclusion among minority students, increasing English-language competence and subject matter learning, promoting an equal-status environment, and sensitizing all youth to diversity and helping them learn to live, operate, and communicate in a diverse society. These researchers have also suggested ways to facilitate, promote, strengthen, and support the relationships between language minority and majority students. Their suggestions include certain pedagogical and structural changes in the school including the use of peer or collaborative learning, managed classrooms, a buddy system, and a whole school approach in which school staff share responsibility for the education of all students. Noteworthy is the significant role teachers can play in integrating language minority and majority students. However, I would also suggest that students themselves must assume some responsibility in developing these relationships (i.e., through increased willingness to take risks in interacting with native-English speakers/ESL learners).

Consistent with previous research (Gentry, 1988; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995), I found that the participants often desired friendships with native-English speakers. They mentioned the benefits of befriending Canadian students as including an increased proficiency in English and increased understanding of Canadian culture and values. Despite their desire to develop friendships with native-English speakers, many participants experienced difficulty doing so. Others researchers have also found that some ESL youth have difficulty establishing relationships with their language majority peers (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995; Foscolos, 2000; Watt et al., 1996a).

My findings were similar to those of Foscolos (2000) who concluded that sociocultural factors, including the acquisition of conversational English, were a determining factor in establishing relationships with native-English speakers. I found it curious that, although the current study participants' cited their lack of shared experience and sufficient cultural knowledge and English-language proficiency as partly responsible for their infrequent friendships with native-English speakers, they also mentioned a great deal of experiential, cultural, and linguistic diversity among their ESL friends. For instance, friendships developed among youths who peacefully arrived in Canada with an intact family and those who arrived alone after having fled an unstable country. Among their diverse group of friends the participants tended to speak English, their only common language. However, these youth felt that Canadian students would be less able to understand their broken, or accented, English. The current research findings suggest that factors beyond experiential, cultural, and linguistic familiarity affected the youths' ability to develop and maintain friendships with their native-English speaking peers.

It is possible that friendships developed more quickly and easily among ESL youth due to increased opportunity and common experiences of marginalization. ESL peers were often the first students the participants met in the schools and, for at least their first year, the students with whom they had greatest contact. As participants' contact with Canadian students increased, through entering the mainstream classes or the workforce, so too did their friendships. The participants' stories led me to believe that in addition to cultural and linguistic knowledge, the opportunity to interact with native-English speakers is related to the development of relationships.

However, given the participants' numerous stories of mistreatment at the hands of their native-English speaking peers, it is clear that opportunity alone is insufficient to develop friendships. Participants recounted experiences of being teased and taunted by their native-English speaking peers. These experiences detrimentally affected some youths' educational experiences: they spoke of feeling unwelcome in mainstream classes, resisting class participation, and not wanting to return to school. Other researchers have also found that a school's sociocultural climate can push ESL youth to the margins, thereby negatively affecting their educational experiences (Derwing et al., 1999; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995; Zanger, 1994). For some ESL youth, these negative experiences acted as barriers in the attainment of equitable educational opportunity.

These findings suggest that, although strengthening peer supports and positive interactions among youth may aid in student engagement and retention, proactive measures are necessary to optimize this potential. Unless and until specific and focused efforts to integrate youth are taken, it is likely that ESL and native-English speaking youth will continue to live a very separate existence. Previous research has also

suggested that "de-facto desegregation" will continue unless a conscious effort is made to facilitate and promote interactions among students (Derwing et al., 1999; Glenn & de Jong, 1996; Harklau, 1994; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995).

Powerlessness among ESL youth. Although peer support played a significant role in the participants' integration and comfort in school, I was intrigued by their belief that there were certain issues around which neither their peers, nor anyone else, could provide support. For instance, a number of youth felt that their friends and families were powerlessness to offer assistance with teacher- or policy-related issues. Some of these youth subsequently gave up, either accepting unfair grades and punishment, or leaving school early. This finding suggests that inequitable power relations within the school, or the perception of such, can negatively affect the educational experiences and progression of ESL students. Critical theorists have argued that ethically, schools must go beyond teaching academic "basics" to address minority students' self- and social empowerment (Toohey, 2000; see Wong Fillmore & Meyer, 1992). These theorists believe that making accommodations for these needs would not only increase youths' understanding of the value of their cultural strengths but would also provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to selectively adopt aspects of the dominant culture that they feel will be of benefit (see Wong Fillmore & Meyer, 1992).

The patterns in participants' stories indicate that their level of comfort and school engagement is related in part to the support provided by both peers and teachers. In addition to the school's social context, other factors were implicated as influencing

participants' experience and progression in school. Frequently mentioned by participants

as limiting their educational opportunity was inflexible school practices and policies.

Inflexible School Practices and Policies

The experiences of the participants illustrate that schools' inflexibility can

contribute to early school-leaving. Nieto's (1992) review of the literature also revealed

that rigid school systems negatively affected some minority students.[11] The schools'

failure to accommodate the needs of ESL youth created barriers to their success.

However, adjusting school practices and policies so that they more accurately reflect and

respond to the needs of our increasingly diverse student population could help ensure

equitable access to educational opportunities. Indeed, Canada's policy of

multiculturalism reflects this need to respond to the needs and values of *all* citizens (see

Canadian Heritage, 2004a); true integration is a reciprocal process involving newcomers'

adaptation to Canadian norms and Canada's accommodations to newcomers (see

Canadian Heritage, 2004b).

The participants indicated that specific accommodations are necessary to ensure

educational equity. These accommodations include increasing ESL support, eliminating

or increasing the high school eligibility age cap, and lessening the pressure for all

students to attend school full-time by increasing the per capita funding available to

schools for part-time students.

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[11] It is important to note that the problems created by inflexible school practices and policies are not unique to ESL youth. Rather, the inflexibility issue is one that creates difficulties for any student not fitting into the school system. For instance, although newcomer youth are perhaps more likely to have unique credit requirements and less flexible timetables, those Canadian youth who are required to work long hours also face the difficulty of combining the responsibilities of school and work.

Negative effect of limited amount of time and ESL support. Numerous studies have found that proficiency in English is related to ESL youths' academic and social success (Foscolos, 2000; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995; Watt & Roessingh, 1994; Watt & Roessingh, 2001; Watt et al., 1996a). Consistent with this research, I found that the participants' proficiency in English affected their interactions with native-English speakers, active participation in class, and ability to successfully complete schoolwork, thereby affecting their engagement in school. Some of the participants expressed concern that older ESL students did not have enough time to learn English and complete the required courses for graduation. For one youth, the limited amount of ESL support resulted his being "pushed" into mainstream classes before feeling adequately prepared.

Some participants expressed a belief that increased ESL support would better prepare them for the mainstream. These youth felt that inadequate language proficiency and under-developed reading and writing skills would prevent their success in mainstream classes. This finding suggests a need for both continued ESL support beyond entry into the mainstream and increased time in ESL classes. In contrast, the ESL youth in Kanno and Applebaum's (1995) research desired a more rapid entry into the mainstream. The inconsistency in these findings highlights the importance of individualized academic programs in which students enter into, or are held back from, mainstream classes based on their individual skills and abilities (rather than being determined by their length of time in Canada or limited ESL support).

Despite evidence that it can take anywhere from five to eight years to become academically competent in English (Collier, 1987, 1989; Cummins, 1994a), until recently Ontario schools provided only three years funding support for ESL education. Although

this three-year rule does not translate directly into programming years, meaning that ESL

students are permitted to receive as many years of support as required, restricted funding

can result in a limited availability of ESL and sheltered classes. A recent provincial

change to four years of funding for ESL marks an improvement. However, whether this

increase in funding is specifically allocated to ESL depends on the decisions of individual

school boards (personal communication with a steering committee member, July 30,

2004). Raising the awareness of school board trustees regarding ESL students' needs may

help ensure that their needs are considered when funding decisions are made.

Negative effect of high school eligibility age cap. Some of the participants mentioned

their concerns about the provincial age cap of 21 years for high school attendance.

Although the age cap did not result in early school-leaving among the participants in my

study, other reports (Derwing et al., 1999; Ngo, 2002; Watt & Roessingh, 1994; Watt et

al., 1996a) have shown this to be a significant factor in "pushing" ESL students out of

school. The older age of some ESL youths' upon arrival in Canada, combined with the

length of time required to learn English and complete subject-area courses, can place

these youth at an educational disadvantage. Flexibility regarding the 21-year age cap for

high school attendance may prove beneficial to older ESL students who are close to

graduation and have an already-established support system in their school. A failure to

make such accommodations can create a barrier to ESL students' attainment of equitable

educational opportunity.

Negative effect of limited funding allocated to schools for part-time students. It appears

that a number of the early school-leaver participants in my research would have

continued in high school had they been permitted to attend school on a part-time basis.

For some students, a busy work schedule made it difficult or impossible to attend school

full-time. For others, who required only one or two credits to graduate, the schools'

requirement to attend school full-time seemed unreasonable. Although there exists no

board policy requiring students to attend school full-time, the limited funding allocated to

schools for part-time students can influence whether students are permitted to attend part-

time. In requiring all students to enroll in a minimum number of courses, schools

effectively limited the educational opportunities available to those participants who were

compelled to prioritize their financial, familial, and other responsibilities over school. If

however, the schools' practices reflected the needs of individual students by permitting

them to attend school on a part-time basis, it is likely that a number of students would

benefit considerably. Creating funding formulas responsive to the needs of those

students who can only attend high school on a part-time basis is one possible way to

address this issue. Increased funding for part-time students would better enable school

principals to base their decision solely on individual students' needs.

Macro-Level

The participants' stories, supported by past research, suggest benefits of strategies

addressing pedagogical, relational, structural, and policy changes within the schools.

These findings indicate that teachers, peers, and schools' attempts to increase integration

and respond to ESL students' needs could facilitate a positive educational experience.

However, it would be insufficient to stop there: a focus on adjusting schools or teachers would risk placing the responsibility for educational success within schools alone. This narrow focus would prevent an examination of the societal issues that also affect ESL and other minority students' academic success. A broader focus would consider federal follow-through on immigration policies, socioeconomic disparity, and institutional racism and discrimination. Many authors have noted the need to look beyond language and school-related issues to sociopolitical and socioeconomic factors when considering the academic success of language minority students (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; Coulman, 2003; ESL Task Force, 2000; Glenn & de Jong, 1996; Ivison, 2003; Ngo, 2002; Nieto, 1992; Nikiforuk, 2004; Rothermund, 1986; Wong Fillmore & Meyer, 1992). Indeed, numerous teachers, educational assistants, and school settlement workers within the Kitchener-Waterloo area advised me to look beyond the surface language issues when considering ESL youths' educational experiences. These individuals observed that, although language is the most obvious factor affecting the education of ESL youth, it is not necessarily the most important. More important, they stated, was discrimination within the schools and the school's failure to meet minority students' needs (informal meetings, November, 2003 to June, 2004).

The current findings and past literature suggest that facilitating educational success and ensuring equitable access to educational opportunities might involve increased federal transfer funds and the introduction of a national funding policy for the education of ESL students. Addressing and responding to socioeconomic disparity and racism and other forms of discrimination are also important.

Federal Transfer Funds for ESL Students

The findings of my and others' research suggest that increased ESL support would benefit many students. I have argued that school board trustees must be made aware of, and take into consideration, the special needs of ESL youth when making funding decisions. However, I acknowledge that the decisions of school boards, and indeed provinces and territories, are limited by the insufficient amount of federal funding provided to meet ESL students' needs. Although education is a provincial issue, the federal government holds responsibility for following through on its immigration and settlement policy with the delivery of adequate funds for immigrant youths' educational needs (see Ngo, 2002). Similar arguments were put forth by the Vancouver school board who pressured the federal government to increase transfer funds to the provinces to address the needs of the growing number of ESL students (Chu, 2004). The debate between the provincial and federal government regarding funding for the education of immigrant students is not new: while the provinces push for federal follow-through on immigration policies, the federal government responds that education, including the teaching of ESL, is a provincial issue (Dwyer, 1997).

National Funding Policy for ESL Students

In addition to an inadequate transfer of funds to the provinces, the federal government has also been critiqued for lacking a coherent national policy regarding funding for ESL students. The Coalition for Equal Access to Education (Ngo, 2000) reported that the absence of such a policy has resulted in resource and funding discrepancies across the country. For instance, while British Columbia can provide at

least $1500 for all ESL students, Alberta provides only $720 for only high school ESL

students. It is clear that if schools are expected to meet the needs of the growing number

of ESL students, the federal government must assume increased responsibility in the

sufficient and equitable allocation of funds.

Socioeconomic Disparity

My research indicates that students' financial responsibilities can negatively

affect their educational experience and progression. As previously mentioned, some

participants worked to support themselves or their families. For those youth working

long hours, concentrating in or attending school sometimes proved difficult. Unable to

prioritize academics over financial responsibilities, and not receiving the requested

support from schools that might enable them to balance the two, a number of participants

left school before graduating. That socio-economic and employment status can

contribute to early school-leaving is not a new finding (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002;

Employment and Immigration Canada & Statistics Canada, 1990; Human Resources and

Labour Canada, 1993).

Although I have suggested that schools better accommodate employed students, I

concur with Rothermund (1986) who stated that educational institutions cannot be

"expected to cope with problems which are beyond [their] reach" (p. 11). Rather than

blaming the individual and his/her family, or assigning responsibility to schools, we must

consider the factors that influence immigrants' socioeconomic status. Numerous factors,

including access to professions and trades (Janzen et al., 2004) and discrimination in

hiring practices (Shields, 1993) contribute to un- or under-employment among

immigrants. Until these factors are addressed, inequitable access to education will likely

persist for those immigrant youth who are required to help support their families.

Racism and Other Forms of Discrimination

Multiple researchers have suggested that racism and discrimination within schools

and the larger society affect immigrant and minority students' academic success and

ability to integrate (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; Dei et al., 1997; Hilliard, 1991; Schissel &

Wotherspoon, 2003; Wong Fillmore & Meyer, 1992). My research also indicates that

these factors can affect ESL students' educational experiences. Some of the participants

shared their experiences of racism and discrimination in school. They felt that as a result

of their belonging to a particular ethnic group, or their minority status, they were given

lower grades and unfairly punished. These youth relayed experiences of being mocked

by both teachers and students for their linguistic and cultural differences and of feeling

stigmatized as an ESL student. Although individual teachers and students must be held

responsible for their actions, it is important to remember that these individuals are a

product of a society that itself is dealing with institutional and systemic discrimination.

The literature suggests that an increased discussion of inequity and racism

throughout the 1980s and 1990s resulted in a growing recognition of and response to the

needs of immigrant students (Burnaby et al., 2000). However, informal conversations

with local teachers and an education assistant indicate that the introduction of a

conservative government in the 1990s resulted in a decreased focus on equity, affirmative

action, and anti-racism and period of *"going backwards in our thinking about*

education. " It is clear that eliminating racism and other forms of discrimination within

schools requires not only intention and adequate investments, but also an examination of the racism and discrimination within broader society.

In sum, the current research and past literature indicate that despite a desire to complete high school, graduation is difficult for many ESL youth. The inequitable educational opportunities that result from an education system experienced as neither integrating nor accommodating is best understood and addressed through examining factors at the individual, social, and societal levels.

VII. Recommendations

Given the complexity of early school leaving among ESL youth, an equally complex response is required, one that addresses changes at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Although not possible to address all of the issues related to early school leaving, or to provide an exhaustive list of recommendations, the following specific, concrete recommendations are a start in this necessary process. It is essential that other individuals or groups assume the work necessary to ensure equitable educational opportunities for ESL youth.

The following table can be used as a quick reference for teachers, guidance counselors, parents, school settlement workers, and others working with ESL youth to advance equitable educational opportunities. Each of the recommendations outlined in the table are mentioned in greater depth in the text following the table.

Table 1

Recommendations for Change Needed at the Micro-, Meso-, and Macro-Levels

Micro-Level	• Prioritize class and school attendance • Participate in available extra help sessions • Take risks in developing friendships and participating in class
Meso-Level	• Increase ESL support • Increase teacher collaboration • Increase pre- and in-service teacher training • Regular check-ins with students • Encourage active class participation • Increase translation services • Increase homework assistance • Promote minority and majority student integration • Balance students' social and academic needs • Provide a supportive and encouraging learning environment • Empower youth within the schools • Highlight the assets of youth (i.e., on the way to being, at least, bilingual) • Provide positive role models • Facilitate partnerships between schools, parents, and community organizations • Increase flexibility of school practices and policies • Address racism and other forms of discrimination within the schools • Raise the awareness of school board trustees, and others, regarding the needs of ESL youth
Macro-Level	• Ensure equitable employment opportunities • Increase federal government support of ESL students • Increase per capita funding available to schools for part-time students • Address societal racism and other forms of discrimination

Micro-Level

It is important that the youth themselves take responsibility for their education

through prioritizing class and school attendance, participating in extra help sessions, and

taking more risks in developing friendships and participating in class. Given some

participants' disengagement from school as a result of their skepticism regarding its value, it is also important to heed and respond to these concerns.

Meso-Level

My research indicates that multiple school-related changes could positively influence ESL youths' educational experiences. Although many of the suggested changes relate to teachers, I would like to re-emphasize that teachers are just one of the many factors influencing the education of ESL youth and, as previously mentioned, they face many constraints in their work.

Increased ESL Support Needed

My research indicates that increased ESL support would prove beneficial to many students. While such support might mean an increase in the number of available ESL courses, it could also refer to linking ESL and content area courses (Roessingh, 1999) or developing timetables that better meet the needs of ESL students (Roessingh & Field, 2000). Research indicates that although an increased number of ESL courses is important for some students, others might benefit from more relevant content in ESL courses and/or quicker entry into the mainstream (Derwing et al., 1999; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995). This finding emphasizes the importance of developing individualized work plans for students and increasing collaboration between ESL and mainstream teachers.

It is also important that provisions are made for the continued support of some ESL students beyond their participation in formal ESL programs. This conclusion is in keeping with Roessingh and Field's (2000) study in which the ESL youth emphasized the

importance of ESL support at all stages of their educational progress. My findings

suggest that a failure to do so can have negative consequences for some ESL students.

Similarly, previous research found that the abrupt withdrawal of ESL support, and

accelerated integration into mainstream classes, can leave some students feeling insecure

and unready to compete in academic courses, thereby negatively impacting their

educational success and progression (Derwing et al., 1999; Watt & Roessingh, 2001;

Watt et al., 1996a).

Increased Teacher Collaboration Needed

Providing teachers with the time and resources to work collaboratively is also

important. The adoption of a whole school approach, in which mainstream and ESL

teachers collaborate to meet the needs of all students, could prove beneficial. Research

suggests that if teachers worked together to share their expertise, their teaching would be

strengthened and the needs of their students better met (Glenn & de Jong, 1996; Kanno &

Applebaum, 1995). Sharing their expertise, mainstream teachers could adapt their

instruction methods and course content and structure to meet the special needs of their

ESL students; ESL teachers could adapt their language lessons to better incorporate the

content of their students' subject-area classes.

Increased Pre- and In-Service Teacher Training Needed

I believe that all teachers could benefit from pre- or in-service training so as to

obtain the special knowledge and skills needed to work with students from diverse

linguistic, cultural, and academic backgrounds. Within Waterloo Region, there are

currently efforts underway to encourage teacher colleges to include ESL training in their

basic preparation of teachers (personal conversation with a steering committee member,

July 30, 2004). I feel that it is important to continue advocating for the adoption of these

recommended curricular additions.

My findings suggest that adjustments in teaching methods and practices in

response to ESL students' specific academic needs can positively influence their

educational experiences. These adjustments might include translation services, regular

check-ins, encouraging active participation in class, and the provision of homework

assistance.

Regular Check-ins and Encouragement for Active Class Participation Needed

As suggested, encouraging youths' active participation and having regular check-

ins with ESL students following each class might prove beneficial. Making special efforts

to "draw out" less vocal students and encourage classroom participation among ESL

students appears important in light of my finding that youths' self-consciousness about

their proficiency in English can prevent class participation and result in boredom. Other

research has also found that ESL youths' concern about their language abilities can

prevent them from participating in class (Watt et al., 1996a). Through checking-in with

students after class, teachers can ensure that the class was understood and that students

know what is expected of them. Such actions also provide less vocal students an

opportunity to ask questions and clarify issues or concerns.

Translation Services Needed

Another beneficial adaptation involves offering translation services to students and parents when needed. The participants directly and indirectly indicated that translation is especially important when explaining complex subjects, such as those relating to credit and graduation requirements and academic streams within the school system. Derwing and her colleagues (1999) also found that the high school program and credit requirements need to be explained more clearly to ESL students. Providing translation might avoid student misunderstandings about university entrance requirements and their placement in a lower academic stream, as seems the case with some of the participants. The need for verbal translations of school-related information was also emphasized in a conversation with a local school settlement worker. Her experience with newcomer youth and their parents has taught her that, although written documents in their first language may be provided, these documents are not often read and rarely explained or understood. The resulting unfamiliarity with school policies, including the code of conduct, has had negative consequences for some ESL youth (personal conversation, June 29, 2004). It appears that simply translating documents into multiple languages is an insufficient way to share school-related information with newcomer youth and parents.

Homework Assistance Needed

Given the participants' expressed difficulty in finding the time and support needed to complete their homework, the introduction of extra assistance to those students requiring it could prove beneficial. Foscolos (2000) suggested that teachers could designate the last few minutes of class-time for students to start their homework. This

extra time would help ensure that students can clarify questions and receive help prior to leaving school. Another possibility is the introduction of a homework club in which youth needing assistance are paired with a mentor. Although a few homework clubs exist in the Kitchener-Waterloo area, most of these clubs are neither specifically for ESL secondary school students nor heavily utilized by these youth (personal conversations with service providers, November, 2003-May 2004).

ESL youths' absence at homework clubs may be due to their inability to meet the specific needs of ESL youth, the youths' lack of knowledge of these services, or their inability to attend (due to the time, location, their personal responsibilities). Some of the participants mentioned not attending extra help sessions, or even classes, because they preferred to spend this time with friends. Although it is essential that students take responsibility for their education, I also believe that teachers need to recognize and make room for the social needs of their students by not unnecessarily placing these needs in competition with academics. To balance students' social and academic needs, teachers could create individual work plans with their students. In developing this plan, the teacher could make the student aware of the required work and available help. Students could inform their teachers of the type and amount of support they would prefer to receive. With firmly established guides, based on students' individual needs and teachers' ability and availability, there is less danger of teachers inadvertently acting in a manner perceived as demeaning by their students.

I also believe that rather than offering extra support to students during the lunch-hour or after school, it could be provided during spare periods. Such scheduling would not only bypass the problem of competing with students' social needs but could also

prove beneficial to those students with after-school work or family responsibilities. Another possibility is to meet both the social and academic needs of ESL students at once by pairing them with a peer who could provide academic support. The many and mutual advantages of integrating language minority and majority youth is discussed below.

Promotion of Student Integration Needed

There are a number of steps teachers can take to promote the integration of language minority and majority students. Teachers' could increase their use of collaborative learning in a "managed" classroom, referring to the purposeful mixing of students with diverse language levels and backgrounds in the same group. One of the participants in my study spoke of the benefits of being paired with members of ethnic groups with whom historical relations had been tense. She felt that through her teacher's intervention, these students learned to talk to each other, work together, and even become friends. Kanno and Applebaum (1995) also stress the importance and benefits of managed classrooms. In purposefully mixing students, teachers provide them with opportunities to develop language, interpersonal, and collaboration skills.

Teachers and schools might also introduce a "buddy" system in which newcomer youth are paired with a native-English speaker. Virtually all of the youth in my research mentioned their fears, discomfort, and isolation in the first few days or weeks of school. For some participants, these initial fears diminished after being formally introduced to a "buddy" who accompanied them to their classes, helped them find their way around the school, introduced them to other youth, and attempted to familiarize them with their new school and community. Although most participants who had been paired with a buddy

were highly appreciative, one spoke of discomfort resulting from being paired with two native-English speakers who *"were walking and talking and talking and talking and I didn't understand anything."* I would suggest that it might be beneficial to all students to pair newcomers with both a native English-speaker and another immigrant student, preferably from their own language group, who has been in Canada for a longer time. Including a first-language speaker as part of this buddy system, could help ensure that the newcomer does not feel further alienated by a program intended be beneficial. It might also be beneficial for the newcomer to be introduced to another immigrant youth who has survived the challenges of integration and adaptation.

A Supportive and Encouraging Learning Environment Needed

Some research suggests that it is essential for educational success that teachers and schools to provide a supportive and encouraging environment for all students (Vasquez, 1997; Watt et al., 1996a). As one of the participants suggested, such support might include *"[if] a student is failing, why don't [teachers] just go and ask the student 'Why are you failing? What is your problem?'... give [students] a chance."* Part of providing an environment that encourages students and fosters their self-confidence may involve teachers trying to understand their students and his/her behaviour. Providing opportunities for youth empowerment and role models within the schools could also help to create a supportive and encouraging learning environment.

Youth Empowerment Needed

Many of the youth in my research mentioned feeling powerless within the schools. These youth not only felt that they lacked the power to influence their teachers or school policies, but that their friends, parents, and others were also powerless to effect any change. A response to the issue of powerlessness might include increased opportunities for youth empowerment through creating a student body that represents the needs and interests of ESL youth, hiring an ombudsperson or advocate for ESL youth, and introducing antidiscrimination and antiracist practices and policies within schools.

As power issues were not the focus of my research, my data does not answer the question of whether the participants already have the understanding, knowledge, and skills deemed necessary for their empowerment. Neither does my research provide information on efforts taken within Kitchener-Waterloo schools' to address minority youth empowerment. Future research, including youth and other stakeholders, could provide insight into the effectiveness of any existing efforts to increase minority youth's voice and power within the schools. This research could also provide information on the actions needed to ensure opportunities for ESL youth empowerment.

Positive Role Models Needed

Providing positive role models to ESL youth is important in improving their perception of education. The participants in my research, along with other researchers, suggest that school staff needs to become more diverse so as to more aptly reflect the reality of our population demographics and act as role models for students (Dei et al., 1997; Nieto, 1992). Increasing the diversity of school staff might translate into focused

efforts to recruit, and provide opportunities for, minorities to enter teachers' training

programs and teaching positions. In efforts to diversify school staff, it is important to

heed the advice of De La Luz Reyes and Halcon (1997) so as to avoid covert racism.

These researchers warn of the dangers of tokenism, the type-casting syndrome, the "one-

minority-per-slot" syndrome, and the hairsplitting concept which can result in minorities

not being hired, hired into a limited type and number of positions, or having lower status

within the school. If we hope to not only increase the *number* of minority teachers and

other school staff but to also provide them with a diversity of high-status and well-paid

positions in a multicultural school, it is essential to incorporate antiracist and

antidiscrimination practices into hiring and school environments.

Increased Flexibility of School Needed

I ask whether it is possible to create a more flexible school system that takes into

account and better responds to the needs of all students. In developing this system, one

might consider increased flexibility regarding the high school eligibility age cap,

allowing the needs of individual ESL students to determine the type and amount of

support they receive, and establishing funding formulas that provide adequate support for

part-time high school attendance when required. Adjusting the school system and policies

so that they more accurately reflect and respond to the needs of our increasingly diverse

student population will help ensure equitable access to education.

Raising the awareness of school board trustees regarding ESL students' needs

may help to ensure that these needs are considered when funding decisions are made. For

this reason, my steering committee has discussed plans to share our research findings

with the trustees. Also important is ensuring that school boards have an adequate budget to work with.

Need to Address Racism and Discrimination within Schools

One of the implications of teachers' profound influence on students' educational experiences is that teachers must reflect on the ways in which racist or stereotyped beliefs get played out in their work. Some researchers suggest that confronting this issue would involve an end to the common academic silence on issues of racism within schools and the adoption of an anti-racist approach to education (Dei et al., 1997; Glenn & de Jong, 1996; Nieto, 1992; Watt & Roessingh, 1996).

In confronting these issues, the negative perception of ESL students and programs found in mine and others' research (Derwing et al., 1999; Kanno & Applebaum, 1995; Toohey, 1992) could also be addressed. The findings from this research suggest that increasing the status of ESL youth and programs could aid in student engagement and retention. Rather than viewing ESL youth as deficient in English language proficiency, they could be seen as on their way to becoming (at-least) bilingual (Toohey, 1992).

Macro-Level

Although not the focus of my research, my findings indicate that societal level factors can also affect ESL youths' educational experiences. I will briefly mention the implications of my research on the broader society.

Equitable Employment Opportunities Essential

The participants' stories indicate that their perception of the value of education might be improved by increasing their parents' access to employment. Increasing access would involve addressing the issues of internationally educated persons' access to professions and trades and discrimination in hiring (Janzen et al., 2004; Shields, 1993). With greater access to employment in their field of expertise, immigrant parents would be better able to both serve as role models for their children and to financially support their families. Until these issues are addressed, inequitable access to education will likely persist for those immigrant youth who are required to help support their families.

Additionally, some participants expressed concern that, like their parents, they too would experience difficulty accessing employment. This concern may indicate their lack understanding of the barriers that exist for internationally educated persons in entering their profession or trade. For this reason, I believe it is important that ESL and other immigrant youth are educated about these barriers. Perhaps youths' understanding that the barriers are related to being internationally educated, rather than to being an immigrant, would improve their perception of the value of their own Canadian education.

Federal Government Support Needed

Although education is a provincial and territorial government responsibility, I believe that the federal government should be more responsible in following through on its immigration and settlement policy. This follow-through would involve an increased transfer of funds for immigrant youths' educational needs. In addition, establishing a

coherent national policy would help ensure the sufficient and equitable allocation of

funds for the education of newcomer youth (Ngo, 2002; see Nikiforuk, 2004).

Societal Racism and Other Forms of Discrimination Need to be Addressed

To address racism and discrimination in schools, we must first deal with these

issues within the broader society. Although the specifics of dealing with societal racism

and discrimination are beyond the scope of this research, I will suggest that it is essential

to make a conscious and active decision to address the issues. An adequate investment of

finances, time, and other resources would be required.

VIII. Reflections on the Emergent Nature of Community-Based Research

My research changed in a number of ways from the original proposed project. In

this section I will briefly review my negotiation of the changes resulting from the

challenges of conducting community-based research with marginalized youth.

My research project was designed with the values of participatory action research

in mind, including that of learning as an on-going process (Nelson et al., 1998). I

interpreted this value as allowing for flexibility in the project, or permitting one phase of

the research to inform action in the next. While some of the flexibility in my research was

planned for, including the use of an open-ended, semi-structured interview guide, flexible

thinking was required in other unanticipated areas. The resulting changes in my research

followed systematic thinking about responses to challenges in the field.

Given the nature of my research, a community-based project involving

marginalized youth, flexibility and openness to change proved vital to the success and

timely completion of the project. One of my biggest personal lessons from the research

process was learning not to be tied to a particular plan. Throughout the course of this

project the multiple ways in which the research could be successfully completed became

clear. Although it was hard to let go of my "perfect" research design, I learned that doing

so was not only necessary but sometimes beneficial.

Changes in Data-Collection

I believe that the population with whom I was working, as well as my time

constraints, made my project particularly vulnerable to change. For instance, I had

originally intended to begin interviewing early school-leaver participants in focus groups.

However, following multiple planned focus groups to which one, two, or no, youth

showed up my plan was altered. Initially frustrated, upon reflection I realized that the

youths' failure to attend the scheduled interviews did not indicate a lack of responsibility.

As a matter of fact, quite the opposite was true: these youths had multiple work and

family responsibilities that interfered with their personal schedules.

Given the youth's busy schedules, as well as their frequent employment in

relatively unstable jobs requiring shift work, coordinating focus group interviews proved

very difficult. In the process of scheduling and re-scheduling focus groups, I lost three

potential participants. Rather than risk losing the few remaining early school-leaver

participants, I decided to modify my research methods and conduct individual interviews.

I felt that doing so allowed me to meet one of my main research objectives of

highlighting and making space for the voice of ESL youth within the literature. In

modifying my methods to better suit the participants' schedules, I also avoided last-

minute cancellations of focus groups with poor turn-outs. In one case, a focus group that had been scheduled with five individuals resulted in a two-person in-depth interview. As both participants were eager to go ahead with the interview at that time, and because I felt that they could benefit from each other's presence and support, I decided to proceed with a rather unorthodox, and unplanned for, two-person in-depth interview. I also felt that in working more closely with individual participants' schedules, I was better able to demonstrate my respect for the time and energy they contributed to this research.

Changes in Youth Research Assistant's Roles and Responsibilities

The particular circumstances facing many of the early school-leaver participants, as well as my lack of research funding, affected another aspect of my research. My youth research assistant, intelligent, insightful, and incredibly hard-working, was unable to participate in data collection or analysis. Given the combination of his financial and familial responsibilities, constantly changing employment situation, and work-related illness, with my inability to provide him with more than a few hours of relatively low paying work each month, his involvement in this research could not be a priority. Despite numerous attempts to become re-involved in the project, circumstances prevented this from happening. As I never received prior notice when my research assistant was unable to attend interviews or meetings, they all proceeded without him. I feel that had I been able to provide my youth researcher with increased hours and pay, his involvement in the research could have been prioritized.

Changes in Selection of Participants

Originally hoping to recruit a purposeful sample of youth through both referrals and responses to my information flyer, the challenge of finding ESL youth with the time, interest, and ability to participate resulted in my accepting virtually every youth who both met the criterion and expressed an interest. When my information flyers failed to recruit any participants, I was forced to rely almost entirely on a few individuals within the education system to assist me with recruitment. Given their already busy schedules, and the requirement that they initiate contact with both the youth and their parents, I was able to obtain only a few participants from each school. School rules preventing me from visiting ESL classes, and the scarcity of newcomer youth services in Kitchener-Waterloo (Janzen & Ochocka, 2003) also contributed to my difficulty recruiting participants. My inability to personally introduce myself and my research to potential participants may have increased any existing hesitancies about participating.

Given the difficulties I experienced in recruiting participants, I ended up with a convenience sample of those ESL youth who met my basic criteria. I was pleasantly surprised that my sample was incredibly diverse, including 11 females and 14 males ranging in age from 15-21. These youth had anywhere from no previous education to a ten-year strong academic background. They originated from countries across the globe: including Afghanistan, Kurdistan, Albania, China, Taiwan, India, Sudan, Somalia, and Colombia.

Changes in Age Criteria

As noted above, 15 and 21 year old youths were included in my study despite my original age range of 16-20 years. This change once again resulted from the peculiarities of the ESL youth population. As I became more immersed in the research, I learned that a couple of the participants had "real" and "fake" ages, referring to discrepancies between their home country and immigration documents. Given the recent school experience of the youth whose age fell above my suggested age-range, and that the current 15 year-old student's "real" age met my criteria, I decided to include both of these participants.

Changes in Steering Committee

There were also a number of changes within the steering committee. Following the first meeting, the youth and adult members both agreed that the involvement of an additional adult who works directly with ESL youth would be beneficial. With their approval I invited a school settlement worker, who had requested to become more involved with the research, to join the steering committee. Although this weighted the committee on the adult-heavy side, all members agreed that including this individual would benefit the research.

The number of steering committee meetings throughout the research project also changed from three to two. Since a meeting of the entire steering committee was not always necessary, we decided to remain in frequent contact via telephone and email and to meet individually when necessary. It is likely that another meeting will occur upon completion of my thesis. In this meeting we will further discuss strategies for awareness-raising or other actions.

I had originally planned to facilitate the steering committee meetings on my own but upon consulting with the youth members we decided to co-facilitate the second meeting. We felt that sharing this responsibility would not only help ensure that the youth voice was heard but also provide a skill-building opportunity.

Changes in Data Analysis

Originally I had planned to "provide the participants with [the preliminary] themes and an opportunity for feedback." However, due to the difficulty and great length of time it took for me to contact these youth regarding their transcripts, as well as their lack of interest in receiving the transcripts for their review and feedback, I decided not to attempt contacting the participants with my analysis. I believed that incorporating the assistance of a collaborative analysis team would help ensure the validity of my analysis.

Although I had originally planned to "hold sole responsibility for analyzing the research," following my participation in a workshop in which I was introduced to the concept and benefits of collaborative analysis, I felt it would be beneficial to incorporate this in my research. Through sharing their insights and providing feedback on the data and my preliminary analysis, the analysis team helped to validate my findings.

Challenge of Staying Close to Values

Along with each change in the research process, came a reconsideration of promoting the values of participatory action research. The main way in which I had planned to ensure the values of empowerment, supportive relationships, social change,

and learning as an ongoing process were incorporated in the research included the active participation of multiple stakeholders and the use of a built-in action component.

The active participation of stakeholders included involving a steering committee, youth researcher, and research participants in the research. The adult steering committee members attended meetings and frequently communicated with me through email, telephone conversations, and in personal informal meetings. However, ensuring the active participation of youth, including the youth researcher, was more difficult than originally anticipated. As mentioned, the youths' busy schedules and multiple responsibilities, as well as the difficulty I experienced in contacting some youth via telephone, made their active participation difficult, if not impossible. Rather than ruling out the possibility of youths' active involvement, I sought more practical alternatives: instead of trying to obtain feedback from each of the participants, I worked with a mixed team of youth and adults to collaboratively analyze the data; instead of risking another scheduled meeting with poor turn-out, I relied on email to share the research findings with participants. These activities helped ensure youths' active participation in the research through providing opportunities to assist with analysis and respond to the findings.

Ensuring that social change was an inherent part of the research also proved difficult. During the final phase of the research, I took a backseat role and encouraged the steering committee members to act as "torch-bearers" in communicating the research findings and advocating for change. Although I was able to engage a number of community members in the issue of early school-leaving among ESL youth, sharing the

research findings in the wider community has proved more difficult. This issue is further

dealt with below.

IX. Communication of Research Findings

I designed the current research project with a built-in action component in which

local stakeholders would be engaged in communicating the research findings to create

awareness and address the issue of early school-leaving among ESL learners. At present,

this objective is less developed than I had originally hoped for.

Initially I felt somewhat disappointed that, at present, the steering committee

members have shared with me no specific plans to communicate the research findings. I

had hoped that the action resulting from this research might include communicating the

findings through a community forum or popular theatre presentations in schools. Upon

further reflection, I realized that I held a rather narrow view of action. Although

community forums and popular theatre can be included in an action component, their

absence does not reflect inertia. Action also includes engaging and inspiring others. I

feel that in this regard, the current research was successful: throughout the course of this

project, I involved 25 ESL youth in my research, established an on-going relationship

with five steering committee members, and spoke to over 30 community members about

the issue of early school-leaving among ESL youth. The majority of these individuals

were interested in learning the results of the research.

I shared and discussed the research findings and recommendations with the

steering committee members at both our final meeting and via an e-mailed summary. I

also attempted to provide a summary of the findings and recommendations with the

research participants and with those community members who were informally involved in this project. With the completion of this research, I handed the "torch" to the steering committee members who hold responsibility for any actions that result. The committee members are considering the following possibilities as ways to communicate the research findings: presentations to colleagues, letters to the local newspaper and to the school board trustees.

Throughout this research project I helped to build relationships among, and provide information to, various members of the community. The knowledge of current, local research increases the likelihood of the findings being used. I trust that the steering committee members will communicate the research findings the best of their ability.

X. Importance of this Research

This research was beneficial in that it contributed the voice of ESL youth to the scarce literature on their experiences in, and leaving, school. Three main groups have benefited, or stand to benefit, through this research. First and foremost are the ESL early school-leaver participants. Involvement in this research project (i.e., as members of the steering committee and research team, and as research participants) provided an opportunity for these individuals to collaboratively and actively work toward a better life for themselves, future ESL students, and the community at large. The opportunities to discuss and reflect on their experience and to hear from others who have had similar experiences had potential benefits for these individuals. The understanding that developed from this research may be used by steering committee members in advocacy, awareness-raising, or other activities aimed at improving the educational experiences of

ESL youth. It is also possible that involvement in the project served as an intervention for some participants who may have been prompted to return to school (as was the case with Dei et al., 1997) or who may have used one of the supports or services listed on the community information sheet shared with participants.

I believe that the ESL student participants also benefited from this research. The benefits to these individuals were two-fold. Active involvement in the research project (i.e., as members of the steering committee and collaborative analysis team, and as research participants) provided these students with research experience, increased links to community resources, and an increased understanding of their own and others' educational experiences. The second potential benefit to this group involves the communication of findings and any resulting action which may occur. If the steering committee members use the research findings to raise awareness or to encourage or implement change, I expect an improved educational experience for ESL students.

And lastly, the community at large can potentially benefit from this project. I expect that the involvement of community members throughout the research process (i.e., on the steering committee and collaborative analysis team) will lead to their mobilization as an increased understanding of the issue develops. Community mobilization might be evidenced in the future activities of steering committee members (i.e., communicating the research findings through writing letters to local newspapers, school board trustees, or politicians). Given the known financial cost of school dropouts, as well as Canada's increasing reliance on a highly educated and skilled workforce to meet labour market needs, any resulting action that increases student retention will strengthen the whole community.

XI. Limitations of Research and Future Considerations

My research could have been strengthened through collecting more data. Gathering additional and multiple perspectives could have generated richer information. Another research project could increase the number of stakeholder participants to include more ESL youth, their family members, peers, teachers, and others who are likely to influence their educational experience. Limiting my research to a small sample within one community also decreased the potential impact of the research. For instance, the findings from such a small study are unlikely to lead to the suggested policy changes. Replicating and building upon this research could better identify institutional or systemic barriers to academic success that might be addressed through policy change. Such research could also increase the potential of implementing the recommendations.

My research was further limited by what may have been a biased sample of ESL early school-leaver participants. Due to the difficulty of recruiting youth who had not completed high school, I relied almost exclusively on guidance counselors for referrals. I do not feel that these participants were representative of all ESL youth who leave school early. It is possible that those youths who had left school early with whom school guidance counselors were familiar differed in some ways from those who were not. It may also be precisely because these youth so highly valued their education and wanted to complete high school that they agreed to participate in this study. There is a further possibility that school counselors were biased in determining which youth would be appropriate for me to speak with. Another research project might designate increased time and resources in recruiting participants. Allowing time to build rapport and gain

trust within the newcomer community could help significantly in recruiting diverse participants.

Increased financial resources could also ensure that one, or multiple, youth researchers were actively involved in all research stages. Involving ESL youth could help with recruitment, developing interview questions, conducting interviews, analyzing and interpreting data, communicating findings, and advocating for change. As previously mentioned, a funded research project that offered more hours at better pay may have furthered the youth research assistant's ability and motivation to stay actively involved in the project.

In my thesis, I commented on broader societal issues that can limit the educational opportunities available to ESL youth. Although grounded in the literature, these comments stemmed from my, and my collaborative analysis teams', interpretations of the participants' experiences. I neither specifically explored these issues with the participants nor did I undergo an in-depth investigation or analysis of societal issues. Another project could further investigate the effect of macro-level issues on the educational experience of ESL youth.

I have highlighted the barriers to equitable educational opportunities for ESL youth in this thesis. I write at length of their struggles and difficulties within the education system. The danger of focusing on and addressing the youths' challenges is the less frequent mention of their incredible strengths. Another research project might focus on the strengths and coping strategies of ESL youth.

I feel that the biggest limitation of this research is the absence of a clear and organized action component. Although there is on-going discussion among steering

committee members regarding the communication of research findings, as yet, no actions have been taken. I believe that the current lack of action results in part from the busy schedules and lack of resources available to steering committee members. I am concerned that as the steering committee members' workload increases, so too will the likelihood of inaction. I feel that future action research should dedicate adequate resources to the final phase of the research. All action research is limited to the extent that time and funds are insufficient to communicate the research findings and take necessary actions. I believe that the participants, and other ESL youth, could benefit from increased discussion and action around the issues highlighted in this research.

XII. Conclusion

Among the participants in my research were aspiring engineers, computer animators, actors, health-care workers, and pilots. These youth brought to Canada knowledge of multiple languages, countries, and customs, and a diversity of life experiences. Each participant was keenly aware of the value of education and strongly motivated to complete high school and *"be something."* Their professional and educational goals, and their diverse knowledge base, indicate that ESL youth have a great deal to contribute to Canadian society. Unfortunately, my findings suggest that ESL youth encounter multiple barriers to a successful educational experience.

Patterns in the participants' stories indicate inequitable educational opportunity can result from an education that is neither integrating nor accommodating. A combination of personal circumstances, the school's social context, and inflexible school practices and policies, limited some participants' ability to progress in their education.

Clearly, if Canada hopes to provide all students with equitable educational opportunities, it must respond to the unique needs of ESL youth. The entire community stands to benefit from the successful integration of newcomer students. These youth are our future. Investing in their education is an investment in our country. We would do well to heed the words of the Dutch philosopher, Desiderius Erasmus, who said, *"The main hope of a nation lies in the proper education of its youth."*

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Appendix 1:

Workplan with Timelines

Activities	Responsible Person(s)	Timeline
Develop a plan for and begin document/literature review	Maureen	May-October
Ethics review	Maureen	October-November
Develop information flyer	Maureen and Hayan	November - December
Recruit steering committee members	Maureen	November
Hire and train youth researcher	Maureen	November - December
Meet with Youth Steering Committee Members	Maureen	January
Document and literature review summarized	Maureen	January
Plan and hold first steering committee meeting	Maureen and youth committee members	January
Interview questions developed	Maureen and Hayan	January
Communication with Steering Committee Members		On-going
Interviews conducted	Maureen	February - May
Preliminary Analysis	Maureen	February - June
Plan and hold collaborative analysis team meeting	Maureen and collaborative analysis team	July
Complete analysis and summarize all information gathered	Maureen	July
Second steering committee meeting	Maureen	July
Complete thesis	Maureen	October
Communication of Research Findings	Steering committee	October -

Appendix 2:
<u>Budget</u>

Expenditure Item	Amount of Cash Expenses
Youth Researcher ($10/hour for approximately 10 hours)	$100
Youth steering committee and collaborative analysis team members ($10/meeting for 4 meetings)	$40
Food/beverages for 2 steering committee meetings (2 x $20)	$40
Food/beverages for 1 collaborative analysis team meeting (1 x $20)	$20
Supplies for 2 focus groups (2 x $20)	$40
Food/drinks for 5 in-depth interviews ($10/interview)	$50
Honouraria for participants ($10 x 25 participants)	$250
Printing and copying	$125
TOTAL	**$665**

Appendix 3:
<u>**Wilfrid Laurier University Informed Consent Form**</u>
Understanding and Addressing Dropping Out of Secondary School Among
Learners of English as a Second Language
Principal Investigator: L. Maureen Lymburner
Thesis Advisor: Dr. Terry L. Mitchell

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled "**Understanding and Addressing Dropping out of Secondary School Among Learners of English as a Second Language.**" This research is being completed by Maureen Lymburner, a graduate student at Wilfrid Laurier University, in partial fulfillment of her Masters degree in Community Psychology. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of, and address, early school leaving among English as a second language (ESL) students.

You are invited to participate in a 1.5-2 hour focus group interview with Maureen Lymburner and Hayan Yassin, her youth research assistant. There will be 7-9 other ESL youths participating in the focus group. The total number of participants in the overall research project is approximately 23-30 individuals.

As an ESL student, you have been selected as someone who has something to share on your educational experiences. Through participation in this research, you will have an opportunity to voice your experiences and perceptions and learn of the experiences of other ESL youths. You will also gain knowledge of the research process and services available in the community and will contribute to the body of knowledge on the educational experiences of ESL secondary school non-completers and students in Waterloo Region.

As there is a possibility that you will experience discomfort in sharing your perceptions of your educational experiences, efforts will be taken to lessen this risk. You will be consulted on the interview location. Additionally, within three weeks of the interview date, you will receive a copy of its transcription for your review and approval. At this time, you will have an opportunity to inform Maureen of anything you wish to exclude from the final report or would not wish to have quoted. You will also receive a list of local agencies or services which provide support to immigrant youth and early school leavers.

The interview will be tape-recorded. This will help me in my later analysis and writing. To protect your confidentiality, all notes and tapes from this interview will be stored in a safe place (locked in my home with only myself having access), the notes of the interview will not be identified by name, and your name will not be associated with any quotes found in any written summaries. The only person who will view the interview notes and tapes will be Maureen, with the exception of Dr. Terry Mitchell, thesis advisor, who may be consulted for analysis purposes. The information gathered in this interview will be used in a Masters thesis at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Initials: _____   Date: _____

Appendix 4:
Wilfrid Laurier University Parental Consent Form
Understanding and Addressing Dropping Out of Secondary School Among Learners
of English as a Second Language
Principal Investigator: L. Maureen Lymburner
Thesis Advisor: Dr. Terry L. Mitchell

Your child is invited to participate in a research study called "Understanding and Addressing Dropping out of Secondary School Among Learners of English as a Second Language." This research is being conducted as part of Masters of Arts degree by Maureen Lymburner. Maureen is Community Psychology graduate student at Wilfrid Laurier University. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of, and address, early school leaving among English as a second language (ESL) students.

Your child is invited to join a 2-hour focus group interview with Maureen Lymburner and Hayan Yassin, her youth research assistant. A focus group is a form of group interview. Your child will join 7-9 other ESL students in answering research questions. The total number of participants in the overall research project is about 23 individuals.

As an ESL student, your child has been selected as someone who has something to share on her/his educational experiences. Through participation in this research, your child will be able to voice her/his experiences and perceptions. Your child will also learn of the experiences of other ESL youths. S/he will learn about research and about the services available in the community. Through being interviewed, your child will provide important information about the educational experiences of ESL secondary school dropouts and students in Waterloo Region. This information will be an important addition to the literature. It may also be used to guide future research or action aiming to improve the educational experiences of ESL youths. The information gathered in this research will be used in a Masters thesis at Wilfrid Laurier University.

It is possible that your child will feel a little uncomfortable in sharing perceptions of her/his educational experiences. Efforts will be taken to decrease this risk: your child will be consulted as to the interview location. Also, soon after the interview, your child will get a written copy of the interview to review for approval. At this time, your child will have an opportunity to inform Maureen of anything s/he wants excluded from the final report or does not want quoted. Your child will also receive a list of local agencies or services which provide support to immigrant youth and early school leavers.

I will request that all focus group participants respect each other's confidentiality. They will be asked to keep private the other participants' comments, names, and other personal details. Although your child's confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, its importance will be stressed with all participants prior to the interview. The interview will be tape-recorded. Your child's name will not be written on the tape or in any of the interview notes. To protect your child's privacy, all notes and tapes from this interview will be stored in a safe place (locked in my home with only myself having access).

Initials: _____   Date: _____

Appendix 7:
Understanding and Addressing Early School Leaving Among
Learners of English as a Second Language (ESL)
Interview Guide

Some people are worried that too many ESL students do not graduate from secondary school. I want to understand why some ESL students are leaving school early. I want to learn about what school is like for ESL youth. I am interested in hearing your stories about school life. You can teach me about the good and bad parts of school. Your answers can help me, and others, understand what is needed to improve school for ESL students.

Background

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
    - Age: _____
    - Sex: Male _____   Female ____
    - Name of school: _____
    - Home Country: _____
    - Number of Years in Canada _____
    - You came to Canada as a: refugee _____   immigrant _____
    - Number of years in school before arriving in Canada: _____
    - How was your English when you came to Canada:
      no English _____   very little English_____   some English___
      good English_____
    - Do you work? Yes _____   No _____
    - Your mother:
      Works_____   Does not work _____
    - Your father:
      Works_____   Does not work _____
    - At least one of your parents went to:
      Elementary School ___ High School ___ College ___ University_____
    - Your parents think school is:
      Not important _____A little important_____ Very important _____

School Experiences

2. Tell me about your first few days/weeks in school in Waterloo/Kitchener. How did school life change after these first few days?

3. Tell me about what your typical school day was like.

4. Tell me about the friends you had in school.

5. Tell me about the high school you attended.

6. Tell me about the teachers. Did they have high expectations for you? Encourage you? Were they interested in your country of origin and your culture?

7. Tell me about the ESL classes in the school you attended.

8. Tell me about your (mainstream) classes with native English-speakers.

9. Tell me about what you did after school.
   ➢ Involvement with school clubs/activities?
   ➢ If not, would you like to be more involved? What might prevent this?

10. Tell me about a bad experience you had at school.

11. Tell me about any doubts/problems you had at school. When you had doubts/problems what did you do?

Reflections and Problem Solving

12. What did you think was the best and worst part of school?

13. Did you feel valued in school? What did teachers/the school do to help you feel valued/important?

14. Did you feel respected in school? Did you feel that your culture was respected in school? How was this respect (or lack of respect) shown? What did that feel like?

15. Did people do enough to help you (and other ESL youth)? What did that feel like?

16. Tell me about why you left school before graduating? Why might other ESL youth do the same?

17. Tell me about what you think might help ESL students to stay in school?
   ➢ What different groups might be responsible for these things?

18. Is there anything else you would like to say?