

# Diverse Teachers for Diverse Students: Internationally Educated and Canadian-born Teachers' Preparedness to Teach English Language Learners

Farahnaz Faez

*University of Western Ontario*

## Abstract

This article describes a study that examines Canadian-born and internationally educated teachers' (IETs') self-perceived preparedness to teach English language learners (ELLs). The study employed a survey and interviews to examine teacher candidates': (a) level of empathy with ELLs, (b) sense of preparedness to teach ELLs, and (c) beliefs about their roles and responsibilities in multilingual classrooms. The study also explores the impact of teacher preparation to teach in multilingual classrooms. Findings suggest that IETs have a higher self-perceived empathy towards ELLs due to their shared backgrounds but personal experiences and empathy are insufficient for providing support and targeted instruction for ELLs. All teachers, regardless of their backgrounds, require appropriate preparation to address the needs of ELLs.

**Keywords:** diversity, ELLs, multilingual classrooms, internationally educated teachers, preparedness

## Résumé

Cet article traite d'une étude examinant la perception qu'ont les enseignants Canadiens formés hors du pays quant à leur préparation adéquate à enseigner l'anglais comme langue seconde (ALS) au Canada. L'étude se base sur une enquête et des entrevues auprès des futurs professeurs qui examinent (a) leur niveau d'empathie vis-à-vis des étudiants d'ALS, (b) leur perception quant à leur préparation professionnelle (c) et leurs croyances quant à leurs rôles et leurs responsabilités dans les salles de classe multilingues. Cette étude explore également l'impact qu'a la formation professionnelle de l'enseignant dans les salles de classes multilingues. Les données révèlent que les enseignants formés hors du Canada sympathisent davantage avec leurs étudiants d'ALS compte tenu de leur expérience commune d'immigré, mais que cela ne signifie pas forcément qu'ils soient mieux à même de répondre aux besoins de formation des apprenants d'ALS.

**Mots-clés:** diversité, anglais langue seconde, salles de classe multilingues, enseignants formés hors du Canada, préparation professionnelle

## **Diverse Teachers for Diverse Students: Internationally Educated and Canadian-born Teachers' Preparedness to Teach English Language Learners**

### **Introduction**

North American classrooms continue to become increasingly diverse in light of current immigration patterns. In the United States, the proportion of students of diverse backgrounds in many urban and rural areas exceeds 60% (Lau, Dandy, & Hoffman, 2007). In Canada, immigration trends have resulted in an unprecedented number of English language learners (ELLs)<sup>1</sup> in the school system. Over 50% of newcomers to Canada settle in Ontario (People for Education, 2008). In large school boards such as the Toronto District School Board, almost half (47%) of the student population have a language other than English as their mother tongue or primary home language (TDSB, 2011). As the student body in North American classrooms becomes more diverse, educators are seeking alternate instructional programs and strategies to better serve these students. There is ample evidence that in spite of the rapid increase in the number of ELLs in mainstream classrooms, teachers do not have the required competence and skills to support these students (Evans, Arnot-Hopffer, & Jurich, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Rushton, 2000; Webster & Valeo, 2011). Another major concern about the education of a diverse student population is the mismatch between the proportion of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and teachers of similar backgrounds (e.g., Solomon, 1997; Thiessen, Bascia, & Goodson, 1996). The inclusion of teachers of backgrounds similar to those of the students has been recognized as being critical (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009), especially for the success of a diverse student population (e.g., Solomon, 1997; Zirkel, 2002) as they bring a unique perspective to education due to their personal experiences with diversity-related issues<sup>2</sup> (Quiocho & Rios, 2000). Yet, little is known about how well-prepared they feel to teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms. The purpose of this paper is to address this gap. This study juxtaposed Canadian-born and internationally educated teachers' (IETs')<sup>3</sup> perceptions regarding their: (a) level of empathy with ELLs, (b) sense of preparedness to teach ELLs, and (c) roles and responsibilities towards ELLs. It also examined the impact of teacher preparation on teachers' perceptions towards these issues. I start by providing a context for teacher education programs in Canada with particular attention to their focus on preparing teachers for diversity and teaching ELLs. Next, I present the conceptual framework drawing on research in: (a) teacher diversity, (b) internationally educated teachers, (c) teacher empathy, (d) linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogy, and (e) sense of preparedness. I then describe the study's participants, methodology, and findings. Finally, I examine and discuss the implications of the findings for policy and practice in teacher education programs.

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<sup>1</sup> The term English language learners (ELLs) has been used to refer to linguistically and culturally diverse individuals for whom English is not a first language. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) ELLs can include new comer and Canadian born students such as aboriginal, Francophone and children born in immigrant communities.

<sup>2</sup> Diversity related issues include, but are not limited to, matters related to race, language, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation. This paper focuses on linguistic diversity though other forms of diversity obviously play a major role in forming individuals' identity.

<sup>3</sup> The term internationally educated teacher has been used to refer to a teacher who has attended school or lived and/or worked outside Canada for an extended period of time and may have teaching experience and a teaching certificate from his/her country of origin.

### **Teacher Education Programs: Attention to Diversity and Teaching ELLs**

In Canada, education is governed provincially and each of the provinces and territories establish their own teacher certification criteria. In Ontario, the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) (established in 1997) regulates all aspects of the teaching profession and sets guidelines for teacher education programs that are delivered by faculties of education in universities across Ontario. As providers of teacher education, individual faculties are autonomous and determine their own content for the programs they offer. As such, pedagogies and approaches for preparing teachers to work in Ontario's increasingly diverse classrooms vary greatly among faculties. In spite of the large number of ELLs in elementary and secondary classrooms, preparing teachers to teach in multilingual and multicultural classrooms does not receive sufficient attention in initial teacher education programs. Attention to diversity and English as a second language (ESL)<sup>4</sup> is not a mandated component of most teacher education programs accredited by the OCT. ESL is a credential that is added to licensure in primary areas of qualification such as elementary education, math, or history, and can only be obtained as an additional qualification after graduating from the program. Through their own initiatives, some initial teacher education programs in Ontario offer elective courses focusing on ESL-inclusive pedagogy<sup>5</sup> in Kindergarten through Grade 12 (K-12) classrooms ranging from 18-36 hours of instruction for each course. Some programs offer ESL-inclusive pedagogy as optional workshop sessions throughout the program. Yet, other programs claim that ESL-inclusive pedagogy is infused into the offerings of other courses (i.e., ESL and teaching subjects such as math, history, or science pedagogy are integrated). There is no uniform approach to addressing the needs of ELLs in elementary and secondary classrooms and, in fact, a large number of graduating teachers may not receive any preparation for teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

### **Teacher Diversity**

An important impetus in considerations of diversifying the teaching pool is exercising equitable hiring practices in the teaching profession. There is a clear mismatch in the current education system in Canada. The increasing number of immigrants to the country has not resulted in a proportionate increase in the student body and teaching force (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). In fact, in the context of rapid increase in the racialized population in Canada the proportion of teachers of diverse backgrounds has decreased (ibid). Surveys of newly accredited teachers in Ontario identify that IETs face great challenges obtaining full-time permanent teaching positions (McIntyre, 2004). Their under-representation has been attributed to systemic discrimination that limits the access of these teachers to the profession (Schmidt, 2010). If they are employed, they are often marginalized and discriminated within the profession (Deters, 2009). The consideration of the linguistic and cultural diversity in the student body in Canadian classrooms is equally important to the issue of employment equity. Scholars have argued that inclusion of teachers of diverse background in the school system is crucial for the unprecedented diversity of the student population (e.g., Dei, 2002; Quijcho & Rios, 2000; Solomon, 1997; Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009; Thiessen, Bascia, & Goodson, 1996; Villegas & Davis, 2007, among others). In support of diversifying the teaching force, issues of proportionate representation (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009; Solomon, 1997), appropriate

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<sup>4</sup> English as a second language has been used to refer to the teaching and learning of English as a second, third, nth or additional language.

<sup>5</sup> ESL-inclusive pedagogy includes instruction that is tailored to the needs of ELLs in mainstream classrooms who are learning content such as math, science or geography and English at the same time.

role models (Dei, 1995; Solomon, 1997; Zirkel, 2002), building relationship with students of diverse backgrounds (Villegas & Lucas, 2004), delivering relevant pedagogy (Solomon, 1997), and positive student achievement (Meier, Wrinkle, & Polinard, 1999) have been particularly emphasized. In previous studies on teacher diversity, there is a paucity of research that examines how these teachers themselves perceive their capacity to teach students of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This study addresses this issue.

### **Internationally Educated Teachers**

The term internationally educated teacher warrants attention and clarification. There are two distinct areas of focus on teachers who do not speak English as their first language. Within the context of second language education, and especially teaching English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL), these teachers have been referred to as non-native English speaking teachers (NNEST).<sup>6</sup> Research surrounding NNESTs has predominantly focused on English language teaching experiences of these teachers in foreign language contexts. In the past two decades, there has been a growing body of research looking at issues pertaining to NNESTs (e.g., Braine, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, 2004; Llorca, 2005; Moussu & Lurda, 2008). These issues range from questioning the privilege of native speakers (e.g., Braine, 1999; Mahboob, 2010), examining linguistic and cultural knowledge of NNESTs (e.g., Kamhi-Stein, 2000; Medgyes, 1994, 2001; Tang, 1997), exploring NNESTs' pedagogical knowledge (e.g., Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Phillipson, 1992, 2009), and collaboration between native and NNESTs (De Oliveira & Richardson, 2004) to broader issues such as NNESTs within the context of English globalization and world Englishes (e.g., Canagarajah, 1999, 2005; Pennycook, 2004). With regards to NNESTs' pedagogical knowledge, which is the focus of this study, NNESTs are recognized for their insights into the English language learning process, anticipating problematic areas and learner errors, providing appropriate and targeted instruction, and being good role models for their students (Cook, 2005; Medgyes, 2001; Pasternak & Bailey, 2004; Phillipson, 1992, 2009).

In Canada, teachers who are newcomers, have studied for an extensive period of time in an international context, and who may also have teaching experience and certificates from their countries of origin are often referred to as internationally educated teachers. This term is generally used in the context of Kindergarten through Grade 12 (K-12) education. There is a growing body of literature that has examined issues pertaining to IETs (see Gagné & Inbar, 2005; Gagné, 2009; Schmidt, 2010). These studies have focused on their experiences in teacher education programs (Cho, 2010; Faez, 2007, 2010; Gambhir, 2004), their participation and marginalization in the teaching profession (Chassels, 2010; Deters, 2009; Pollock, 2010), as well as their unemployment and under-employment (Chassels, 2004; Lum, Chassels, & Rasheed, 2008; Pollock, 2010).

Issues related to NNESTs are still relevant to IETs, as most IETs don't speak English as their first language. However, it is important to realize that in K-12 programs, IETs may teach subjects other than English such as math, sciences, and social studies. Therefore, there may be

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<sup>6</sup> The native and non-native dichotomy has been strongly criticized in the applied linguistics literature (e.g., Braine, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, 2004; Llorca, 2005). I have alluded to the problematic native/non-native dichotomy and argued for understanding linguistic identities as a complex, dynamic, multiple and context-specific phenomenon (Faez, 2011a, 2011b) elsewhere. In spite of this acknowledgement, I use these labels when referring to literature that has explored native/non-native language teacher issues to avoid distorting the literature. I refrain from using the labels in my discussions and use terms such as "speakers of English as a first language" or "speakers of English as a second language" and also "internationally educated teacher."

different issues at play as they have not been trained to teach English. Furthermore, within the North American context, there is also a body of literature emphasizing the cultural and ethnic diversity of teachers (e.g., Dei, 1995; Solomon, 1997) and highlighting the potential of these teachers in providing culturally responsive pedagogy. As IETs are predominantly NNESTs and from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, there are overlapping bodies of literature that pertain to this group of teachers. This study underscores the linguistic diversity of teachers and their preparedness to teach and work with ELLs.

### **Empathy**

The issue of empathy and understanding has been particularly emphasized in discussions of teacher diversity (e.g. Braine, 1999; Dei, 1995; Kamhi-stein, 2004; Medgyes, 1992; Phillipson, 1992; Solomon, 1997). Their similar backgrounds and experiences to students of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds have been recognized as invaluable in today's multilingual and multicultural classrooms. Due to their shared experiences with marginalization and discrimination, teachers of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are well-positioned to develop positive relationships with their students (Villegas & Lucas, 2004). Strong arguments have been made that Caucasian teachers are not able to understand and relate to students of colour in ways that teachers of colour are able to do so (e.g., Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli 2009). Similarly, the literature highlights how, due to their personal and professional experiences with language learning, NNESTs are more empathic towards language learners and understand their challenges better than native English speaking teachers (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Barratt & Kontra, 2000; Hulsebosch & Koerner, 1993; Medgyes, 2001). In a study that compared native English speaking and non-native English speaking teacher characteristics, Medgyes (1994) identified six positive attributes of NNESTs: (a) they provide a good learner model for their students, (b) they are able to teach language learning strategies effectively, (c) they are able to provide information about the language under study, (d) they understand the challenges and needs of their students, (e) they are able to predict student errors and language difficulties of students, and (f) if they share the student's first language, they can use it to their advantage. These findings have been corroborated by later research. Barratt & Kontra (2000) reported that native speaking teachers are unable to make useful comparisons between the learner's first language and English and, as such, are unable to empathize with students going through the language learning process. Arva & Medgyes (2000) emphasize that a unique advantage of NNESTs over their native-speaking counterparts is that NNESTs can empathize with their students' learning challenges and better understand their nostalgic feelings and experiences of culture shock.

### **Linguistically and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

The argument for the significance of linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogy for students of diverse backgrounds is abundant. Many scholars and educational institutions have called for instruction that is sensitive to the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of ELLs (Banks, 2006; Coelho, 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 2007, 2008). Given the low academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students in the United States, Gay (2000, 2001) has argued that instruction has not been culturally relevant and responsive for these groups of learners. In Canada, the overall performance of ELLs compared to Canadian-born students has not been necessarily lower (Worswick, 2004) and they have, overall, shown stronger aspirations to go on to post-secondary education (Taylor Krahn, 2005). However, certain groups of students, particularly those of African and Aboriginal backgrounds, have revealed patterns of low

academic achievement and higher drop-out rates (Solomon, 1992; Statistics Canada, 2007). Arguments have been made that the content and instructional practices in K-12 classrooms across North America promote a Eurocentric world view that is only responsive to White middle-class students (Banks, 2006; Coelho, 2004). Students of diverse backgrounds bring unique cultural practices and norms that are often not acknowledged or valued in the school system (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Culturally responsive pedagogy recognizes the varied value systems such as dress and appearance, work and play, health and hygiene, and school rituals that students of different cultural backgrounds bring to their education and addresses them effectively (Diaz-Rico, 2012). This form of instruction results in positive educational outcomes (Ware, 2006). Instruction that is not tailored to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds brings about negative academic outcomes.

### **Sense of Preparedness**

Teachers' perceptions of their capacity and preparedness to perform certain tasks are known to be a strong predictor of their classroom performance (Pappamihel, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). This capacity has been referred to as teachers' sense of self-efficacy. In particular, teacher efficacy has been defined as "the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 233). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs have a fundamental impact on their teaching practices (Knoblauch & Hoy, 2008) and are context-dependent and task-specific (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Bong, 2006). This is why it is essential to explore teachers' efficacy beliefs and to examine them with regards to specific teaching tasks in specific contexts.

There is growing evidence that teachers are generally not prepared to work with ELLs in subject area classrooms such as math and science (see Flynn & Hill, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Rushton, 2000; Siwatu, 2011; Webster & Valeo, 2011). In fact, many teachers are unaware of their roles and responsibilities towards ELLs in mainstream classrooms (Meskill, 2005). Taylor and Sobel (2003) reported that 73% of teachers identified the diverse student body as their greatest challenge in teaching. Given the argument for including more teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and the literature that suggests that—as a result of their personal experiences with learning English as a second language and diversity-related issues—IETs are better positioned to support ELLs, it is important to examine whether these teachers are, in fact, better prepared to teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

### **The Study**

The research reported here is an investigation into IETs' and Canadian-born teachers' perceptions of their empathy and their preparedness to teach ELLs, as well as their roles and responsibilities towards ELLs in content area classrooms. The questions that guided this study are:

1. How do Canadian and internationally educated teacher candidates perceive their (a) level of empathy with ELLs, (b) preparedness to teach ELLs, and (c) roles and responsibilities towards ELLs in mainstream classrooms?
2. How are the differences in the perceptions of these teacher candidates related to their personal backgrounds and the professional preparation that they received?

## Participants

Data for this study were drawn from a pool of 25 linguistically diverse teacher candidates recruited for a larger study that examined the experiences of internationally educated and Canadian-born teacher candidates (TCs). The TCs were enrolled in a one-year intensive Bachelor of Education program at an Ontario university. The program consisted of five face-to-face full courses, which included general teacher education courses such as educational psychology, content area curriculum and pedagogy courses, two four-week practica, an internship, and an elective course. The program was offered in thematically-oriented cohorts that emphasized various themes such as Catholic education, French pedagogy, teaching in multilingual classrooms, or in geographically oriented cohorts that were scheduled at locations convenient to teacher candidates and had no particular thematic focus. An ESL course was offered as an elective course but none of the participants in this study had taken the ESL elective course. Non-credit 3-hour optional ESL-inclusive pedagogy workshops were offered as part of the program that TCs could take at an additional nominal fee. Some of the participants had attended these workshops.

The sample of 25 participants consisted of 17 (68%) female and 8 (32%) male participants. Eighteen of the 25 (72%) participants were TCs (Canadian-born and internationally educated) who had enrolled in the cohort that specialized in preparing teachers for multilingual and multicultural classrooms. This cohort (ESL-cohort) had a strong focus on diversity-related issues, preparing teacher candidates for teaching in diverse classrooms and emphasizing the preparation of all teachers for linguistically and culturally diverse student populations. Due to its emphasis, the ESL-cohort attracted more TCs from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. I started participant recruitment in this cohort and since only seven of the 18 participants were foreign-born, I had to look into recruiting more foreign-born TCs from the broader Bachelor of Education program. I recruited seven internationally educated teacher candidates (IETCs) from the larger Bachelor of Education program. These participants had selected different foci in the program and were members of different cohorts. Thus, 11 (44%) participants were born in Canada and 14 (56%) were born in a foreign country. Eleven of the 25 participants reported English as their first language. However, not all the Canadian-born participants reported English as their first language. Two of the Canadian-born participants were born to immigrant parents from Italy and India and stated that Italian and Punjabi (respectively) were their first languages. Two of the foreign-born participants indicated English was their first language. One was born in Taiwan to an English-speaking mother originally from Canada and the other participant was originally from India.

## Method and Procedure

Data for this study was collected through a questionnaire and interviews with participating TCs. The first part of the questionnaire included items designed to elicit demographic information, participants' first and additional languages, and their level of proficiency as well as their experiences learning and teaching languages. The second part of the questionnaire sought information on participants' self-perceived level of empathy with ELLs, preparedness to teach ELLs, and level of responsibility towards developing ELLs' language ability in mainstream classrooms. Participants used a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (extremely) to rate their self-perceptions of the various items of preparedness on the questionnaire. The second part of the questionnaire is the focus of analysis for this paper. The items on the questionnaire were designed drawing on literature pertaining to ESL-inclusive pedagogy, IETs, and NNESTs, as well as self-efficacy and teacher preparedness. Participants also participated in follow-up

semi-structured interviews to better elaborate on their sense of preparedness, explain reasons for their choices, and explain their experiences in the teacher education program. Each interview was approximately one hour in length. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis proceeded in two phases. In the first phase, quantitative data analytic procedures consisted of descriptive statistics. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the portion of the questionnaire that inquired about teacher candidates' level of empathy, preparedness to teach, and responsibilities. The qualitative data analysis included identifying themes that elaborated on and provided a better understanding of the items in the questionnaire.

### **Findings**

The first analysis focused on teacher candidates' self-reported ratings of their level of empathy towards ELLs, understanding of diversity related issues, overall sense of preparedness to teach, preparedness to teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms, and their sense of responsibility towards ELLs in mainstream classrooms. This analysis compares Canadian-born teacher candidates with their foreign-born counterparts (IETCs). Means and standard deviations are presented for both groups (see Table 1). An examination of the means reveals that IETCs express a relatively higher level of both empathy towards ELLs and understanding of diversity-related issues compared to Canadian-born TCs who predominantly spoke English as their first language (i.e., an average 9.8 and 9.2 compared to 8.5 and 8.4, respectively). The standard deviations however are higher for the Canadian-born TCs (1.4 and 1.2) on these two items compared to IETCs (0.4 and 0.6), indicating that there is a higher in-group variation. This is perhaps due to the fact that two of the Canadian-born participants were from immigrant families whose home language was not English and expressed a very high level of empathy with ELLs. Canadian-born teacher candidates indicated a higher level of preparedness to teach (overall) compared to IETCs (8.5 versus 7.8). On the other hand, IETCs indicated a higher sense of preparedness to teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms than Canadian-born teacher candidates (9.1 versus 8.5). In spite of their high self-perceived preparedness to teach ELLs, IETCs showed a considerably lower sense of responsibility towards ELLs in mainstream classrooms than Canadian-born participants (7.9 versus 10) with a relatively high in-group variation ( $SD = 2.1$ ).



Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Questionnaire Items*

	Canadian-born		IETs	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Level of empathy with ELLs	8.5	1.4	9.8	0.4
Level of understanding of diversity-related issues	8.4	1.2	9.2	0.6
Preparedness to teach (overall)	8.5	0.6	7.8	0.7
Preparedness to teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms	8.5	0.5	9.1	0.6
Responsibility towards ELLs in mainstream classrooms	9.9	0.3	7.9	2.1

The second analysis compared the findings from teacher candidates who were enrolled in the ESL-cohort, which focused on teaching in multilingual classrooms ( $n = 18$ ) and the IETCs who were not enrolled in this program ( $n = 7$ ) (see Table 2). By examining the ESL-cohort that includes both Canadian-born and IETCs, it was expected that the means on various questionnaire items would change. Means for IETCs' level of empathy and understanding of diversity issues is still higher compared to the ESL-cohort group (9.7 and 8.9 compared to 9.1 and 8.8). What is worth examining more closely are the following items: (a) preparedness to teach, (b) preparedness to teach ELLs, and (c) perceptions of responsibility towards ELLs. Findings reveal that those who were not enrolled in the ESL-cohort, all of whom were IETCs, had a lower sense of preparedness to teach compared to those who participated in the programs (7.4 versus 8.4). Also ESL-cohort participants were slightly more prepared to teach ELLs than IETCs who had received no focused instruction on this topic (9.0 compared to 8.6). The most significant difference between the two groups was their sense of responsibility towards ELLs. While the participants in the ESL-cohort revealed a very strong commitment to support ELLs in mainstream classrooms; unexpectedly, the non-cohort participants, all of whom were IETCs, revealed a relatively low sense of responsibility towards ELLs. In what follows, I present the findings from the interview data, which provides a more in-depth understanding of the issue.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for Questionnaire Items: ESL-cohort and Non-cohort Group (IETCs)*

	ESL-cohort		Non Cohort (IETCs)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Level of empathy with ELLs	9.1	1.3	9.7	0.4
Level of understanding of diversity-related issues	8.8	1.2	8.9	0.4
Preparedness to teach	8.4	0.6	7.4	0.5
Preparedness to teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms	9.0	0.5	8.6	0.8
Responsibility towards ELLs in mainstream classrooms	10	0.0	6.0	1.0

### **Empathy with ELLs and understanding diversity-related issues**

As noted in Table 1, TCs who were internationally educated and had experienced learning English as a second or additional language expressed a relatively higher level of empathy towards ELLs and understanding of diversity-related issues compared with their Canadian-born counter parts. These IETCs overwhelmingly attributed their high self-perceived level of empathy to their personal experiences of having to learn English as a second language and having dealt with cases of racism and discrimination. A few voices below capture these positions.

Paulette, an IETC originally from China, elaborated on her high self-reported level of empathy with ELLs:

I have been there and I have no words to explain what it means to go through this experience. I am Chinese and I speak English with an accent so I know what it means to be an immigrant and deal with discrimination and racism. I can certainly understand and relate to people who are going through the same adaptation that I had to go through or maybe still am going through. I can easily connect with them.

Mary, also an IETC who had immigrated to Canada from the Czech Republic 15 years prior to the study, echoed a similar rationale for her high self-perceived level of empathy towards ELLs and understanding of diversity-related issues:

I am a 10 because I am an ELL myself, an ESL learner. I know what it feels like when they (ELLs) can't express themselves. If they are frustrated with learning English and things like that, I know how it feels. I have experienced that myself.

The entire group of IETCs provided similar explanations for their high self-reported level of empathy towards ELLs and understanding of diversity-related issues. Their first-hand personal experiences as immigrants and language learners were expressed as testimony to their high empathy and understanding of diversity-related issues.

Some Canadian-born participants also reported a high level of empathy towards ELLs. Some Canadian-born participants spoke a language other than English at home. Others who spoke English as their first language had also learned additional languages and some had taught abroad. Therefore, it is important not to overlook the experiential knowledge that this group can bring in working with ELLs. Sandy, who was born in Canada to Italian-speaking parents, echoed experiences somewhat similar to IETCs. Her parents had not learned English very well, and therefore she had responsibilities that children of her age would not normally have. She indicated, however, that since she was born in Canada she had not experienced the difficulties of starting life in a new country:

I know what it is like for some kids to assume the role of adults, go home and do the bills, go to medical appointments with parents, and so many other things that kids of their age would not normally do. When I was a kid, I had to do all of these. My parents didn't learn English very well so I had to read insurance policies for them and stuff like that. So I can empathize with ELLs to some extent. But I don't know what it is like to leave your country behind and uproot yourself and go through a new education system; that should be very tough.

Some of the Canadian-born participants also compared their experiences of learning other languages and living in other countries to those of the ELLs. They predominantly expressed the frustration that can result from having to live and function in an unfamiliar language. Some were mindful, however, that as a White English-speaker they would perhaps not be disadvantaged in the same way. Most acknowledged that the only way to fully understand the challenges of newcomers is to personally experience the process. As uncovered through voices of the participants, the relatively lower level of empathy towards ELLs and understanding of diversity-related issues was attributed to a lack of first-hand experiences with the immigration process as well as having to live and function through a different language. The issue that requires further examination is how high levels of empathy contribute to preparedness and commitment to support ELLs in mainstream classrooms. This is discussed in the next section.

### **Preparedness to Teach ELLs and Responsibility Towards Them**

As a result of the explicit emphasis and effective instruction on ESL-inclusive pedagogy provided in the ESL-cohort, these participants were more prepared to teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms compared with IETCs who did not receive focused instruction. The striking difference between the two groups was that the ESL-cohort participants, regardless of their backgrounds, unanimously indicated that their responsibility was to support ELLs in their language learning endeavors in mainstream classrooms. Their enthusiastic quotes on how they needed to create a safe and supportive learning environment for ELLs, foster emotional and psychological well-being of ELLs, and provide academic and language support for ELLs was evidence for their high self-perceived level of responsibility for ELLs. Furthermore, several of the ESL-cohort participants acknowledged that they needed to act as advocates for ELLs who often tend to be marginalized in the school system. Billy's account of his sense of responsibility is resonant of most of the TCs in the ESL-cohort group:

I'd say that my responsibility is to help them however I can, whether it is content support or language support. I definitely have to help them improve their oral and written communication skills; otherwise, they won't be able to show me what they know. And I

also have to be an advocate for them both in the class and out of the classroom. Sometimes ELLs are seen as problems by their peers and by other teachers. So I see I also have a HUGE social responsibility towards them.

Billy was preparing to become a science teacher and yet his sense of responsibility towards ELLs was beyond content and linguistic support for them. ESL-cohort participants, regardless of their teaching subject (e.g., math or physical education), felt that one of their top priorities was to support ELLs in their language learning endeavours as this would enhance their academic performance. As a result of the emphasis and modeling of ESL-inclusive pedagogy in the ESL-cohort, all participants felt well-equipped and in fact passionate about ESL-inclusive pedagogy. Due to the emphasis on ESL teaching strategies, some TCs from this group indicated that they even felt more prepared to teach ELLs than to teach other mainstream subjects. This also explains the relatively higher mean for teaching ELLs than preparedness to teach in general (9.0 versus 8.4; see Table 2).

The IETCs who were not part of the ESL-cohort, on the other hand, had received little or no explicit instruction and modeling of ESL-inclusive pedagogy. In spite of their personal experiences with learning English and diversity-related issues, as well as their status as IETCs and foreign-born, these TCs did not see ESL-inclusive pedagogy as part of their responsibility as content teachers. In fact, interview data revealed that they were ill-equipped to address these elements in their classrooms. A few excerpts are provided to illustrate the issue. Young was a certified teacher from China who claimed the highest (10) level of empathy towards ELLs. He indicated that it was not his role to support ELLs in improving their language skills:

*Interviewer:* Do you think you will support them (ELLs) with their language development in the math class?

*Young:* I can help them understand the problems with respect to math problems but I don't think I have enough time or energy to help them improve their English, improve their language. I think that's the ESL teacher's responsibility.

Young had not received any explicit instruction on ESL-inclusive pedagogy in the teacher education program and had not attended any of the voluntary workshops. The lack of such instruction had left Young with a particular perspective regarding roles and responsibilities of mainstream teachers and ESL teachers. He did not see that the role of content area teachers included language instruction for ELLs, a perspective that is challenged in ESL-inclusive pedagogy. Tom, another IETC, echoed the same concern. His attention was also not drawn to ESL-inclusive pedagogy in the program. After completing a one-month practicum in a highly ELL populated school, he initially indicated that he did not have any ELLs in his classroom. During further reflection in an interview, he realized that there had been students in his classroom that had "accents." However, in his view, they did not need further support:

*Interviewer:* How did you support ELLs in your practicum?

*Tom:* I didn't have ESL students in my class.

*Interviewer:* NO ONE, no one in your class spoke English as their second language?

*Tom:* Oh, wait a second, yes, some spoke English with a heavy accent, very heavy accent but I understood them.

*Interviewer:* How did you modify your lessons, what adaptations did you make in working with them?

*Tom:* They were OK; they didn't need additional help.

Based on Tom's interview excerpt, it is difficult to imagine how he had provided ESL-inclusive pedagogy during his practicum, as he only realized during the interview that the classrooms in which he had been teaching included ELLs who may have needed additional support. Tom also indicated that "some spoke English with a heavy accent" not realizing that all English is accented, that there is no accent-free English, and that everyone speaks English with a different accent. Some accents are perceived to be associated with power and prestige while others not. These issues were at the core of ESL-inclusive pedagogy that were addressed in the ESL-cohort. Tom claimed ultimate empathy towards ELLs but, based on his interview, he had not been attentive to the needs of ELLs during his practicum teaching. The other five IETCs provided similar statements about their roles and responsibilities towards ELLs.

### **ESL and Diversity-inclusive Pedagogy**

Contrary to the prevailing view that IETCs diversify the teaching force and are therefore in a better position to provide diversity-inclusive pedagogy, this study found that IETCs, more than Canadian-born TCs, expressed challenges about providing diversity-inclusive pedagogy in their classrooms. For example, Dina, an IETC who was not part of the ESL-cohort, indicated that the most difficult aspect of teaching in Ontario classrooms was the focus on diversity-related issues. She stated that in her country of origin, Malta, everybody was from the same language and cultural background and therefore she was not familiar with issues of multilingualism and multiculturalism. She found it daunting to teach the curriculum and at the same time address diversity-related issues such as sexual, racial, and linguistic diversity appropriately in her classroom. She found it daunting to appropriately address diversity-related issues in her classroom. She said, "The only aspects that are challenging to me are the assignments pertaining to linguistic, racial, and sexual diversity that might arise within my student population, which here in Canada is a big thing but back home it was nonexistent." Similarly, Jack, a non-ESL-cohort IETC, originally from India, was surprised that he needed to pay attention to matters of cultural and linguistic diversity in history and geography classrooms. Overall, IETCs found addressing ESL and diversity-inclusive pedagogy a challenging aspect of teaching in Ontario classrooms. Personal experiences with these issues did not necessarily seem to ease the challenge.

With regards to ESL-inclusive pedagogy, several ESL-cohort participants expressed concerns about their lack of knowledge about the English language and its grammatical structure as an obstacle in their strong desire to provide ESL-inclusive pedagogy. Susan, who was born in Canada and spoke English as her first language, stated that she knew what was grammatically correct in English but did not know how to provide the appropriate instruction to ELLs:

I don't know how to explain grammar. I am totally lost and this is a problem when you are trying to help ELLs. When I was helping an ESL student in my practicum I realized I didn't know how to explain why we use this verb and not the other form. I felt kind of stupid when ELLs asked me these questions and I didn't know the answer. I would be like, "this sounds right," but I knew this is not going to help them. They need to know the rules and I don't know any of that.

Instead, IETCs—especially those who had learned English at a relatively older age—tended to reveal a much more explicit knowledge about the English language and how it works. Grace, an

IETC from the ESL-cohort, originally from China, who had started learning English when she was 15 indicated:

For the most part, I know how English works. I can explain the sentence structure to an ELL and tell them for example, that in English the adjective should precede the noun. This is how I learned English. I can tell them what a preposition or participle is and I can tell them when and how to form a present or past perfect tense. A lot of ELLs need this kind of language instruction and I think non-native teachers can provide this type of instruction.

The interviews revealed a marked difference between the ways in which IETCs from the ESL-cohort elaborated on their knowledge about the English language and the ways in which the IET non-ESL-cohort participants discussed language support for ELLs. The explicit instruction on ESL-inclusive pedagogy in the ESL-cohort seemed to have triggered IET candidates' knowledge about the English language, whereas the lack of instruction for the other IETCs contributed to a lack of understanding of their roles and responsibilities and inadequate preparation to teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

### Discussion

The examination of how TCs from diverse backgrounds perceive their empathy, sense of preparedness and their roles and responsibilities towards ELLs revealed a number of interesting findings. Personal and professional experiences with learning English and being an immigrant contributed to a higher self-perceived empathy towards ELLs and understanding of diversity-related issues. This finding conforms to the existing literature on this topic that linguistically and culturally diverse teachers tend to be more empathetic towards ELLs due to their personal and professional experiences learning English as a second language (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Medgyes, 2001). The data revealed that personal and professional experiences with language learning and diversity-related issues are not limited to IETs. Some Canadian-born TCs were raised in immigrant families and had experiences similar to those of ELLs. Several of the Canadian-born TCs had experienced learning additional languages, had been part of exchange programs, and had lived or worked in foreign countries. Therefore, Canadian-born participants can also relate such personal experiences to those of ELLs just as IETCs. Nonetheless, some argue that the experiences of learning English and functioning through English is different (e.g., Braine, 1999) as there are power dynamics associated with English and speakers of English as a first language (Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992). Therefore, the experiences of speakers of English learning an additional language and residing in a foreign country could be different from individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds attempting to learn English.

Findings also revealed that empathy with ELLs and personal experiences with diversity did not automatically assist IETCs in adopting ESL-inclusive pedagogy or ideology. As revealed through the voices of non-ESL-cohort IETCs, in spite of their personal experiences with ESL-related issues, most of these TCs did not perceive their role as one that included linguistic support for ELLs. On the other hand, all TCs who were members of the ESL-cohort, regardless of their linguistic and cultural background, perceived their role as one that included ESL-inclusive pedagogy and language support for ELLs. Research that has explored issues pertaining to NNESTs highlights that their personal experiences with language learning equips them with better awareness about the language and language learning process, which in turn results in

better instructional practices (see e.g., Braine, 1999; Medgyes, 1994, Medgyes, 2001). Others argue that the language learning experiences of teachers can significantly contribute to their professional practice (Ellis, 2006). These claims are perhaps more relevant to (language) teacher preparation programs where TCs receive explicit instruction on language education. Through reflective practices promoted in most language teacher education programs, teacher candidates are able to make relevant connections between their personal experiences and those of their potential learners. In the absence of such explicit instruction, the data suggests that linguistically and culturally diverse teachers do not automatically adopt ESL-inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogy in K-12 classrooms. The voices of the ESL-cohort and non-cohort participants regarding their roles and responsibilities towards ELLs revealed that *instruction* on ESL and diversity-related issues and not personal experiences has a stronger impact on adopting ESL-inclusive pedagogy.

Canadian-born English as first language speakers reported inadequate knowledge about the English language and its structure. This finding is supported by literature that compares the knowledge base of native and NNESTs (e.g., Medgyes, 1994; Pasternak & Bailey, 2004). Pasternak and Bailey (2004) contend that NNESTs have a stronger explicit knowledge about the target language, which can assist them in their professional practice. Arva and Medgyes (2000) placed grammar knowledge as NNESTs' "pride of place" (p. 361) and a prominent gap in the knowledge base of native English speaking teachers. The data also revealed that IETCs were not automatically better in their instructional practices in working with ELLs. Contrary to the assumption made by several scholars examining the strengths of NNESTs (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Bailey, 2002; Medgyes, 1994; Phillipson, 1992), this study's findings suggest that pedagogical knowledge in language education is not necessarily the strength of these teachers by virtue of their background. In the ESL-cohort where explicit instruction was provided, IETCs were able to make connections between their personal knowledge and the ESL-inclusive pedagogy presented in their cohort. Therefore, IETCs *gain* their pedagogical knowledge in contexts where explicit instruction on language teaching pedagogy is provided. Explicit instruction on language pedagogy might be internalized more easily by IETCs compared to Canadian-born TCs due to their personal knowledge and understanding of ESL-related issues. Lack of such instruction can result in feelings of inadequate preparation and confusion about their roles and responsibilities towards ELLs, as was the case for the non ESL-cohort IETCs.

### Conclusion

Drawing on the perceptions of 25 teachers of various linguistic backgrounds, captured through questionnaire and interview data, this article argues that shared backgrounds and empathy are insufficient for equipping teachers to provide support and targeted instruction for ELLs. While inclusion of teachers from diverse backgrounds is crucial in addressing issues of representation and role modeling, simply assuming that these teachers' shared background and empathy with ELLs prepares them for addressing the needs of ELLs in mainstream classrooms is erroneous. All teachers, regardless of their backgrounds, need appropriate preparation and targeted instruction to supporting students of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (see Coelho, 2004, and the Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 2007, 2008 documents for ESL-inclusive pedagogy in mainstream classrooms). The argument provided in this paper is not meant to downplay the significant contribution of teachers from diverse backgrounds. On the contrary, it is extremely important and equitable, as many scholars have argued, to increase the number of linguistically and culturally diverse teachers. In so doing, it is important to realize that they,

similar to other teachers, need targeted instruction to address the diverse needs of students in an ever-evolving globalized world.

Hence, given the unprecedented diversity in North American classrooms, there is an urgent need for a stronger commitment from teacher educators and educational institutions to prepare TCs to work in linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse classrooms. Providing such instruction might not be an easy task. Conversations related to issues of diversity can be controversial and there might be resistance to such discussions in teacher education programs. Teacher educators need to develop strategies such as exposing TCs to appropriate readings and critical reflection/reactions, scenarios, practicum placements in diverse classrooms, and examples drawn from their personal experiences to counterbalance such resistance. Some teacher educators might need to take an advocacy role in the program to promote understanding of diversity-related issues. Working in multilingual and multicultural contexts is a complex issue and involves more than simply including more teachers from backgrounds similar to students to remedy the situation. Policies need to be revised at the institutional, accreditation, and provincial levels to ensure that diversity and ESL-inclusive pedagogy will be integrated across teacher education programs to better prepare all teachers to teach in multilingual and multicultural classrooms.



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