




Ryan, T. G., & Deuerlein, K. (2018). Revitalizing the Ontario public education system for young English language learners. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 5(1), 15-36. <http://iojet.org/index.php/IOJET/article/view/333/229>

Received: 19.11.2017  
Received in revised form: 16.12.2017  
Accepted: 22.12.2017

## REVITALIZING THE ONTARIO PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR YOUNG ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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# REVITALIZING THE ONTARIO PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR YOUNG ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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## Abstract

Herein we argue that teachers who work to foster their ability to teach English language learners effectively need to learn about their students. Although Ontario (Canada) educators have demonstrated that English language learners' cultural knowledge and language abilities can be mobilized within the classroom as important tools and resources for learning the systematic development of language policy at the school level is crucial for extending innovative practices and attitudes into schools across the province. Such policy should reflect the demographic trends and recent research literature that recommends teachers must be informed and able to assess and evaluate English proficiency since this can disguise and hinder students from communicating the information they know. Teachers, therefore, must be diligent and perceptive to accurately measure and record information that the student does know. Given this stance we present a review of the perspectives and attitudes of Ontario Elementary school teachers towards skills, abilities, and training for teaching young English language learners. We introduce current themes and facts prevalent in the OMOE literature pertaining to effective ELL education and professional development for teachers to implement and foster English acquisition and student success.

*Keywords:* English language learners, Elementary school teachers, Language policy

## 1. Background

### 1.1. Effectively Educating English Language Learners

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (OMOE), over 25% of Ontario students, approximately 503,853 individuals are identified as English language learners (2008d, 2013b). Although most English language learners (ELLs) in Ontario are Canadian-born (OMOE, 2013a), these students are underperforming in school and on large-scale test scores in comparison with their English-speaking counterparts, and with more recently arrived immigrant students (Coelho, 2007; Ryan & Whitman, 2013). Noting that ELLs are the fastest growing segment of primary and elementary students (Webster & Valeo, 2011), Canadian education systems need to provide adequate systematic responses to the need for quality English acquisition services (Ngo, 2007).

According to the Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario (OMOE, 2007a), there was a lack of oversight for English acquisition programs by the OMOE; there was a lack of centrally co-ordinated development of ongoing training programs for teachers, under-investment and inequitable funding allocations for English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD) programs among school boards, and little guidance by the OMOE on how to modify the standard curriculum expectations and provide accommodations to ESL/ELD students (OMOE, 2007a). Appropriate instructional practices and aids for English

language learners, therefore, could not be successfully and equally implemented in Canadian schools. The labelling of poor academic performance (DeLuca, Volante, & Earl, 2015; Ngo, 2001), the marginalization of ELLs by the education systems (Sinclair & Ghory, 1987), and the high drop-out rate of ELLs (Ngo, 2007; Sinclair & Ghory, 1987) outlines the importance of this growing problem.

In 2007, a provincial policy was set in place to establish consistency and development for Ontario's English language learners. *Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12* (OMOE, 2007b) is, therefore, a dominant text in this review; however, the various initiatives it promoted and affected are also analyzed.

Although attention to ELL development and success should be a priority in all grade levels, in this literature review we focus upon primary education (K-3). This focus is due to the fundamental development that occurs during this time; the physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and linguistic development of young children which is of significant importance and influence (OMOE, 2006; 2007c) longitudinally. Recognizing that all children develop knowledge and skills at varying rates and means also impacts early formal education. The unique strengths, interests, and needs of young ELLs require additional attention and adjustments to teaching methods and materials. Early educational intervention for these students will directly impact their future academic achievements and post-secondary education. The main concern causes us to ask: How effective are the OMOE policies and procedures of preparing teachers to address these concerns?

## 1.2. Purpose

Projections from Statistics Canada (2010) state that by 2031 between 25% and 28% of the population in Canada could be foreign-born (between 11.4 – 14.4 million people). In order to maintain the unique cultures and heritages, as well as to foster academic success, the attitudes, beliefs, and languages of this growing number of students need to be incorporated into the classroom environment. To effectively implement a multicultural and proactive education program for diverse ELLs, engaging and effective lessons need to be designed and implemented and assessment and evaluation practices must be inclusive (Tran, 2015; Coelho, 2007; OMOE, 2007b; 2014c). The purpose of this research is, therefore, to unearth factors that have impacted policy change and professional learning for teachers of young English language learners.

We ask the following questions:

1. What are the teacher perceptions of their ability to meet their ELLs needs and the available professional development available in Ontario? How does this relate to the Ontario Ministry of Education's expectations of them?
2. How have the Ontario Ministry of Education and teacher education programs adapted to meet the growing needs of ELLs?
3. How does the existing policy and professional development reflect the needs of English language learners?

## 1.3. Objectives

Our objective is to identify and analyze existing policy and documents regarding English language acquisition provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education. After providing a holistic picture of current teacher perspectives of their English language learner training and capabilities, including practical and theoretical ELL knowledge

and strategies, we outline the OMOE documents and curriculum that are designed to impact ELLs. We identify key issues in policy and curriculum that benefit Ontario ELLs, as well as determine areas that need further progress. Lastly, we gather significant resources regarding ELL professional development that has achieved successful results for teachers and their ELLs. The results of this study provide recommendations for improving teacher training and practice, policy and implementation for the OMOE, as well as present information to encourage teachers to become agents of change for the existing school policies.

#### **1.4. Definition of Terms**

To ensure clear interpretation and understanding of the key terms used throughout this paper, the following definitions have been included:

*Language learning*: Defined by the OMOE as acquiring vocabulary and grammatical structures (2008d); this includes internalizing, expressing, and connecting new concepts, as well as communicating those concepts effectively to others.

*Standard English*: refers to the English language used in education, law, and government in English-speaking countries (OMOE, 2008d).

*English language learners (ELLs)*: is a term used to describe students in provincially funded English language schools in Canada (OMOE, 2007b). ELLs refers to students whose first language is not English or is a variety of English that is significantly different than Standard English. English language learners may be Canadian born or recently arrived from other countries. They come from diverse cultural, economic, religious, and social backgrounds and have various experiences with school, as well as assorted levels of skill, ability, and need. As such ELLs may require a variety of educational supports to attain English proficiency (OMOE, 2007b; 2008d; 2013a).

*Everyday English* (often referred to as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills [BICS]): describes lived experiences, such as face-to-face conversation, talking, reading and writing about what is presently happening; high-frequency and familiar vocabulary are used in simple sentences (OMOE, 2013a; Roessingh, 2006). According to the Ontario Ministry of Education, everyday English proficiency is required for English language learners to comfortably and effectively communicate with English speakers (2007b; 2013a). It denotes the individual's social language; this includes the ability to carry on a conversation in familiar settings and represents approximately 10% of the language required for academic English. Researchers propose that BICS take approximately two years to acquire (Roessingh, 2006).

*Academic English* (also known as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency [CALP]): refers to more abstract and complex content than everyday English (Roessingh, 2006). Low-frequency vocabulary and more complex sentences are used, which may describe actions, ideas, theories, and/or frameworks (OMOE, 2013a). Academic English includes talking, reading, and writing that may take place through presentations, videos, or discussions. It often involves learning new ways of thinking, such as describing properties or processes, comparing and contrasting, hypothesizing,

and generalizing (OMOE, 2008d). The OMOE contends that five or more years are required to acquire academic English proficiency (2008d).

*English as a second language (ESL)*: is a term used to describe programs and services designed to serve students studying English as a second or additional language (OMOE, 2008d). ESL programs are for students who require educational opportunities to develop age-appropriate first language literacy skills (OMOE, 2007b).

*English language development (ELD)*: refers to programs and services designed to serve students with considerable educational gaps where ESL programs would be insufficient (OMOE, 2007b). Students requiring ELD support may not have had opportunity to develop age-appropriate first language literacy skills due to limited prior schooling (OMOE, 2007b). As such, ELD programs are implemented to accelerate student learning and literacy skills in order for the students to transfer to ESL programs that are inherently age-appropriate (OMOE, 2008d). The OMOE explains that ELD programs begin in Grade 3 because extensive gaps do not occur for younger students (OMOE, 2007b; 2008d).

*Modifications*: are changes to the curriculum expectations (OMOE, 2008d). Unlike accommodations, modifications change the program itself in order to meet the students' needs and abilities.

*Accommodations*: are strategies and provisions provided by the teacher to enable students to meet unaltered provincial curriculum expectations (OMOE, 2008d).

## 2. Outline

This literature review provides background information outlining the major developments and changes to the Ontario Ministry of Education (OMOE) policies and expectations for English language learners (ELLs), as well as the ideal targets for school administration and staff. We present a review of the perspectives and attitudes of Ontario Elementary school teachers towards skills, abilities, and training for teaching young English language learners. We introduce current themes and facts prevalent in the OMOE literature pertaining to effective ELL education and professional development for teachers to implement and foster English acquisition and student success.

We look into five categories: First, specialized strategies and techniques, second, character development, third, diversity and inclusivity training, fourth, assessment and evaluation, and fifth, funding and provisions. We present literature for each category via two sections: a. policy documents and b. Ontario Ministry of Education suggestions and recommendations. Yet, as professional development for teachers of ELLs is the focus of this review, the content will centre upon how educators may utilize the OMOE documents to create effective lessons and an inclusive classroom environment. We then present a summary of the literature, conclusions, and offer recommendations for further research.

### 2.1. Review

The Ontario Ministry of Education (OMOE) defines successful English language learners (ELLs) as students that can communicate effectively in a variety of settings (2007b); they can use English to take charge of their own learning - they can achieve academically in all subject areas and participate in the social, economic, political, and cultural life of their own communities and of Canada for their age group (OMOE,



2007b). While the whole community is responsible for fostering student success, when students were asked to reflect on their education, they frequently reported the teacher as the single most important factor in their success (OMOE, 2008b). The OMOE reports that selecting, getting and supporting the right people into teaching is one of the most important qualities of a high-performing education system (2007b; 2008c). The impact of teachers is equally, if not more, important for English language learners.

The Ontario Ministry of Education, and many scholars alike, promote teacher training and professional development as a critical aspect of fostering and maintaining effective learning for all students (Broad & Evans, 2006; Tellez & Manthey, 2012; OMOE, 2006; 2007b; 2008b; 2008c). As the most prominent influences on students' academic success (Broad & Evans, 2006; Kyriakides, Creemers, & Antoniou, 2007; OMOE, 2007c), teachers have a significant responsibility. In order to encourage and impact all ELLs to be successful, it is imperative that teachers have a comprehensive understanding and ability to execute the information and knowledge expected of them. Unfortunately, however, studies suggest that teachers lack confidence in teaching English language learners (Tellez & Manthey, 2012; Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly, J., & Driscoll, 2005; Tran, 2015). Kip Tellez and George Manthey, for example, collected descriptive data from over 570 teachers of ELLs and found that teachers doubt their own strength and ability to foster English language development (2012). Teachers' perceptions affect how they feel about their preparation and instructional decisions made to meet the needs of their diverse students (Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2011; Tran, 2015). The role of the teacher is central to language development and yet, many educators lack the confidence to purposefully and consistently promote strong language acquisition skills in their students.

Although several curriculum documents and supporting resources were offered for teachers of young English language learners (ELLs), it was not until 2007 that the Ontario Ministry of Education established the English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development policy: *English Language Learners ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12* (OMOE, 2007b). Establishing provincial parameters for all ELLs, the OMOE contend that this policy promotes academic achievement for Ontario's English language learners, as well as develops their talents, helping them to reach their goals and gain the knowledge and skills necessary for personal success in the global community (OMOE, 2007b). The policy goals are to establish a consistent approach to English language education across the province; provide school boards with direction and support; describe procedures for initial and ongoing assessment, large-scale assessments, and reporting to parents; clarify procedures for collecting data and monitoring progress; and describe procedures to support graduation rates and postsecondary enrolment (OMOE, 2007b).

Prior to 2007, Ontario's public education system offered varying levels of support for ELLs (OMOE, 2001; 2005a; 2005b; 2007a). Of the numerous public and private inquiries and reports advocating for consistent support across the province, the Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario was of great significance (2005a; 2007a). The report commented on the lack of over-sight of ESL/ELD program delivery, lack of accountability for allocation of funds provided, inconsistency across school boards, and lack of centrally coordinated and ongoing teacher training (2005a; 2007a). The Auditor General of Ontario categorized several areas where education for ELLs should improve, including enhanced teacher training and instructional aids,

monitoring student progress, ongoing assessments and reporting, as well as ensuring quality program delivery and funding (2005a; 2007a).

From 2007 numerous Ministry documents and reports have been provided and initiated to support English language acquisition. Literature focusing on assessment and evaluation (OMOE, 2014a) and supporting language development for teachers continue to be produced (OMOE, 2008b). The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (established in 2004) began the Capacity Building Series in 2007 as a means of supporting leadership and instructional effectiveness (OMOE, 2015). Various articles are specifically for ELL education and establishing inclusive classroom environments; *ELL Voices in the Classroom* (OMOE, 2009a), *Canadian-born English Language Learners* (OMOE, 2013a), and *English Literacy Development – Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling* (OMOE, 2014b) are a few examples.

The interest, initiative, and growing attention to English language development that arose from the English as a Second Language and English Language Development Policy represent a pivotal change in public education: English language learners were assured quality education in policy (OMOE, 2007a). In order for the Ontario elementary school teacher to implement the mandatory policy requirements, however, understanding and comprehension of the OMOE documents published after policy should be apparent in educational practice. An exploration of the themes found within the OMOE documents will outline important strands of professional development that could guide the classroom teacher to effectively implement the Ontario Ministry of Education ESL/ELD policy.

### **3. Methodology**

We accessed the ERIC database via the Nipissing University website. Key phrases such as English language learners, professional development, and challenges for teachers were first explored. Using titles and abstracts to further guide our search, we began focussing upon specific professional development subjects and initiatives. Training programs and initiatives regarding differentiation, character development, assessment for learning, and diversity training were themes prevalent in the material offered. While reading and analyzing the literature, we began to question what the Ontario Ministry of Education was doing to resolve the tension teachers were having with regard to effectively teaching young English language learners.

#### **3.1. Analysis and Synthesis**

Specialized strategies and techniques, character development, diversity and inclusivity training, and assessment and evaluation are main themes prevalent throughout the Ontario Ministry of Education documents that pertain to English language development. As such, the following chapter is divided into these categories. Similar to most public school developments, however, funds and provisions determine the strength and impact of growth and intensity. For this reason, the final discussion will address the financial implications and policy associated with the English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development policy and suggestions that are offered by the OMOE.

### **4. Specialized Strategies & Techniques**

All students require individualized lessons to maximize learning potential (Ryan, Aquino, Berry, Clausen, & Wideman, 2008). While differentiated instruction supports

the learning of all students in the class, specialized strategies and techniques should be utilized in order to accommodate and engage the variety of learning styles that young English language learners possess (Burchell, Dyson, & Rees, 2002; Coelho, 2007). In the following section, we explore the Ontario Ministry of Education policy documents and suggestions pertaining to English language acquisition guidelines for teachers.

#### **4.1. Specialized Strategies & Techniques: Policy**

According to the OMOE policy document (2007b), each school should have an administrative team that ensures procedures and practices are in place for welcoming ELLs and their families. The team is responsible for building an inclusive environment, encouraging school involvement, and acquiring a range of resources in the classrooms and library that reflect linguistic and cultural makeup (OMOE, 2007b). Of particular importance for this review, are sections 2.12.1 and 2.12.2; there should be a certain level of expertise and support, and professional development should be available (OMOE, 2007b). The administrative team should ensure a person with expertise in English as a Second Language/English Literacy Development helps the teacher design and implement supportive plans and programs for the ELLs (OMOE, 2007b). The team should help the teacher incorporate the appropriate curriculum adaptations, as well as teaching and assessment strategies. The administrative team should also provide access to quality professional development for any teacher in need (OMOE, 2007b). From this position, the remaining responsibility for ELL school education lies with the classroom teachers. The policy outlines expectations for the teachers that are deemed integral for ELL development; such as learning about students' backgrounds, experiences, and languages and utilizing modifications and accommodations to ensure ELLs have engaging and challenging opportunities (OMOE, 2007b). Teachers are expected to collaborate with the ESL/ELD expert to plan a variety of instructions and lessons that reflects and celebrates the linguistic and cultural diversity of their students (OMOE, 2007b).

The policy suggests that each board should design and implement programs and services based on the needs of the ELLs in their specific schools. As such, specific programs, adaptations, designated qualified personnel, and professional development to meet the policy demands are at the discretion of the school board and school principal.

#### **4.2. Specialized Strategies & Techniques: Suggestions and Recommendations**

Using the main themes found throughout the Ontario Ministry of Education documents, specialized strategies and techniques can be categorized into five groups: utilizing first languages; incorporating silent periods and small group work; modelling and encouraging appropriate language; scaffolding instruction; and differentiation.

### **5. First Language (L1)**

Creating space for students' first language is imperative for the greatest academic achievement (OMOE, 2013b). Studies suggest that students who continue to develop age-appropriate proficiency in their own language do better in school than students who abandon their first language and often do better than monolingual English-speaking students (Lopez, Scanlan, & Gundrum, 2013; Genessee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; OMOE, 2006; 2008c). The continued use of first languages benefits development in part because it allows children to develop age-appropriate world knowledge and vocabulary, it encourages the transfer of knowledge in their L1 to English, and it builds confidence and eases the social and emotional



transition that occurs when children begin school (OMOE, 2013b; 2011b). Teachers can support and encourage L1 use by learning some greetings, including L1 in environment print, giving ELLs the opportunity to teach other students, allowing same-language partners when possible, incorporating cultures and languages in daily activities, and incorporating early writing, books, and songs in their students first languages (OMOE, 2011b; 2013b; Genessee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006). By incorporating and celebrating the first languages within each classroom, all students should benefit; ELLs will develop better language proficiency and all students will gain insight and knowledge about culture and diversity.

### **5.1. Silent Period and Small Group Work**

Most students are actively absorbing language during silent periods (OMOE, 2008d). Teachers should, therefore, respect this time. The language absorption occurs at an amazing rate during silent periods and when the students are ready, they will begin to speak (OMOE, 2005b; 2007c; 2009a). To promote language, co-operative learning strategies are recommended. In small group discussions about real world problems, the ELL will be shown how to encourage social skills as well as language development in a safe and calm manner (OMOE, 2008d). Teachers, therefore, should manage groups in a variety of ways to maximize their benefit; such as assigned groups that change periodically, providing partners with proficient speakers, emphasizing collaboration, and establishing clear routines, timelines, and expectations (OMOE, 2008d; 2009a; 2011b; 2013b). Developing conversational strategies is also recommended as oral everyday English is gained prior to academic English (OMOE, 2011b). By focusing on social skills and language in formal and informal settings, the students can develop their confidence and English acquisition.

### **5.2. Model and encourage appropriate language**

According to *A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction, Grades 4-6* (OMOE, 2008a), teachers should model and teach appropriate voice, volume, and respect for classroom discussions. *The Kindergarten Program* also states that teachers should simplify vocabulary, recycle new words, simplify sentence structure, and highlight key ideas and instructions (OMOE, 2006). Clear and explicit instructions, as well as non-verbal cues will help the ELL understand what is expected of them and encourage them to participate. Teachers should speak naturally, but pause briefly between phrases; be conscious of words that need further explanation; monitor use of common and unusual idioms, cultural references, jokes, colloquial forms, figurative language, and slang (OMOE, 2006; 2008a). Educators should also promote conversation and appropriate communication between students to maximize language learning (OMOE, 2009a). In order to foster respectful discussion, the rules for engaging in classroom talk should be established and revisited throughout the year, time should be granted for students to process their thoughts, and all students should understand the focus and purpose of each learning activity (OMOE, 2009a; 2011b).

### **5.3. Scaffolding**

Scaffolding is often required to support comprehension (OMOE, 2009a). The use of models, toys, and manipulatives, as well as additional visual support may provide contextual support (OMOE, 2006). Providing notes that highlight key ideas and new words may benefit various ELLs, as will frequent use of a variety of concrete, visual, and bilingual support (OMOE, 2006; 2008a; 2009a). Examples of key visuals that can be scaffolded include use of pictures, terms, words, and letters, as well as body

language and paired or small group work (OMOE, 2008a). Whatever scaffolding techniques are used, the Ontario Ministry of Education stresses that teachers check often for comprehension and re-teach what is not comprehended (OMOE, 2006; 2008a; 2009a).

#### **5.4. Differentiation**

In *Canadian-Born English Language Learners* (OMOE, 2013b), the Ontario Ministry of Education advise that to effectively develop skills and ensure comprehension, the language environment needs to be adapted. The reflection, revision, scaffolding, and feedback will help the students learn by doing, which will aid the retention and strengthening of new skills and information (OMOE, 2013b; 2014b). Explicit instruction is recommended to help ELLs develop language acquisition; examples such as think-alouds, shared and guided reading, pre-teaching important words and specific decoding techniques are encouraged (OMOE, 2007b; 2008d). Text walks are suggested as a great strategy to introduce words and structures prior to navigating through particular texts (OMOE, 2008a; 2014b). ELLs, like all students, benefit when teachers select approaches and strategies that are specifically differentiated for each student's learning needs (OMOE, 2006).

By implementing quality programming in elementary school experiences, young students' will strengthen their foundation for academic learning. As stated in *The Kindergarten Program* (OMOE, 2006), early learning experiences have a profound effect on development. In order to minimize stress and maximize learning, teachers should utilize the use of first language, incorporate silent periods and small group work, model and encourage appropriate speech, providing scaffolding tools, and differentiated instruction. While policy states that the administrative team should ensure that teachers have access to quality professional development to enrich and extend their repertoire of instructional strategies (OMOE, 2007b), this goal is not necessarily achieved without the commitment and aspirations of the teacher. The examples offered throughout the Ministry guides and reports, thereby, raise an important concern: are the written suggestions enough for teachers to develop and apply effective practice and pedagogy? And, will mandatory professional development help teachers to understand and use the material offered by the Ministry?

#### **6. Character Development**

Character development has become a leading initiative intended to be implemented and developed within each classroom (OMOE, 2008b). In *Finding Common Ground* (OMOE, 2008b), character development is described as a means of improving critical thought, deep feelings, and wise behaviour. It denotes a deliberate effort to nurture the chosen attributes identified by the school and community in order to develop responsible and equitable citizens (2008b; 2014c). The Ontario Ministry of Education defines character development as a means of fostering cultures and school communities that are respectful, safe, caring and inclusive (2008b). Although civic engagement and productivity remain priorities of quality education, preparing students to be citizens with empathy and respect has become prevalent in OMOE literature (OMOE 2008b; 2014a; 2014c). Studies in character development have demonstrated that positive results and improvements occur in motivation and achievement, self-discipline, pro-social behaviour and interpersonal relationships, equity and respect for diversity, as well as preparation for the workplace, civility and feelings of safety, and civic engagement, to name a few (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2003;

OMOE, 2008b; 2014a; 2014c). The provincial policy, therefore, seems progressive and necessary for effective ELL education.

### **6.1. Character Development: Policy**

School boards in Ontario began the implementation of the Character Development Initiative during the 2007 - 2008 school year (OMOE, 2008b). Although some boards had already developed similar types of programs, this provincial initiative was designed to add depth and continuity across Ontario (OMOE, 2008b). Each school committee, which includes student representatives, teachers, administration, and a cross section of the community, selects the most valuable attributes that the board and school will commit to model, teach, and expect in all school activities (OMOE, 2008b). The province has established character development resource teams to support all public school boards across the province, which they contend are experienced in the implementation and extension of character development programs (2008b).

While this initiative is not directed towards English language learners specifically, critical thought and respectful citizenship will advance student every day and academic English as well as provide confidence to have voice within the community. The OMOE contend that character development practices are holistic, academic, social and emotional, attitudinal, and behavioural (2008b). The benefits, therefore, cross all domains of learning and the results should be found in student achievement, graduation rates, attendance, student leadership, behaviour and engagement, and in overall school culture (OMOE, 2008b). The curriculum documents direct teachers with expectations geared towards social, interpersonal and citizenship development across all subjects (OMOE, 2008b, 2006). In *The Kindergarten Program*, for example, integration, real-life contexts, learning through exploration and inquiry are expected (OMOE, 2006). Social knowledge and competence is assessed though curriculum expectations such as developing empathy for others, demonstrating respect and consideration for others, and demonstrating self-reliance and a sense of personal responsibility (OMOE, 2006).

### **6.2. Character Development: Suggestions and Recommendations**

The text entitled *Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education* (2008c) lists various supporting conditions that the Ontario Ministry of Education deem significant for student progress. Within the document character development, small class sizes, student engagement, professional learning, and leadership are mentioned (OMOE, 2008c). According to this document, a key feature of this strategy is teacher education and the continuous professional learning of all education staff. Similarly, throughout the curriculum documents educators are encouraged to consume the available literature regarding specialized teaching practices and to reach out to the support teams when in need. Teachers are expected to engage students with the intent of creating collaborative, caring, and equitable learning environments (OMOE, 2008c); they are responsible for cultivating students that expand their own roles as members of the global community, assisting students in creating a school culture that values caring relationships, fosters the sense of belonging, nurtures democratic principles and encourages student voice in decision making (OMOE, 2006; 2008b; 2008c). While it is suggested that school principals provide professional learning opportunities for members of the school community in the area of character development, teachers are not required to fulfil any training obligations (OMOE, 2007). The lack of obligation for character development education, similar to English

acquisition training, raises concerns for adequacy of implementation without efficient and effective teacher training.

The *Finding Common Ground* document contends that the Character Development Initiative is vital for creating and sustaining school environments aligning itself with the fourth pillar of the *Student Success/Learning to 18 Initiative: Community, Culture and Caring* (OMOE, 2008b); the first three pillars are literacy, numeracy and pathways (OMOE, 2008b). Due to the increasing ethno-cultural and racial diversity, common ground needs to be founded on our values and beliefs in communities and as a province. The difficulty here lies in the foundation that character development occurs through interactions with others in their diverse classrooms and communities; it is not taught abstractly or as a separated course. The teacher and school staff, therefore, need to model and establish appropriate behaviour and attitude at school, as well as use suitable strategies and communication to foster such a class of students. Although policies, legislation, and programs may define the scope and expectations of equity initiatives, actualizing character development may be an unquantifiable quality we expect from all students and education staff.

## **7. Diversity and Inclusivity Training**

Research has shown that growth in understanding and knowledge is facilitated when students' prior knowledge is brought into the classroom (Gay, 2000; Glaze, Mattingley, & Levin, 2012). Students are able to build from their experiences and background knowledge as they make connections between new information to what they already know (OMOE, 2013b). As a representative for the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Jim Cummins, lists resources and tools that ELLs require to foster their literacy development in multilingual contexts (2007). He states that dual language books should be provided and that educators need to learn about our students. Cultural knowledge and language abilities can be mobilized within the classroom as important tools (Cummins, 2007).

### **7.1. Diversity and Inclusivity Training: Policy**

The Accepting Schools Act was set in place on September 1, 2012 (Bill 13, 2012). It requires all school boards to provide safe, inclusive, and accepting learning environments where all students can succeed (OMOE, 2014c). The policy is in place to create comprehensive systemic change to the public education system (OMOE, 2014c). The *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* (2014c) confirms that all boards must have an equitable and inclusive education policy which focuses on eight areas: 1. Board policies, programs, guidelines, and practices; 2. Shared and committed leadership; 3. School-community relationships; 4. Inclusive curriculum and assessment practices; 5. School climate and the prevention of discrimination and harassment; 7. Professional learning; 8. Accountability and transparency (OMOE, 2014c). When the renewed vision for education was released in 2009, the new strategy goals were divided into four categories: achieving excellence for all students and teachers; ensuring equality by inspiring all students to reach their full potential; promoting well-being, both mentally and physically; and enhancing public confidence that the publically funded education system is fostering confident, capable, and caring citizens (OMOE, 2014c). The goal is to create and maintain equity and inclusive education that understands, identifies, addresses, and eliminates the biases and power dynamics that limit student potential (Ryan & Date, 2012). While not specifically mentioning language, the

barriers may be related to various attributes such as sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnic origin, religion, socio-economic background, or other factors (OMOE, 2014c).

The province has determined that diversity is a strength of our province and that it should be effectively reflected and celebrated in the public school system. In order for teachers to foster a culture of continuous improvements for diversity instruction, as well as demonstrate and communicate those improvements annually, as required by the policy, it may be argued that pedagogy must also adapt (Tran, 2015). The focus on teaching the workforce through initiatives such as the Character Development Initiative is a step towards diversity and multicultural training. Through progressive action and revision, developing and implementing strategies to engage students and promote inclusive education should build a capacity for diversity and inclusive instruction.

## **7.2. Diversity and Inclusivity Training: Suggestions and Recommendations**

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2006, 2013b), teachers should be culturally responsive; they should exhibit this characteristic by bringing the world into the classroom in a safe and encouraging manner. Teachers need to foster relationships with an understanding of the children and their cultures (2013b). While various OMOE documents state that teachers should foster safe, culturally respectful, and inclusive classrooms (OMOE, 2007b; 2008b; 2008d; 2014), the means to achieve this classroom culture is wanting. Hieu Van Ngo (2007) suggests that each school board requires a cultural competence policy ensuring that each classroom culture embraces diversity and promotes cultural pride. Unlike the OMOE policy, Ngo focuses on teacher education to develop the knowhow and understanding of diverse cultures. Policy changes that ensure adequate training may lead to changes in pedagogy that will meet the increasing multiculturalism and evolving sociopolitical context of immersion in Canadian schools (Ngo, 2007; Ryan & Date, 2012; Swain & Lapkin, 2009).

Studies have demonstrated the strong link between the quality of teacher-student relationships and academic achievement and behaviour (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2003; Forsyth, Adams, & Hoy, 2011; Kyriakides, Creemers, & Antoniou, 2007). Forsyth, Adams, and Hoy (2011), for example, base their argument on 30 years of collected data. They argue that the sense of belonging and active engagement carried forward through trust, creates a successful environment. Although many educators may support the claim that student social and emotional engagement and academic success are intertwined, developing one's own ability to foster trust through diversity and/or multicultural training is not mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

## **8. Assessment and Evaluation**

Accurately assessing and evaluating English language learners can be a difficult task. The lack of English proficiency can disguise and hinder students from communicating information they know. Teachers, therefore, must be diligent and perceptive to accurately measure and record information that the student does know.

### **8.1. Assessment and Evaluation Policy**

The Education Quality and Accountability Office began assessing student in Ontario in 1996 as a means of improving the education for all students (Education



Quality and Accountability Office, 2013). In order to develop consistency across Ontario schools students are tested in Grade 3, 6 and 9 unless their capabilities prevents them from being included. Accommodations and special provisions may be made to help students complete the large-scale standardized test without changing the content, which means English language learners are only exempt from taking the test if they have not yet acquired the level of English proficiency required for success (OMOE, 2007b; EQAO, 2013).

Although creative expressions, meaningful learning, and preparing students for the challenges of our complex global society are the goals of the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013c), the large-scale EQAO test is used as the dominant measure for academic achievements (EQAO, 2013). One of the Ontario Ministry of Education core priorities is to heighten levels of student achievement and the test results are a quantitative means of analyzing data on a grand scale (OMOE, 2008c). There is discrepancy within the Ontario Ministry of Education literature regarding these tests and English language learners (Ryan & Whitman, 2013). On the one hand, standardized tests are said to be used with discretion because there may be cultural and/or linguistic bias in the tests, which can result in unreliable or invalid data (OMOE, 2008c; Ryan & Whitman, 2013). On the other hand, reports are offered in which 96% of principals say that the achievement results were used to guide school improvement initiatives and identify areas for improvements (EQAO, 2013).

## 8.2. Assessment and Evaluation Suggestions and Recommendations

In *ELL Voices in the Classroom*, the Ontario Ministry of Education suggests that assessment and evaluation must be adapted to effectively report student progress (2009a). While assessment *for* learning, assessment *as* learning, and assessment *of* learning are taught in universities and through professional development across Ontario (DeLuca, Volante, & Earl, 2015), professional development for in-service teachers is not mandatory. By utilizing all three methods of assessment, the OMOE contend that student achievement will be maximized (2009a); student needs will be identified, guidance and feedback will be provided, and periodic reports of progress will be offered.

For ELLs to demonstrate their learning, the Ontario Ministry of Education also suggest that alternative and supplemental assessment strategies and evaluation procedures may be required (OMOE, 2013b). Not only do teachers need to be careful when communicating with all students, but they need to be mindful of interpreting miscues and analyzing assessment results for ELLs (OMOE, 2013b). When a student's language proficiency restricts certain answers, it does not necessarily mean that the student does not understand the content; but rather the issue may be due to their English comprehension. Therefore, educators need to make sure that they are assessing and evaluating the specific curriculum expectation that the task was designed for. In order to do this effectively, teachers should gather information about the students' literacy abilities in their first language and be aware of the various factors that are impacting their lack of responses to questions and requests (OMOE, 2006; 2008d). The teacher should also focus on what the students know, rather than assess and evaluate what they do not (OMOE, 2006). Several developmentally and linguistically appropriate assessments are offered for teachers to implement: allowing time for adjusting socially, cognitively, and physically, interpreting knowledge holistically, and assess what the ELLs are able to demonstrate with their limited English (OMOE, 2005b; 2006; 2008a; 2014a). The Ontario Ministry of Education also suggests using alternative methods to gather information and to record

observations and demonstrations utilizing manipulatives, games, and art work (2006; 2014b). In, *Supporting English Language Learners. A practical guide for Ontario educators* (OMOE, 2008d), the OMOE outlines appropriate adaptations to the instructional program for teachers to use when teaching young English language learners. Specifically the document suggests modifying some or all subject expectations so they are challenging but attainable, to use a variety of instructional strategies and learning resources, and to use assessment accommodations (2008d). From all the examples offered, differentiating instruction based on assessment is crucial. Also, because young children will demonstrate their learning in many different ways, primary school teachers should assess student learning on an ongoing basis using everyday experiences and a variety of strategies and tools (OMOE, 2006).

Many suggestions are made in the Ministry documents regarding how to implement effective assessment and evaluation for English language learners. The policy and supporting literature also recommend that professional development opportunities should be available to teachers. Seeking specific and personal guidance on how to correctly apply the mentioned strategies, as well as where to attain in-person professional development to harness these required skills are the responsibility of the school administration and the individual teacher.

## 9. Funding & Provisions

People for Education is a charity that works to support public education in Ontario. In *Language Support* (2013a), they recommend that the province establish a clear standard for proficiency in English or French that allows students to meet academic requirements and that a new funding model for language support be developed that accurately reflects the goals of the English language learner policy (People for Education, 2013a). They suggest that funding should better support student's language proficiency and that funding intended for English language learners be protected so that it may only be spent on the purpose for which it is given (People for Education, 2013a; 2013b). In the *Annual Report on Ontario's Public Funded Schools* (People for Education, 2013b), the People for Education assert that funding for English language acquisition does not match the needs in the Ontario education system nor does it match the Ontario Ministry of Education policy (2013b). The three ways that funding is granted are for "recent immigrants" from non-English or French speaking countries, for "pupils in Canada" who do not speak English or French at home; and for French programs where students require assimilation support (People for Education, 2013a; OMOE, 2013a). The policy says that students should receive support until they have acquired the English or French skills needed to succeed academically (OMOE, 2007b); therefore, the student should receive funding based on their language proficiency. Yet the funding is based solely on students' years in Canada and Census data on recent immigration (OMOE, 2013a). The results mean that not all eligible students receive the English language support they need and that classroom teachers and specialized staff are not able to address the language needs of all students.

Another major disconnect is the accountability and direction of funds. School boards are responsible for how they spend, as well as whether they spend all the money on language support (People for Education, 2013a; 2013b). According to People for Education, the funding granted for language acquisition can be used for other programs and services (2013b). Prior to the 2007 policy for English language learners, 130 schools in Toronto that had a small number of English language learners (1-10) had not received any English as a Second Language teacher support (2013a),

after the policy the same schools became served by a team of 37 itinerant English as a Second Language teachers. Although significant efforts have been made in Ontario elementary schools, People for Education discovered that in 2013 23% of schools with 10 or more ELLs had no specialist English as a Second Language teacher and the average ratio of English as a Second Language/English Language Development teachers to English language learner was 1:73 (2013a).

### **9.1. Funding and Provisions Policy**

According to the Ministry of Education (2011a), for the ninth consecutive year Ontario has increased its Education spending. The increase of 46 per cent, or \$6.6 billion brings the total to \$21 billion (OMOE, 2011a). For the 2015-2016 school year, the projected English as a second Language and English Literacy Development allocation is \$222.8 million (OMOE, 2013a); this assigns an average of \$11, 451 per pupil over the year. Clearly a significant amount of money is dedicated to public education. The funding, however, is based on the sum of the Recent Immigrant and Pupils in Canada components weighed for each of the four years the student is eligible (OMOE, 2013a). Although the Ontario Ministry of Education emphasizes that the efforts made better align education funding with more efficient board cost structures drawn from current and relevant data (2010), as the People for Education illustrate, the quantitative data used does not consider the English language proficiency of the students (2013a; 2013b). Various Canadian-born English language learners, thereby, will continue to lack effective support (People for Education, 2013b).

Of specific relevance for this review is that the Ontario Ministry of Education espouses commitment to working with stakeholders to effectively manage and use funding for professional development and relevant board initiatives, as well as collaborate with school boards to acquire and manage text books, learning materials and classroom supplies (OMOE, 2010). Due to board interests and needs, however, funds may be spent in vastly different ways. An audit of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat found that funding allocated for six secretariat programs could not be fully explained by the Secretariat (OMOE, 2009b). The document outlines that funding was either based on average daily student enrolment or the Secretariat could not fully explain the method it used to allocate funding (OMOE, 2009b). Funding based on average daily enrolment rather than relative need does not direct resources towards the greatest need. In fact, the audit reports that school boards were unable to provide evidence that use of funds resulted in higher achievement (OMOE, 2009b). Further analysis, therefore, is required to assess the effectiveness of the various programs in improving student outcomes. Once achieved, the transfer of payments to school boards for initiatives that provide the most benefit to students' achievement can be ensured (OMOE, 2009b).

### **9.2. Funding & Provisions Suggestions and Recommendations**

The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat partnered with the Ontario Association of Deans of Education to create a research-into-practice series, which can be used to foster student learning. *What Works? Research into Practice* (2007) is written by Jim Cummins. It outlines the importance of active engagement with literacy for student success and key ways for ELLs to connect their first language to English. Cummins acknowledges that educators have introduced promising innovations in English language education but notes that ELLs require at least five years to acquire age-appropriate academic language skills (e.g. reading, writing, and vocabulary). This marks an important discrepancy between funds granted for four years by the

government. Strategies for success, Cummins argues, require a coherent language policy at the school level, in which subject teachers must be given the provisions and education to be capable of including all students in the learning process (2007).

Although funding has dramatically increased over the past decade (OMOE, 2013a), supporting improvements in public education and English language acquisition, it is difficult to understand how the OMOE can assert that appropriate funding will be allotted so schools have the resources they need through continued use of data and results of the work and progress made (OMOE, 2008c) when recognizing that English proficiency is not a measure directing funding. Perhaps this is an area that will be considered for further ELL development.

## 10. Summary

The Ontario Ministry of Education has made significant advancements regarding English language acquisition. Policy, initiatives, reports, and funds have been developed and allocated with the best intentions for Ontario English language learner education. Based on the discoveries in this literature review, it is clear that English acquisition is paramount in current educational discourse. Much of the Ontario Ministry of Education literature comments on the continual journey of education; for students, educators, and administration alike. With specific attention to requirements for effective English language learning, educators can develop their theoretical and practical teaching skills through study of the available Ontario Ministry of Education material. As a journey, the research and initiatives pertaining to strategies and techniques, character development, diversity and inclusivity training, and assessment and evaluation practices that are available in various Ontario Ministry of Education documents should continue to expand and modify with changing demographics of Ontario students. With projections from Statistics Canada stating that by 2031, three in ten Canadians could have a first language other than English or French (2010), it is imperative that educators develop their capacity for teaching English language learners.

The reports offered by the Ontario Ministry of Education have shown that funding and provisions have grown substantially. With the goal of academic success for all students, the government is well aware of the need for English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development programs and supports. While funds and provisions have been making their way towards many English language learners, there are others that do not meet the quantifiable data requirements remain isolated from current guiding principles and funding. The way in which the funds are being spent, therefore, is also making an unquantifiable academic difference for many students.

## 11. Conclusion

It has been a rewarding experience learning about the advancements in Ontario public education. The initiatives and direction of this school system have unquestionably succeeded in positioning itself as one of the leading education systems in the world (Mourshed, Chijoke, & Barber, 2010). With school excellence being the goal of Ontario public education, the improved social and academic achievements, personal and social well-being, and improved attendance are progressive results from English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development programs and policy. For Ontario to develop their mission of cultivating and continuously developing a high-quality teaching profession with strong leadership throughout the system (OMOE, 2014), teachers need to feel confident that they can effectively motivate English language learners to achieve high expectations and success

(Burchell, Dyson, & Rees, 2002; Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2011). Educators need to develop their ability to be responsive and offer high quality lessons that are accessible and integrated. An important next step in building the vibrant, prosperous province of tomorrow, which is the Ontario Ministry of Education's goal, is to effectively train teachers to foster motivated innovators, community builders, creative talent, skilled workers, entrepreneurs, and leaders of tomorrow.

A literature review by Kathryn Broad and Mark Evans discovered that effective professional developments needs to be continuous, in-depth, and requires active engagement by the educator (2006). Unlike other professions, including law, accounting, and policing, education does not have a universally accepted set of standards for required in-service training (Broad & Evans, 2006). Although Broad and Evans (2006) contend that training should be systemic, comprehensive, and research-informed, there is no single, linear pathway for teachers to develop individually. Similarly to the students they teach, for professional development to be successful, education for educators must be differentiated. Unfortunately, the complex issue of professional development remains obscure. As Jim Cummins notes, although many boards provide short-term intervention programs, unless regular classroom instruction extends and supports language learning, the intervention effects will quickly fade (OMOE, 2013a).

For teachers to foster their ability to teach English language learners effectively, they need to learn about their students. Although Ontario educators have demonstrated that English language learners' cultural knowledge and language abilities can be mobilized within the classroom as important tools and resources for learning (Cummins, 2007), Cummins suggests that the systematic development of language policy at the school level is crucial for extending innovative practices and attitudes into schools across the province (2007). Such a policy should reflect the demographic trends, but also the recent research literature that suggests that what teachers know and are able to do is one of the most important factors influencing student learning (Broad & Evans, 2006; Ryan & Date, 2012).

## **12. Recommendations**

The Ontario Ministry of Education encourages teachers to be continual learners. They recommend that anyone responsible for or seeking professional development should consider the following: coherency, attention to adult learning styles, learning goals, sustainability, and that it should be evidence-informed (OMOE, 2007c). Encouraging this type of reflective practice should also promote forward planning. Although incorporating such characteristics will guide effective professional development, the motivation for learning is linked to relevance and choice. Professional development, therefore, covers a broad spectrum of learning pathways. As such, there is no assurance that teachers will choose to learn more about English language development and effective ELL strategies. While the career trajectories teachers choose to take will ultimately benefit their students, they will not necessarily benefit the growing number of ELLs in Ontario. After conducting this literature review, I am left questioning what professional development teachers are participating in to assure they are implementing policy mandates and effectively educating ELLs? And, how does the Ontario Ministry of Education know that the professional development is linked to student achievement?

While current literature stresses that teaching is becoming increasingly complex and that highly competent teachers need to continue learning, adapting, strengthening



their sophisticated pedagogical repertoire and range of practices for various contexts (Broad & Evans, 2006), there remains a gap in literature that connects professional development with professional learning and change in practice (OMOE, 2007c). Further research should consider reporting successful professional development practices that have directly impacted teacher instruction and student success. By doing so, professional development could anticipate and proactively design learning programs that engage teachers and support student achievement, and funding could be more accurately directed and spent.

To sustain development and achieve excellence, Mourshed, Chijioke, and Barber (2010), state that system leaders must integrate three aspects of development and implementation: performance level, interventions necessary to make desired improvements, and adaptations of the intervention to the prevailing context (taking into account history, culture, policies, structure of school system and nation). We recommend that the improvement journey exist for teacher training as well. System leaders, both administrations and teachers themselves, should have a clear understanding of teacher performance, design appropriate and personalized interventions, and adapt the interventions for each prevailing context. With clear differentiated professional development channels to pursue, educators can make intelligent and evidence based choices on which next step to take. With effective education, teachers will be able to develop and model the strength of character to overcome obstacles and be resilient; characteristics the Ontario Ministry of Education expects from public school students.

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