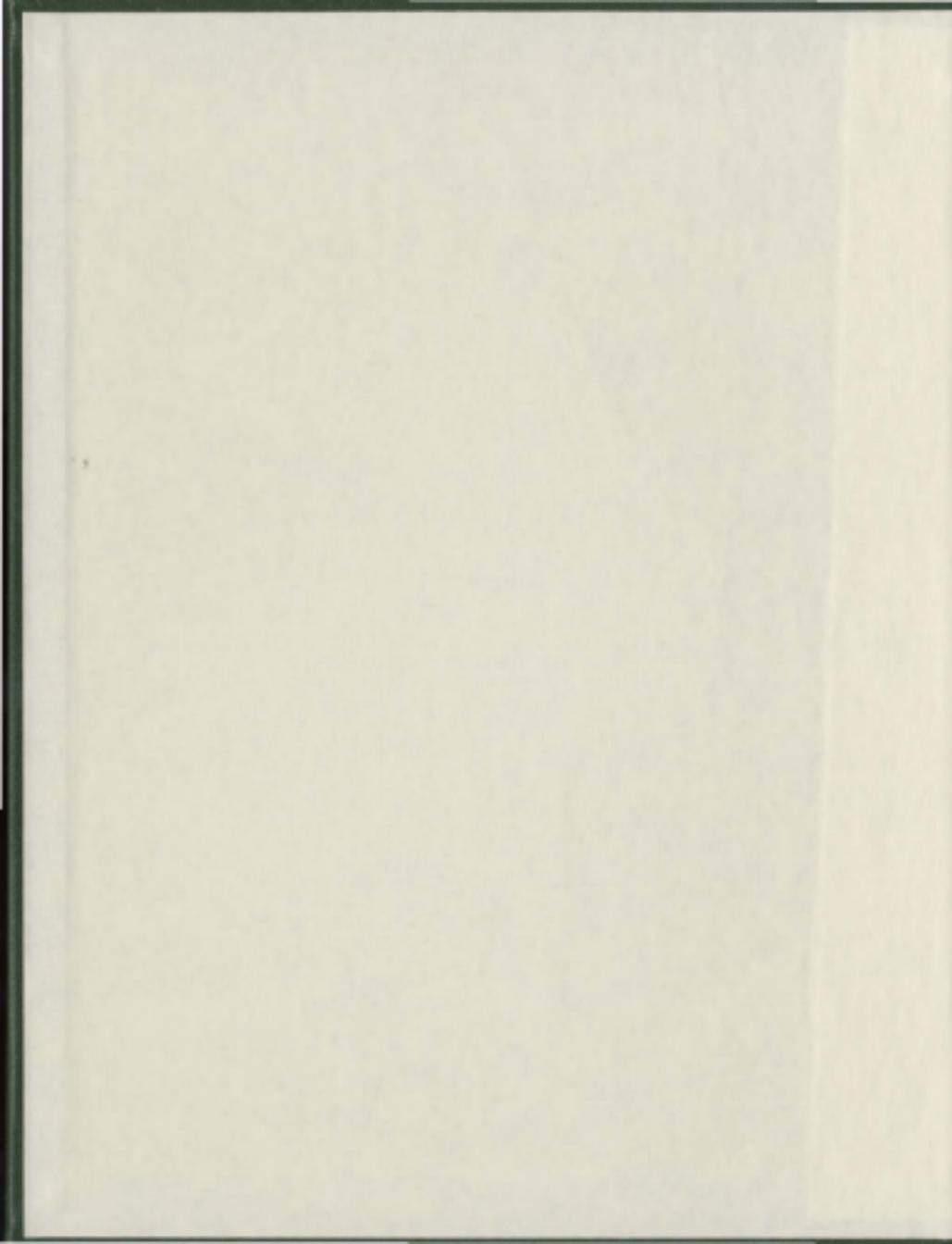


PRACTICAL WORLD OF ESL TEACHERS IN THE  
EASTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT, ST. JOHN'S NL:  
PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES

OLGA VILTCHEK







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by

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A thesis submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Education**

**Faculty of Education**

Memorial University of Newfoundland

**May, 2011**

St. John's

NL

## **Abstract**

### **Practical World of ESL Teachers in the Eastern School District, St. John's, NL Pedagogical Experiences and Challenges**

The personal accounts of five ESL teachers were analysed using elements of a grounded theory approach, and compared to the existing professional literature. The major emerging themes were motivation, teachers' professional preparation, collaboration with different groups involved in ESL education and work challenges. Main intrinsic motivational factors indicated by the teachers were desire to work in a multicultural environment and love for children. The study also showed that the teachers' professional preparation was not sufficient for working with students with learning gaps. Results showed that ESL teachers in the District encounter challenges comparable to what ESL teachers experience in other Canadian provinces and the US. Thus, the study suggested that the teachers have challenges in maintaining collaboration with certain groups, such as parents, social workers (SWIS) and administration. They also encounter institutional barriers and other constraints that have practical impact on their professional practices and outcomes. However some issues such as lack of curriculum and assessment kits, unstable job security, and inappropriate working conditions in some schools are triggered by the particular context of the District.

### Acknowledgments

Many people assisted me through this journey. I thoroughly enjoyed my coursework at MUN's Faculty of Education, which was my much needed preparation back to academia. Without the expert advice of my colleagues, mentors, friends, and my family, the successful completion of this work would not be possible.

I am most grateful to my supervisor, Elizabeth Yeoman, who helped me begin this journey and gave me confidence to believe that I would be able to complete this extensive work. She provided me guidance and understanding throughout my work, and assisted me with thoughtful comments and constructive suggestions. Her open, friendly and flexible demeanor afforded for valuable opportunities for creativity and personal growth. Doctor J. Phillips also helped me to begin the journey and gave me the confidence to believe that I would be able to complete this work.

Further, I would like to express my appreciation to all the participants of this research who shared their views and experiences with me with great insight and candor. I learned a tremendous amount from them and I am looking forward to sharing their narratives and discussions in return. I am humbled by the efforts of these teachers working very hard to continue to grow professionally and contribute to the improvement of the ESL in their schools.

I extend my gratitude to my editor, Tamara Reynish, who demonstrated exceptional dedication to this long work and stayed with me to the end of this journey.

I also appreciate the friendship and advice offered by Dasha Shafiro and Natalia Volkova. They offered opportunities to informally discuss academic issues and share life experiences that inevitably influenced my graduate work and, therefore, became crucial in finishing this degree.

My family's support made this work possible and I am especially grateful for the infinite support, patience and understanding of this long and isolating process of my husband, Alexey, and

my son, Savely.

Finally, I dedicate my efforts to my mother, Anna, for making me feel special and proud for taking courage in dedicating myself to this work.

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## Chapter 1

### Point of Departure

#### 1.1 Introduction

Practical experience teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Belarus resulted in my decision to complete a Master's in Second Language Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). I taught English as one of the foreign languages that was compulsory for successful graduation from the Belarussian State University. While living in Newfoundland, my interest in teaching English remained. I discovered that teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) differs from teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in philosophy and practice within these sub-fields. I assumed that these variations occur mainly due to the social, cultural and political contexts in which the teaching takes place. I discovered that teaching ESL in this province goes beyond the immediate goals of language proficiency as was the case in the context of EFL at the university where I taught, and serves a greater purpose. In the context of Canadian multiculturalism "language teachers need to be prepared from a knowledge base that considers the learners' need for bilingualism as well as society's need for individuals with the capacity for cross-linguistic, -cultural, -social, and -political boundaries" (Bigelow & Walker, 2004, p.4).

Therefore, being unfamiliar with the specifics of teaching ESL, my intention was to look into this domain in the context of teaching English to immigrants in

Newfoundland and Labrador – a context that is currently changing due to the province's recently adopted initiative to attract more immigrants into the province (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007). Starting from my own teaching experience and educational background, this study investigates the work of ESL teachers in the province. The examination of ESL teachers' experiences in the context of Newfoundland and Labrador becomes particularly relevant to the emerging interest in attracting immigrants to the province as little has been published about teaching ESL in Newfoundland and Labrador. While this question is a starting point of my inquiry, this study is not designed to compare or contrast ESL teachers in Newfoundland with EFL teachers in foreign countries, but to bring to light major aspects of practical experiences of ESL teachers in the Eastern School District.

ESL teachers have a complex role in the current system of education. In addition to teaching the language, they must strive to promote high self-esteem and cultural pride among their English language learners (ELLs). At the same time, ESL professionals are expected to teach the "hidden curriculum" of their school to ELLs and their parents. This has become a crucial part of their job (Haynes, 2004). The "hidden curriculum" represents those implied social rules, fundamental beliefs and values of the community that are not a part of the academic curriculum (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985; Haynes, 2004). Hence, for ELLs to integrate and adapt into the school culture, learning the hidden curriculum is as important as learning the language. Sometimes, the role of an

ESL teacher extends to helping ELLs and their families adapt to the school culture without forcing them to give up their cultural background. At the same time, ESL teachers are expected to educate the community about the cultures that ELLs bring. Moreover, research shows that the work of ESL teachers encompasses multileveled collaboration with stakeholders —mainstream teachers, administrators, and parents— who all impact the educational process (Harper, de Jong & Platt, 2008).

My previous knowledge of ESL teacher practice and examination of relevant literature regarding the ESL profession served as a foundation for the development of questions for the current study. The questions focus on major areas that, in my opinion, define the philosophy and practice of ESL teachers: collaboration between ESL teachers and stakeholders, teachers' beliefs about curriculum and their views on the importance of training to become an ESL teacher are primary areas of investigation. Consequently, these areas are the starting point for expanding on the participants' experiences and beliefs, and form the basis for other themes that emerged during the interview and analysis processes.

This study, which has elements of a grounded theory approach, will facilitate the development of a theoretical account of the general features of the topic while simultaneously grounding the narrative in the teachers' own accounts of their work and experience (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The construction and constitution of the individual teachers' roles is an immensely diverse and complex process. The intent of this inquiry,

however, is not to detail a profile of variables that comprise such a teaching experience, but more to capture the major themes extrapolated from the data.

This study deepens the present understanding of ESL teachers' roles and reflects on the teachers' views on the practicality of ESL teaching strategies while elucidating issues that interfere with the effective implementation of ESL services. Additionally, this study reveals what additional support the teachers require to work efficiently with second language learners. Issues related to increased immigration, human capacity and cultural divides, as well as instructional and programming needs are gleaned from the narratives of the ESL teachers who participated in the study. This research, detailing current ESL teacher practices and perspectives, may help increase the understanding of the important roles that ESL teachers play in the Eastern School District.

### **1.2. Providing Context**

Statistics Canada, following research conducted on the number of newcomers to the country each year, projects that "by the year 2025, 100 percent of Canada's population growth will be attributed to immigration" (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007). This study also points out that currently almost one in five (18 percent) of Canada's population is foreign born.

Newfoundland and Labrador today is home to immigrants from all over the world. However, the population primarily consists of the descendants of settlers who came from Great Britain and Ireland and much smaller numbers from France, in addition to four Aboriginal groups: the Métis, Innu, Inuit and Mi'kmaq peoples (Encyclopedia of Canadian Provinces, 2007). The combination of these demographic groups has laid a permanent foundation for a vibrant and culturally unique province.

According to 2007 statistics, Newfoundland and Labrador can attribute only 0.16 percent of its total population to recent immigration; this rate of immigration has been stable since 2003. Of these recent immigrants, only 36 percent remain in the province. Thus, the influx and retention of newcomers is relatively low. Considering this, in 2007 the province adopted a new immigration strategy with the view to ensuring a prosperous future for the province by increasing immigration, which may contribute to economic growth and stabilization of the province's decreasing population. This provincial government strategy explains how the economy and culture of Newfoundland and Labrador would benefit from attracting and retaining immigrants. According to this strategy, immigrants bring their entrepreneurial spirit to Newfoundland and Labrador and establish businesses, which foster economic growth. In addition, some highly-trained immigrants provide valuable services in many social sectors, particularly health care and education. A primary objective of the immigration strategy is to attract more immigrants to the province and to retain them once they arrive. Stakeholders agreed that the province

should undertake initiatives to attract more immigrants and implement programs designed to improve retention (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007). Increased immigration will also contribute to the cultural landscape of the province, bringing diversity and the opportunity to experience other cultures. However, most immigrants will need support, including language support, when they get here.

Though the first record of teaching ESL in Canada dates back to the late nineteenth century, ESL education on a larger scale began after World War II. In response to the influx of immigrants from Europe displaced by the six-year European conflict, the Canadian government introduced a language and citizenship program for adult newcomers, which was administered through provincial ministries of education. Later, these ESL programs expanded across Canada as policy makers at the federal level recognized the importance of facilitating newcomers' "social, cultural, economic and political integration into Canada so that they could become participating members of the society as quickly as possible" (TESL Ontario, 2007, p.4).

Since most immigrant children depend on their schools to teach them about Canada and their civic rights and responsibilities, it is incumbent on the school system to ensure these newcomers are prepared to take their place in Canadian life. However, until the late twentieth century, ESL programs and services in Newfoundland were minimal

and often informal (Burnaby, 1992). Usually teachers without ESL credentials, volunteers (retired teachers), or tutors provided ESL in-class assistance.

Presently at the national level, Consultations on the Settlement and Language Training Services Needs of Newcomers identifies language learning as one of the needs to be addressed to facilitate the transition and integration of newcomers into the Canadian lifestyle (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, n. d.). On their arrival to Canada, newcomers are assigned to complete language courses with a Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) school, a national ESL program for adults that is delivered by qualified and experienced instructors. The program is based on the underlying principles of adult language learning and teaching as defined in the Canadian Language Benchmark document targeted at providing language services and delivery to immigrants (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2006). However, ESL programming in schools has become the responsibility of the provincial government, which determines its direction and defines the amount of support for providing assistance to young newcomers (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007).

In the Immigration Strategy, policy makers acknowledged that solid ESL programming and quality ESL services have become imperative for immigrants to settle in the province. Thus, the Strategy recognizes the need to provide improved educational outcomes for K-12 ESL students throughout the province by reviewing teacher allocation

for the provision of ESL programs. The Strategy also recognizes the need to provide ongoing professional development for classroom teachers and ESL teachers and to examine different modes of providing ESL service, including the use of distance technology (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007).

The Immigration Strategy details the breakdown of ESL students in the Eastern School District, which is the focus of this study. In the Eastern School District, the majority of ESL students are in the K-9 student population. As of June 2006, there were 193 ESL students: 113 in elementary, 38 in intermediate and 42 in high school (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007). The breakdown of ESL students in the 2009-2010 school year is as follows: 137 in elementary, 37 in intermediate and 63 in high school (updated information obtained via email from the Eastern District Office - see Appendix 1). These statistics show a steady growth of the number of students who require special language support, especially in the urban areas of the Eastern School District.

When considering the abovementioned figures, it can be assumed that the demand for qualified ESL services is also increasing within the Eastern School District in particular, as more immigrants prefer to settle in or around the greater St. John's area. The Immigration Strategy (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007) specifies that there is a perceived

need to increase access to ESL services due to the growing number of schools where ESL programming is necessary.

In 2002, the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education published a handbook designed to guide administrators and classroom teachers in the reception and orientation of ESL students and families into schools and communities, and to provide suggestions for program planning and delivery. Since that publication, revised curriculum guides were released for high schools, new learning resources have been authorized for grades 7-12, and in September 2006, a new ESL literature course was implemented (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007). Therefore, it is timely to study teachers' work in this field.

### **1.3. Significance**

As this province becomes more culturally diverse, understanding the current state of ESL teaching is vital. This qualitative study examining ESL teachers' experiences might contribute to emerging discourse in this province and the findings may influence future studies in this or other areas of ESL. The findings in previous national and international research serve as a source of reference and a means of comparison for the findings in this study. Based on interviews with the teachers and drawing on aspects of grounded theory, this study provides an in-depth examination of the experiences of ESL

teachers and unveils some issues and challenges they encounter while teaching ESL in the Eastern School District. Moreover, this research may contribute to improved teacher practices and hold implications for the professional development of ESL instructors. The findings of this study might also offer insight and contribute to the awareness of policy makers.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 ESL Context

This study focuses on the perspectives of ESL teachers on ESL education in the context of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Eastern School District in particular. I conducted an overview of the literature in the area of ESL covering such topics as: ESL teacher preparation; curriculum issues in ESL; models of ESL instruction; and collaborative relationships that ESL teachers build during their practices. The investigation of these topics informed the research and helped discover thematic directions for the interviews. This literature review is represented mostly by North-American studies that I considered relevant for exploring this particular context.

Canadian studies reported a dramatic increase of more than 200 percent (Statistics Canada, 2008) of the ESL population over the past ten years in the major metropolitan areas of Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal and Toronto. However, despite such a significant increase in the ESL student population in Canadian schools, school boards have not provided adequately systematic responses to the need for quality ESL services (Rimniceanu, 2007). In response to the rising need to provide high-quality ESL support in the most immigrant populated provinces, a Calgary-based umbrella organization – the Coalition for Equal Access to Education – initiated roundtable discussions with all

interested parties to articulate a common vision of ESL learners and develop strategies for effective ESL education (Van Ngo, 2007, p. 2). As a result of this discussion, six pillars of effective ESL education were outlined: development of comprehensive programming by professionally trained personnel that should necessarily include standards of achievements and have strong connection with the learners' bank of knowledge in their first language; responsive funding allocations that should have a needs-based framework; cultural competence where the stakeholders emphasized the need for a culturally diverse personnel; networking, collaboration and coordination between interested individuals, groups and institutions; capacity-building and advocacy that suggests spreading awareness of ESL in order to raise the profile of ESL education and enhance resources for ESL services; and effective leadership that implies systemic responses at all levels (Van Ngo, 2007).

As mentioned above, Canadian studies on ESL show that ESL programming in Canada does not meet the changing needs of ESL students. The studies are drawing on previous studies on ESL student achievement over ten years that indicated a 74 percent dropout rate among high school ESL students after they exited ESL programs (Watt & Roessingh, 1994, 2001). Kouritzin and Matthews (2002) explain such a high dropout rate through a generally accepted rationale: "ESL students must learn the language of instruction, the academic language and genres required for content study, and the subject area simultaneously" (para. 2). Even though tracking studies have not been completed in

Newfoundland and Labrador, it can be assumed the dropout rate in the province is unlikely to be lower. The issue of high drop out rate raised concern for many educators in other parts of Canada that led to the reconstruction of ESL school programs. For example, in Alberta an ESL researcher, Roessingh (1999), responded to this issue by including an adjunct component for the most linguistically demanding course in the mainstream required to enter a university: the English literature course. It is intended to link mainstream content to ESL programming, drawing on language learning needs of ELLs. Thus the emphasis was put on the active role of ESL specialists: "...we need to be clear that the ESL teachers are the educators with the expertise to be proactive in responding to ESL learners' needs" (p. 74). Later, adding to her previous research on adjunct ESL support for the literature course, Roessingh and Field (2000) drew the attention of school administration to the construction of a timetable for sheltered English and an adjunct ESL course that is compatible with the proportional integration into mainstream for high school learners. Roessingh and Field (2000) emphasized collaborative planning of ESL and mainstream teachers for the content and language goals, thus putting ESL educators at the forefront of program change.

Given the fact that the social fabric of Canada is diverse, debates over social justice, inclusion and multiculturalism permeate this sphere of education. Thus, many scholars, including Burnaby, James & Regier (2000), Breshears (2004), Johnson (2006) and Rinniccanu (2007) have advocated for inclusive education where the ideas of

multiculturalism are cultivated and practiced. Rîmniceanu (2007) asserts that an inclusive education system "may be a key indicator as well as predictor of social cohesion in Canada" (Rîmniceanu, 2007). In her literature review on multiculturalism in the Canadian classroom, Rîmniceanu outlines that current policies on multiculturalism do not find application in practice. She states: "Policies are in place to protect multiculturalism ideals; however, they are formulated in a general manner and fail to shed light on how and when they are applied" (p.13).

However, Rîmniceanu (2007) also states that in the area of ESL policy makers and practitioners have managed to effectively link theory and practice. Presently, almost every province in Canada has comprehensive ESL policies that outline principles of inclusion and address the issues from teacher competence training to roles and responsibilities of main stakeholders. Newfoundland and Labrador also has curriculum guides in place at the secondary level for ESL instruction in public schools (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Education, 2009). Besides ESL curriculum guidelines, the Immigration Strategy document (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007) dedicates a section to improvement of initiatives in ESL education in high school and proposes prospective initiatives for effective implementation of ESL programming. English as a Second Language and Newcomer Programs (ESL and LEARN) echo goals and principles of the existing policies in other provinces of Canada: to support the

language development of ELLs; to both help them develop intellectually and as citizens; and achieve the expected learning outcomes of provincial curricula in the school communities that value diversity and promote inclusion (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007).

## **2.2 Choice of the Field - Motivation**

Teaching children is complex and demanding. It requires not only professional knowledge of pedagogy, psychology and methodology, but also genuine dedication towards the craft. The quality of teaching depends on teachers' motivation to teach (Sinclair, 2008). The literature explains that regardless of many laudable motivators that have attracted teachers for more than a century — working with young learners and contributing to a society — there are competing concerns that counter positive factors of teaching, such as inadequate resources, subordinate status, work intensification, lack of public respect (Anthony & Ord, 2007 as cited in Smethen, 2007; Sinclair, 2008). Therefore, for the current study it is necessary to begin by determining factors that bring teachers into the teaching profession as well as negative factors that the teachers may experience in order to identify trends that apply to the context of Newfoundland and Labrador to inform teacher recruitment and retention.

In addition to knowing more about attractors to teaching, it is important to consider how teacher expectations play out in their first few years of teaching. It is during

this stage, when they are "constructing and reconstructing their sense of professional self (the values, purposes and practices that make up their identities as teachers), that they are most vulnerable" (Anthony & Ord, 2007, as cited in Smethem, 2007, p. 469).

According to Dörnyei (2001a), motivation is thought to be responsible for "why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity and how hard they are going to pursue it" (p. 6). Research suggests that salient motivations determine: (a) what activities people do or do not engage in ("attraction"); (b) how long they engage in these activities ("retention"); and (c) the depth to which they engage in these activities ("concentration") (Sinclair, 2008, p. 80).

Epstein (2001) conducted a study where one of the forms of client analysis was to identify the teachers' learning needs in order to understand their preferences in professional development. The teachers were asked to list their reasons for entering the field of language teaching. Among the reasons mentioned by the teachers were: they were inspired by volunteer work that led to the realization that it was a fulfilling career; they enjoyed English and working with people; they were uncomfortable teaching French as French language teachers, so they began teaching English; they had a positive experience teaching overseas; life circumstances; and others (p.54). A similar case study on teacher motivators was conducted in Australia, where the researchers explored teacher motivators according to three broad categories: intrinsic, extrinsic and altruistic reasons (Anthony & Ord, 2007 as cited in Smethem, 2007; Sinclair, 2008). Organized under these categories,

the study reported that altruistic (for example, making a difference in young people's lives, community and society) and extrinsic (for example, holidays, job expectations, dissatisfactions with previous employment) motivations were the dominant factors in choosing the profession of teaching. Among other reasons to teach, teachers mentioned "love" of or desire to work with and benefit children; influence of others including family members or past teachers; and love of teaching a particular subject and desire to impart knowledge. However, after a more detailed analysis of the data the researchers complied with Watt and Richardson's (2007) critique of this framework for the "lack of definitional precision and agreed theoretical links" (p. 364). They cite Anthony *et al.*: "A review of our data indicated that each participant's reasoning for turning to teaching as a career was multifaceted, complex, at times emotionally charged, and contradictory" (p. 364).

Watt and Richardson, adapting the expectancy-value theory of motivation proposed in work by Wigfield and Eccles (2000), developed comprehensive factors influencing teaching choice (FIT-Choice). According to expectancy-value theory, behaviour is a function of the expectancies one has and the value of the goal toward which one is working. Such an approach predicts that when more than one behaviour is possible, the behaviour chosen will be the one with the largest combination of expected success and value (Fishbein, 1967, as cited in Smetten, 2007). Applying the developed framework in a survey study that involved 1653 pre-service teacher education candidates in Australia, the researchers identified the following constructs in choosing teaching:

antecedent socialisation influences; tasks perceptions – both demands and returns; self perceptions; values – intrinsic, personal and social; and fallback career options.

In a further analysis, Watt and Richardson (2007) discovered that participants' teaching ability-related beliefs, personal and social utility values and positive prior experiences of teaching and learning were significant motivations for choosing teaching as a career.

A body of research suggests considering teacher motivation from the perspective of teachers' feelings associated with this profession (Day, 2000; Elliott & Crosswell, 2001; Nias, 1996; Watt and Richardson, 2007). The literature identifies associations between teachers' commitment and their effectiveness. In the study of teachers' identity, Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington & Gu (2007) discussed how positive teachers' identities influenced the strength of their motivation. They stated that "emotions play a key role in the construction of identity" (p. 8). They found that the way the teachers sense themselves and the image that they present to others vary along three dimensions: professional, situational and personal. The professional dimension reflects social and policy expectations of what a good teacher is and educational ideals of the teacher. A positive social image of an ESL teacher may serve as an attraction to enter this career. The situated dimension is located in a specific school and context and is affected by local conditions, leadership, support and feedback and is connected to a long-term identity. The personal dimension is located outside school and is linked to family and social roles.

The researchers assert that the strength of teachers' commitment, job satisfaction, their well-being, self-efficacy and vulnerability can be affected by the above mentioned influences. The research found that the extent to which teachers are able to and are supported across these three dimensions determine their sense of effectiveness.

In summary, teachers start with motivational expectations of what teaching involves. The literature review offered a general framework for grouping motivational factors, such as intrinsic, extrinsic and altruistic incentives. Other perspectives suggested looking into the interrelation of teacher identity and incentive to undertake the teaching profession. However, due to the multifaceted nature of teacher motivation, various frameworks apply. The overview of the literature will help locate the ESL teachers' motivations within these frameworks.

### **2.3 Issues of Professionalism and Professionalization in ESL**

A major criticism of ESL programs has been the lack of effective ESL teachers (Richards, 1987; Judd, 2000; Zen, 2001; Breeshears, 2004; Schmidt, 2004; Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005; Rimniceanu, 2007; Ajayi, 2008; Harper & de Jong, 2009). In this section I will introduce a review of the literature on the effectiveness of an ESL educator. It will examine such domains as professionalism (Breeshears, 2004), professionalization (MacPherson, Kouritzin and Kim, 2005), ESL teacher qualification

(Freeman, 1992; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005) and specialized training (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005; Goldstein, 2003).

Many studies highlighted ESL teachers' lack of credentials, implying that a great number of ESL teachers in Canada and the US do not have specialized training and thus, are unable to adequately address the learning needs of ELLs. In the 1990s Mendelsohn (1994) measured the ESL profession against published definitions of the term *profession*, concluding that ESL education in Canada (Ontario) at that time failed to meet these criteria for being called a real profession, defined as follows: "A profession consists of individuals with specialized knowledge obtained through intensive education which allows them to provide esoteric services in a near-monopoly fashion to a public which recognizes and accepts the utility of the monopoly" (p. 84). Mendelsohn (1994) explained that the teachers' knowledge was "less than specialized": the ESL teachers' services were not viewed as highly skilled as many still believed that anyone who speaks English can teach English, and the public did not recognize ESL teachers' monopoly to teach ESL (p. 84).

In an article discussing the status of non-native English-speaking teachers, Astor (2000) explains that "a qualified teacher of English should be a professional in at least three fields of knowledge: pedagogy, methodology, and psycho- and applied linguistics" (p. 18). He adds that good relationships and fun in the class do not make it up to the student if a teacher lacks competence in one of the areas. This leads to poor quality of

ESL education and a high dropout rate at schools. In Alberta 63 percent of schools reported that staff designated to instruct ESL had some ESL training, while 27 percent of ESL designated teachers had no TESL training (Review of ESL Program Implementation in Alberta, 2006). While the number of ESL students in Ontario has been increasing, the ESL resources have been reported to be declining. A number of Canadian schools expressed concern that ELLs were taught by school workers with no specialized ESL training: librarians, special education teachers and, in one case, the physical education teacher are teaching ELLs (People for Education, 2002). In addition, the work of ESL teachers is aggravated by the fact that there are cohorts of ELLs with severely interrupted schooling that requires even more sophisticated pedagogic responses from ESL and classroom educators (Dooley, 2009, p. 5). However, ESL teachers are not prepared to be literacy teachers (Dooley, 2009; Sarroub, Pernicek & Sweeney, 2007; Sarroub, 2008).

Since the discussion of professionalism of ESL teachers has become extremely relevant, it is worth examining the term "professionalism" as it is defined in the literature. Breshears (2004) frames it as an "internal quality of teaching" that would also include requisite traits and functions of teachers and professional development (p. 25). Lately, the literature on ESL and mainstream teacher qualification has been focussing on the multicultural aspect of specialized teacher training. For example, Johnson (2006), Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001), Lantolf and Thorne (2006), and Thorne (2001, 2004, 2005) characterize ESL teacher qualifications from the sociocultural stance. Johnson (2006)

maintains that an ESL teacher must demonstrate "knowledge of language teaching situations, possibilities afforded by social and institutional structures, and an understanding of how teachers relate their pedagogical practices to the sociocultural background experiences of their students" (p.236).

Goldstein (2003) reveals that ESL teacher education programs in Canada do not consider the impact second language students have on a school's linguistic, cultural and learning dynamics outside the classroom. Johnson (2006) also believes that good teaching and effective teacher education program depend on ESL teachers' ability to work effectively with students who call "more than one place home" (p. 4) and who are actively living in two or more cultures. According to Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll (2005) this preparation must include not only teaching related issues such as individual approach and methodologies, but also dealing with cultural diversity, social injustice, promotion of multiculturalism, dealing with parents and others.

Recent studies from sociocultural perspectives (Ajayi, 2008; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Thorne, 2001, 2004, 2005) have stressed the importance for ESL teachers to acknowledge the skills, cultural heritage and beliefs second language learners bring to the classroom. Canadian studies reveal that ESL teachers do not effectively deal with diverse sociocultural issues that arise in their classrooms with middle and high school students (Faez, 2007; Johnson, 1996; Nieto, 2002; Schmidt, 2004). Faez (2007) continues that ESL education is limited to single workshops or discussion groups around the topic, thus

the ESL teachers' success in addressing the needs of ELLs depends purely on the teachers' personal abilities and level of sensitivity to the background experiences of ELLs (p. 14). Researchers from the USA, such as Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll (2005) corroborated that the students of teachers with specialized training who understand the sociocultural lives of their students showed greater academic gains than those with teachers who lacked such preparation. Similarly, Ajayi (2008) pointed out that the ESL teachers in his study were sensitive to the sociocultural backgrounds of their students and were creative and resourceful in bridging cultural differences in class (p.640). However, the findings of the research indicate that ESL teachers faced institutional barriers (Johnson, 2006, p. 247), limited suitable materials that support teachers' sociocultural practices (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005, p. 9) and inadequate methods of assigning ESL students to ESL classes (Ajayi, 2008, p. 649; Gandara, 2005, p. 8). Consequently, Ajayi (2008), Breshears (2004), Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll (2005) and Johnson (2006) challenged the common underlying assumption that professionalism is primarily the responsibility of an ESL teacher, arguing that there are factors outside the control of ESL teachers that put constraints on ESL teachers' performance. Van Ngo (2007) paralleled previous findings by asserting that "effective ESL education must include not only English-language instruction, but also support services that help ESL learners achieve academic language proficiency and sociocultural well-being" (p. 6).

The outside factors mentioned above do not only affect professionalism of ESL teachers, but also impact the way an ESL group is viewed by the general public that is termed "professionalization." Professionalization "embodies the social and historical process, relating to the authority and status of the (teaching) profession" (Breshears, 2004, p. 25). It has been documented in the literature on ESL teaching that the "ESL community lacks the social status granted to many other professions" (Breshears, 2004, p. 24). Similarly, Harper and de Jong (2009) in case studies on professionalization of ESL teachers in the USA identified similar problems, saying that ESL education in the USA is being marginalized in mainstream contexts. The body of research narrows the discussion of low professionalization to the following reasons that interrelate: poor working conditions, and low pay (Breshears, 2004, p.25) that hinder good professionalism and, consequently, negatively affects social status of the profession. While the literature indicates parallel developments in ESL services in the US and Canada, contrary to the ESL teachers in the US, ESL teachers in school system in Canada are paid the same as other school teachers. Therefore, low pay cannot be considered an aspect of low social status of ESL teachers in Canada.

Other issues discussed in the literature on ESL teacher professionalization concern ESL professional knowledge parameters (Freeman, 1992, as cited in Breshears, 2004, p. 27) that are not clearly defined. Freeman points out that ESL lacks validated professional knowledge or "standards and processes for entry and licensure" that transform ESL as a

job category to ESL as a profession (Freeman, 1992, as cited in Breshears, 2004, p.27). Kreidler (1986) and Larson (1990, as cited in Breshears, 2004) called for standardized knowledge to enter an ESL profession that could distinguish a professional group from lay people through the process of certification. As Breshears (2004) and MacPherson *et al.* (2005) articulated, ESL professional knowledge provides a well-established mechanism for exclusion. Breshears (2004) continues: "there must be control over who can practice and who cannot" (p. 27). Labaree also claimed that ESL as a profession cannot be socially recognized until ESL is brought into line with other university-based disciplines (1992 as cited in Breshears, 2004). Conversely, MacPherson *et al.* (2005) relayed that universities across Canada offer teacher training courses that differ in duration, course offerings, programs and certificates (p.12). However, there is a conflict between universities and colleges that offer extended professional programs with academic credits, diplomas, and degrees and, alternatively, programs that only meet TESL Canada minimal requirements with short, often non-profit programs (Thomson, 2004 as cited in MacPherson *et al.* 2004, p. 13). Some universities and colleges feel that the latter discourages professionalization of the field since these programs are not accredited with TESL Canada certification and thus leave their graduates in limbo in their application for TESL Canada certification. Many employers demand such certifications.

Possibly, as a result of the inconsistency with standardization of university programs, many school boards in the US and Canada also fail to accept ESL as a

curriculum-based discipline and it is viewed only as an aiding tool for facilitating settlement of a second language learner.

Other researchers promote a more holistic understanding of an ESL education arguing that the scientific approach suggested by Labaree (1992 in Breshears 2004) is not properly suited for the nature of teaching and learning (as cited in Breshears, 2004, p. 26). They attribute the development of ESL education to ESL teacher research that earns credibility for the practice-based knowledge that teachers specialize in. Breshears (2004) adds that "documenting what ESL teachers do in the classroom and adding it to the academic discourse raise the status of ESL teachers' work" (p. 26).

Thus, the implementation of TESL Canada national standards for all ESL educators in May, 2002 (TESL Canada, 2009) serves as an authoritative base for evaluation and comparison of ESL training in Canada. In this province ESL teachers in adult and K-12 ESL programs are loosely organized under TESL Newfoundland and Labrador (TESL NL) - a professional organization that is an affiliate of TESL Canada. The primary responsibility of this professional organization is to develop professional ethos, principles, positions, professional development, community-building opportunities, codes of conduct and, finally, professional standards (Kreidler, 1987, p. 2; MacPherson *et al.*, 2005, pp. 7-8). Consequently, TESL NL's mission is to "promote awareness of TESL Canada recommendations and standards in ESL programs across the province" (TESL NL, n. d.). However, K-12 ESL teachers have to be certified according to the provincial

guidelines at the level they intend to teach, but they do not have to have TESL certification. Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province that does not have a standardised certification program in ESL. From this, it can be concluded that TESL as a field is undergoing the process of professionalization and is becoming exclusive and thus more attractive to high-quality candidates (Kreidler, 1986, p. 4; Breshears, 2004, p. 27; MacPherson *et al.*, 2005, p.17) thus directly influencing the social status of ESL teachers of K-12 across Canada.

#### **2.4 ESL Teacher Diversity**

Another recurring criticism of current ESL practices is the lack of teachers who reflect Canada's diversity. Previous studies have pointed out that non-native speaking L2 (Second Language) teachers face inequitable hiring practices, hold marginalized teaching assignments and are positioned as less competent than their expert-speaker counterparts (Arva & Medgyes, 2000, and Braine, 1999 as cited in Johnson, 2006, p. 247). Rimniceanu (2007) maintains that "the majority of school teachers are female who belong to the Euro-Canadian dominant group" (p. 16). This fact also holds true for ESL teachers in Newfoundland - they are all native English speakers. However, in other provinces in Canada the number of non-native speakers as teachers is larger. Rimniceanu (2007) asserts that incompatibility between the cultures of teachers and students has been increasingly identified as a key cause of poor school performance (p. 16). Johnson (2006)

when talking about the evolution of teacher identities within their localities, asserts that regardless of their linguistic biography, it is critical for ESL teachers to sustain a sense of professional expertise by the way they position themselves, enact their teaching practices and the kinds of learning environment they are able to create for their learners.

### **2.5 Curriculum Issues**

This section is dedicated to the discussion of terms *policy* and *curriculum*, the interrelation between these two concepts and how these influence ESL instruction in Canada. An overview of the related literature on the effectiveness of ESL programs and curriculum in Canadian provinces helps create a more complete picture of the internal workings of ESL practices in Canada.

The definition of "policy" is "a deliberate plan of action adopted or proposed by a government, party, business, or individual to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes" (Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 2004). To put it simply, a policy answers "the what?" and "the why?" Another possible way to look at policies is to think of them as principles that underline the actions that will take place to solve public issues (internet resource, <http://biz.map.com/e17a.htm>). Creese (2005) cites Ball's observation of policy and its relationship with outcomes, saying that it is not necessarily linear and straightforward. Ball (1997) maintains:

Policies create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do is narrowed or changed or particular goals or outcomes are set. A response must still be put together, constructed in context, offset against or balanced by other expectations. All of this involves creative social action of some kind (p. 31).

From Ball's quote, Croese (2005) concludes that policy is interpretive and a potentially messy process (p. 31). For example, one of the main goals of existing educational ESL policies in Canada is to help quickly adapt immigrant children into the school system through providing them with additional English language services. These policies recognize the changing nature of the linguistic and cultural needs of the students and, therefore, encourage school boards to recognize the transitional nature of ESL programs. For example, Alberta's educational policy, adapted from the province of British Columbia states, "Its function is to facilitate the integration of the student into the regular school program at the earliest possible opportunity" (Alberta Education Policy 1.5.1, 2003).

Kouritzin and Matthews (2002) argue, however, that sometimes a broad definition of policy does not capture informally established practices that have influence on development of a public policy. Thus, at times it is necessary to consider *de facto* policy.

Ashworth identified several forces influencing ESL educational practice which help to pinpoint *de facto* policy (Ashworth, 1984 as cited in Kouritzin & Matthews, 2002). These forces include:

- 1) National questions such as who, when, where, from where, how many and under what circumstances, people are permitted to enter the country;
- 2) Social issues, such as whether assimilation or integration is stressed, the status of teachers, the tolerance for diversity in the community, the curriculum and support for programs;
- 3) Institutional influences like the philosophy and goals informing practice, the design, length and quality of programs, and
- 4) Economic forces which would direct the presence or absence of an ESL program, the class size, the number of teachers and the community's attitude towards immigrants (Definition Section, para.3).

Therefore, ESL policy refers to standard recommended procedures and practices permitted in the provision of ESL and other second languages. For example, the documents regulating ESL provisions in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador are Curriculum Guidelines, Literacy Enrichment and Academic Readiness for Newcomers (LEARN) developed by the Department of Education. Other ESL provincial policies (Alberta, British Columbia) and national policies (Canadian Immigration Act, 1977;

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; Multicultural Education Policy, 1992 and other documents governing the rights of immigrants) can potentially influence the provision of ESL instruction in K-12 schools.

Kouritzin and Mathews (2002) stated:

When viewed with a wide-angle lens, curriculum incorporates a wide variety of practices as well as pedagogical guidelines including, but not limited to, the role of administrators, the role of the teacher, pedagogical methodology, classroom texts, and classroom practice (Definition Section, para.8).

Kouritzin & Mathews (2002) added that supported by public tax monies, curriculum legitimates the socially accepted norms and values in society thus reflecting them in classroom practices. Therefore, they concluded, curriculum can be viewed as a policy (Definition Section, para.8). In relation to the governing of ESL education in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Department of Education has developed high school ESL curricula that are embedded in the curriculum guidelines for teachers. These guidelines specify curriculum outcomes for three levels of proficiency and encompass types of teaching approaches and learning activities to achieve the outcomes. In the reviewed literature, ESL is often viewed as an additional, secondary support that becomes the responsibility of school administration. Thus, scholars in Canada and the

US critique ESL school programming for the lack of comprehensive and solid educational frameworks that could place ESL in line with other school disciplines.

Examining the quality of ESL education in the school system in Canada, Van Ngo (2007) stated:

Despite the increased ESL student population in Canadian schools, school boards have not provided adequately systematic responses to the need for quality ESL services. Through the media, ethnocultural communities and advocates have consistently expressed their concerns about the failure of school boards to provide explicit, structured ESL instruction (p. 2).

To respond to such a great demand for quality ESL services, it has been suggested that ESL should be recognized as a core subject for ESL students (Roessingh & Field, 2000). However, many scholars argue that ESL instruction should be aimed at aiding to achieve academic success and be embedded in the content area curriculum. Research suggests integrating subject matter and language development through content-based ESL curriculum. According to Cummins (1980) students attain Basic Interpersonal Communicational Skills (BICS) that they carry out in a face-to-face conversation, in a short period of time and in cognitively undemanding contexts (p. 177). The other proficiency, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), is contextually reduced

to written texts in content areas such as math, science, social studies and other subjects. In order for ESL students to perform cognitively demanding tasks, such as writing and presenting research papers, for example, they need "CALP English that takes them beyond that of BICS English" (Brown, 2004). As discussed, ESL students' academic success heavily depends on their attainment of CALP English. Therefore, Brown (2004) asserts that integration of subject matter and language development in ESL programs is the best way for ESL students to succeed in the mainstream. Canadian schools have adopted various models of second language instruction and their choice depends on the ESL student population, individual student characteristics, training of the staff and district resources.

## **2.6 Instructional Models in ESL**

The research supports transitional programs (sheltered, pull-out, adjunct, inclusive) sustained for a period of five or more years (ESL K-12 Program Implementation in Alberta, 2006). According to research findings, full immersion of ESL students into mainstream classes at the early stages of their adaptation can be detrimental for their academic achievement (Harper & de Jong, 2009). Therefore, this integration into the mainstream is accompanied by pull-out support that is deemed the most beneficial for students who have little or no English. The delivery models of English language instruction depend on various factors, such as district demographics, funds allocation,

number of trained ESL teachers, ESL materials and resources, and availability of appropriate instructional space (Genesee, 1999, pp.14-17). Therefore, they vary across Canada. A Review of ESL K-12 Programs in Canadian provinces indicates that sheltered classrooms are most common in large schools with large numbers of ESL students. Further to this, the most widely used instruction is an in-class model that amounts to 64 percent, followed by a pull-out model comprising 20 percent. The following sections will provide an overview of the most commonly used models of instruction in Canadian schools and discuss their effectiveness from various perspectives.

#### **2.6.1 Sheltered instruction.**

The present day integral component of English language teaching for most K-12 schools in Canada and the US is aimed at supporting students' academic language development (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 1996; Harper & de Jong, 2009; Nunan, 2005; Richard-Amato & Snow, 2005). This movement toward including context in language instruction helps "meet the crucial need to prepare ELLs for mainstream academic content instruction" (Bigelow, Ranney & Dahlman, 2006, p. 40; Harper & de Jong, 2009, p. 141). In sheltered content-based classes, ESL and mainstream teachers make the content comprehensible through direct, clear and simple English and by using a wide range of scaffolding practices to communicate meaningful input in the content area to students. ELL students study in classes separate from the mainstream until they reach

language and academic proficiency sufficient to join the mainstream class. The literature finds the sheltering model to be successful as integrated instruction was deemed more effective than language learning in isolation, because, when integrated with context, language is used for authentic communication (Archibald, Bashutski, Guo, Jaques, Johnson, McPherson, Roessingh & Shea, 2008).

Sheltered programs can be either bilingual or monolingual, but English is a key element of both. Krashen (1985) presented a detailed model for this type of instruction that implies gradual transition of an ELL from a sheltered class to a mainstream one. For example, in this model, students are mainstreamed in music, arts and physical education, while they are sheltered for linguistically demanding classes, like science or math (as cited in Freeman & Freeman, 2001).

Meanwhile, Harper and de Jong (2009) believe that "the move towards content-based language and sheltered content teaching as well as increased attention to the linguistic demands of mainstream classrooms represent a significant shift in the content and context of ESL curriculum and instruction" (p. 141). Creese (2005) and Davidson (1992, 2006 as cited in Harper & de Jong, 2009) maintain that the shared responsibilities of mainstream and ESL teachers require that ESL teachers assume more collaborative and supporting roles (p. 141). Other scholars argue that, as a result of a content-based ESL instruction, ESL teachers' roles and ESL curriculum are not clearly distinguished from those of mainstream teachers (Pica, 1995 as cited in Bigelow *et al.*, 2006, p. 41): they

assume similar responsibilities “for which neither of the teachers is adequately prepared” (Harper and de Jong 2009, p. 138). Bigelow *et al.* (2006) conclude that there is the need for ESL teachers to maintain a strong hold on their role as language teachers. To this end, they propose a planning model for successful integration of content in English language curriculum with the aim to balance the content and language objectives (p. 41). In a similar vein, Dooley (2009) feels that ESL teachers need to find ways of linking the conceptual knowledge of students who arrive with content area backgrounds different from others in their class to the mainstream educational discourse.

#### **2.6.2 Adjunct support.**

An adjunct support can be described as an ESL course that is linked to a content area course. The courses share the same content area and complement each other by common assignments. The key element of the adjunct support courses is coordination of the material between mainstream and ESL teachers. The content area course is taught by a teacher with expertise in that area, whereas the ESL adjunct is taught by an ESL instructor (Roessingh, 1999, p. 78). This model is most common in high school when most of the ESL students are unable to cope with academic challenges in some subjects, like English literature, and require additional linguistic support. Roessingh (1999) in her case study identified positive outcomes of introducing an adjunct high school ESL literature course aimed at helping ESL students progress through high school. This course

provided additional linguistic support in such areas as different types of reading, writing and presentations needed to successfully move through the course (p. 74).

### **2.6.3 Inclusive model.**

Instead of pulling students out of class for ESL instruction, some schools offer in-class assistance. It is argued that full immersion may be detrimental at the early stages of adaptation.

Harper and de Jong (2009) maintain:

Placement in mainstream classrooms without appropriate preparation of teachers and instructional accommodations can lead to the social isolation of ELLs, as well as to a lack of class participation, meaningful peer interactions and teacher feedback, and opportunities for language development and academic achievement (p. 138).

This inclusive model may be beneficial for high-intermediate to advanced proficiency levels. However, often this responsibility falls solely on the classroom teacher who may or may not have training in working with second language learners. In this regard, MacPherson *et al.* (2004) state:

As the Department develops professional learning opportunities for educators to do with inclusive schools, we specifically recommend that content-area teachers across the curriculum need to be explicitly educated through professional development and curricular documents in academic language issues pertinent to their subject area. (p. 18).

Therefore, in order for an inclusive model to be successful, co-teaching is encouraged where both mainstream teachers and ESL specialists are equal partners with flexible and interchangeable roles. They share students, instructional time, resources, class and planning. This kind of partnership requires certain personal characteristics from the teachers, such as flexibility, similar values and beliefs, willing to take risks and think on their feet. They should acknowledge the evolving nature of inclusion and eliminate certain elements in their instruction that are not working.

The inclusive model offers multiple benefits for ESL learners: they are exposed to natural dialogue and interaction between the teachers and their classmates, students do not miss out on what is going on in the classroom. Anecdotally, it is known that ESL students achieve more in a well-designed inclusive model (An Ideal ESL Inclusion Program, 2008, internet resource, slide 12). In addition, the team-work adopted by co-teachers allows the teachers to experiment and use various teaching strategies, thus

facilitating professional growth. Furthermore, by having an opportunity to constantly observe the students, an ESL teacher has a better opportunity to identify and remedy linguistic problem areas of ELLs. Thus, an ESL teacher becomes an integral part of the school community.

Together with the benefits of this program, there are certain disadvantages that need to be considered. The most serious ones include insufficient time for ESL and classroom teachers to prepare lessons and possible segregation of ESL students within the class. Considering the abovementioned aspects of the inclusive model of ESL instruction, it is logical that adequate training and professional development become significant components of the effective implementation of this model.

#### **2.6.4 Pull-out model.**

The style of ESL program delivery and methods favoured by individual schools depends on the funding, available school resources and support ESL students require. Schools with larger ELL populations may employ a permanent ESL specialist, whereas in schools with a small number of ELLs, ESL specialists may work several times a week, pulling students out of class for English language classes or assisting them in-class with a particular content area. This model of instruction is widely used in districts with a diverse immigrant population, and it is suitable for students from different language backgrounds (Rennie, 1993).

The pull-out model of instruction can also accommodate different methods of English language teaching depending on various factors such as ESL teacher preparation, students' first language or their age group. Usually, ESL teachers incorporate subject content in their pull-out classes using different visual or audio aids and simplified language to help students understand their grade-level material. Thus, the pull-out model is the most common method of second language instruction with inconsistent number of ELLs in Canadian elementary schools, including the Eastern School District.

Regardless of the fact that it is being widely used, pull-out instruction has its limitations. Studies in Canada and the US suggest that it is the least successful strategy for teaching ESL (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005, p. 5). The main disadvantages include disruption of mainstream classes (Seaman, 2000, p. 11), ESL lessons are usually unrelated to the classroom curriculum (Jama, 1992, p. 5) (however, pull-out affords using a sheltered approach and incorporating subject matter into classes), and valuable time lost in transitions (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005, p. 5). Jama (1992) concludes that this ESL program tends to segregate ELLs from their peers and isolate them from mainstream education. These facets have direct negative implications on ESL quality and teachers' professionalization (p. 6).

This negative attitude toward the pull-out method of teaching is also common in schools in other immigrant countries. For example, in New Zealand there is much controversy about how effective such a model is, especially where a school or a

classroom has only a few learners from diverse linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds (Haworth, 2005 as cited in Barnard, 2009, p. 233). Barnard (2009) maintains: "Typically, in New Zealand ESL students receive very little focussed English language tuition, for which they are withdrawn from their regular classes for a few hours per week" (p. 233). Apart from the linguistic difficulties English language learners face, there are also challenges of coping with a new culture of learning. Drawing upon classroom research Haworth discussed the complexities in learning in mainstream classroom in terms of three dimensions. The first of these is the interactional dimension that represents the social basis upon which all classroom learning occurs. Classroom teachers explicitly or implicitly establish communication norms based upon prevailing pedagogical values, beliefs and practices. The second dimension is referred to as "instructional task performance", that is a collection of various tasks through which learning is operationalised. Thirdly, students acquire cognitive skills in linguistically context-reduced areas - they learn technical terms, comprehend new concepts and acquire new modes of enquiry. The learners are also encouraged develop metacognitive skills - they learn how to become good learners (Haworth, 2005, as cited in Barnard, 2009, p. 235). Naturally, language becomes central in this process and the challenge of full immersion for ELLs into mainstream classes with only several hours of pull-out instruction per week becomes obvious.

### 2.7 Content of ESL Programs

Discussions about values and moral decisions in a wide range of linguistic teaching activities made clear the need for thoughtful reflection on the aspects of ESL endeavours (Johnson, 2003, as cited in Deckert, 2004, p. 74). Presently, ESL teachers exercise more freedom in selecting and incorporating materials into ESL programming. These materials can be video clips, newspapers, extracts from television, maps, charts and more. Although Dunkel recognized the efforts of ESL teachers to include authentic resources into commercial workbooks, the sheer lack of availability of these materials raised pedagogical and ethical discernment (Dunkel, 1998, as cited in Deckert, 2004, p.75). Deckert (2004) provides recommendations for ESL teachers for selecting topical materials for ESL classrooms. He suggests they have to maximize the students' capacity to function in the new environment, develop appreciation for new language learning contexts and reflect their interests in learning (p. 86).

Discussions on the content of ESL resources have also been prevalent for second language education in the US. American scholars call for reconsideration of ESL programs arguing that ESL curriculum and textbooks do not reflect linguistic and cultural diversity; ESL programs do not seek to build on the cultural-linguistic experiences of English learners in ways that their diverse experiences become a source of pride for them (Valdes, 1999, p. 45); ESL programs do not foster critical thinking as they are designed

with the intention of easing ELLs into mainstream culture; ESL curriculum does not take into account the social context of learning English.

With the rise of humanistic approaches (e.g. learner-centered approach) the focus has somewhat shifted to the learner's needs. From this stance, ESL learners are seen as individuals who bring a variety of experiences and knowledge with them to the classroom. The rationale that supports this approach is that the learning process will be more relevant and deeply felt if educators manage to tap into the learner's backgrounds (James, 2000, p. 38). Bringing out students' culture helps instructors activate prior knowledge and make ESL material more meaningful for the students. According to Cummins (1996), it is important because

some students may have relevant information in their [first language] but not realize there is any connection with what they are learning in their L2 whereas in other cases, there may be a considerable cultural gap between what is assumed by the text and what students know from their prior experience (p. 76).

Newfoundland and Labrador ESL Curriculum Guidelines for High School (2010) provide isolated suggestions for ESL specialists to take into consideration ELLs' previous knowledge. For example, the curriculum guide for English Second Language course 3205 suggests that teachers "Provide appropriate topics for discussions and presentation, taking into consideration students' interests and needs." As stated, it is left to instructors

to decide if they want to include a cultural component to their classes and find ways to do so.

Courchene (1996) and Sauvé (1996) elaborating on ESL teacher multicultural preparation, argue that teaching culture should not be perceived as a simplistic delivery of information, but as a "process of knowledge sharing and creation" (Sauvé, 1996, p. 18). When saying that culture is always talked about in a particular context, Sauvé (1996) implies that an ESL teacher must be mindful of the realities of the learners they teach (p. 18). Thus, talk about an ESL curriculum, in general, centres on the discussion of an ESL teacher's urgent need to be a creative individual with critical thinking and reflective abilities, to be able to develop programs and materials and adapt them to various contexts and individual learners. The ESL teachers' participatory role in the educational process is discussed extensively in the literature on critical pedagogy and it offers a new perspective on the role of a teacher. It has shifted the focus from the positivistic paradigm that had long positioned teachers as carriers of policies articulated by others to educational decision makers (Langer & Applebee, 1987 and Roemer, 1991 in Cumming, 1993), and reflective practitioners (Penneycook, 1994; Richards & Lockhart, 1994) that identify and transform unequal relations of power through their practice. Recent research trends in language teaching practices have been focusing on language teacher capacities to accommodate curriculum change or resist it according to factors in their work environments and personal beliefs (Cumming, 1993; Ullman, 1999, p. 31).

Schon (1987) who brought "reflection" to the centre of understanding of what practitioners should do emphasised such notions as reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. The former literally means "thinking on our feet," or "making decisions on the spot". It involves looking to our experiences, connecting to our feelings and attending to our theories in use. It entails building new understandings to inform our actions in the situation that is unfolding (as cited in Smith, 2009, Section *The Reflective Practitioner*, para 1).

In this framework, a number of researchers have described how ESL teachers can transform classrooms, thereby leading to a broader social change. These researchers view ESL teachers as primary policymakers. For example, Ricento and Burnaby (1998) cite Freeman's research on how teachers at Oyster Bilingual School (USA) implemented a language policy that represented an alternative to mainstream social discourse with respect to language minority participation in education. Auerbach (1995) argues that "the day-to-day decisions that practitioners make inside the classroom both shape and are shaped by the social order outside the classroom" (p. 9). This view on the participatory role of educators in general was shared by Auerbach (1992), Bartolome (1994), Giroux (2004), Gonzalez (1995), and Moll and Gonzalez (1994) among others.

This thesis is concerned with ESL teachers' experiences with ESL programming and the nature of their interconnections with the curriculum. As an alternative to more traditional concepts of a multicultural ESL teacher who celebrates diversity, this thesis

will also examine the teachers' activities within the framework of critical pedagogy – how the teachers bring about social change through their practice and address ESL and diversity related issues in their classrooms through curriculum.

### **2.8 Collaboration**

Collaboration is an interactive process that enables teachers with diverse expertise to work together as equals and engage in shared decision making toward mutually defined goals (EBSCOhost: Thesaurus). Collaboration between stakeholders involved in the education process brings many educational and personal benefits to teachers and students alike. Research findings report that teachers involved in collaboration with their colleagues gained considerable personal benefits, such as improvement of communication skills, sharper focus on their work, increased amount of time spent on reflection, enhanced self-esteem, confidence in their teaching ability and increased motivation to risk in implementing new teaching strategies (McCann & Radford, 1993, p. 25). Collaboration has a direct impact on students too. The teachers gain better perspectives on students' learning and develop better understanding of students' needs. Students receive well-planned, consistent instruction determined by combined teachers' efforts. Furthermore, students are exposed to a collaborative behaviour that they can transfer to their own learning. There is an abundance of literature in ESL citing the benefits of collaboration between ESL and mainstream teachers around curriculum, resources, students'

achievement and the importance of teacher collaboration with parents and school administration (Early & Gunderson, 1993; MacPherson *et al.*, 2004; Smith & Scott, 1990; Tang, 1994).

Educators and policymakers are becoming more concerned with developing a professional school culture that promotes an atmosphere of collegiality, a shared vision and serves the interest of all involved in the teaching-learning process (Planche, 2004, pp.11-18). Drawing from the educational research on school culture it can be concluded that school atmosphere affects the extent and depth of relationships between the stakeholders. The term "stakeholders" includes anyone that has an interest in or who can be affected by collaborative actions-teachers, students, parents, school administration. The nature of the relationships that take place within the school community span a continuum-from casual interaction to the creation of joint work with a purposeful commitment (Leonard & Leonard, 2001a as cited in Planche, 2004, p. 11 ). Little and McLaughlin (1993), McLaughlin (1997), Newmann and Wehlage (1995), Rosenholtz (1989) and Slater (2004) strongly advocate for creation of a collaborative culture as one of the stellar factors in school improvement (as cited in Planche, 2004). The research indicates that activities directed at collaborative problem solving with fellow teachers and others (*i.e.* supervisors, parents, students) clarify the teachers' own meaning and help them build social relationships that support teacher's changing views of themselves as teachers (Davydov, 1995; Driver *et al.*,1994; Kauchak & Eggen, 1997, and Olson, 1997,

as cited in Planche, 2004; Richardson, 1997; Roberts, 1998). Akyel (2000) states that "collaboration can provide social support for reflection and opportunities to learn from peers or from less or more experienced colleagues" (p. 58).

Nunan (1992) suggests that "in language education, teachers, learners, researchers and curriculum specialists can collaborate for a number of reasons" – from experimenting with alternative ways of organizing teaching and learning to collaboratively creating an environment in which learners, teachers and researchers are teaching and learning from each other in an equitable way (p. 233). Bailey (2000), who researched ESL teacher collaboration in the USA, concluded that collaborative teaching is largely positive – collaborative language teaching provided the teachers with an environment where teachers and learners could not only teach and learn, but could learn from each other as well.

However, Crow (1998) asserts that collaboration is only possible if the following conditions are realized – parity and reciprocity (Crow, 1998 as cited in Planche, 2004, p. 11). Parity infers that all parties involved in collaboration have some power resources at their disposal. Reciprocity involves an action exchange where both parties believe they receive benefits for the efforts they provide (Planche, 2004, p. 11). However, if the power resources are unequal, true collaboration is hard to achieve. Thus American research uncovers that ESL teachers' have a marginal role in the mainstream (Case, 2009; see also Auerbach, 1991; Courtney, 2009). An ESL teacher was referred to as a

"stranger" - an individual who is neither a member nor outcast of the reference group. This attitude, the researcher asserted, stemmed from the local politics surrounding ESL programs. Thus, in Case's study, as a consequence of the district's decision to begin pull-out instruction without certified instructors, the professionalization of ESL teachers was affected and thus prevented them from meaningful participation in the dialogue within the mainstream. For example, the collaborative efforts of the ESL teacher in Case's study were thwarted by the following factors common for many pull-out ESL teachers: the meeting with mainstream instructors were "on the run or in between the classes" (see also Li and Zhang, 2004), one teacher's schedule, generated from working in several schools did not allow her to attend faculty meetings, making her feel left on the sideline of membership in the mainstream faculty.

This example of Californian teachers, mentioned above, might not be characteristic of the Canadian context. However, it is relevant in terms of ascertaining if the teachers in the Eastern School District feel the same way and, if so, what can be done to change the situation. Many scholars frame collaboration within a social constructivist framework and view it as a focal alternative form of professional development (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005; Johnson, 2006). In this regard, Planche (2004) cites the work of Mitchell and Sackney on building on the "interpersonal capacity" of educators as a key dimension of collaborative and collective projects (p. 23). The core idea behind this term is that an individual learning is deeply influenced "by the dominant metaphors of the

group experience" (p. 23). In a similar vein, Schmidt (2004) regards collaboration as a means for reflection that is the key element in the professional development of teachers. Collectively, teachers may articulate the implicit understandings governing their professional practices to monitor their beliefs and adjust their teaching practices to meet the needs of a variety of learners (Knezevic & Scholl, 1996; Williams & Burden, 1997, as cited in Schmidt, 2004).

Since ESL teachers are engaged in the collaborative processes with other members of a school community, other studies on ESL teacher collaboration suggest that ESL teachers form a "professional community" (Westheimer, 1998). Drawing on diverse thinkers like John Dewey, Maxine Green, Nel Noddings, and Robert Bellah, Westheimer (1998) tried to identify the dimensions that constitute professional teacher community. He pointed to five similarities in theories – interdependence, interaction and participation, shared interests, concern for individual and minority views, and meaningful relationships. However, as this study is concerned with a community at the local level, Bellah *et al.*'s (1985) definition is better suited for use here. They stipulate that a community is "a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision-making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are both nurtured by it" (cited in Planche, 2004, p. 32).

The body of research dedicated to ESL education in Canada, the US and other immigrant countries emphasises the need for collaboration with the view to

comprehensively and meaningfully addressing the linguistic and sociocultural needs of ESL learners (Sakash & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995; Van Ngo, 2007). Van Ngo, drawing from roundtable discussions and symposia of all stakeholders of ESL education, concludes that the collaboration among the concerned parties is premised on exchanging information, sharing expertise, resources and support system to assist ESL learners (p. 12). One body of literature in particular dedicated significant attention to the ESL and classroom teachers' team work (Berk, 2004; Li & Zhang, 2004; Smethem, 2007). In order for ESL teachers to function effectively, they need to establish collaborative relationships with mainstream teachers and administrators with the intent to bridge the gap between the limited training in ESL pedagogy that mainstream instructors might have and the specialized instruction that ESL students require (Case, 1999, p. 113). Li (2004) exploring educational factors involved in a Chinese ESL student's English attainment in an America public school asserts that "collaboration is key to effective programming" (p. 4). Drawing from her research she concludes that in collaboration, ESL teachers must work with mainstream teachers, other specialists and administrators, parents and the students to plan, implement and monitor the ESL program. Other researchers agree that collaborative efforts between ESL educators and other stakeholders should be directed at curriculum negotiations that have been progressing toward content-based instruction (Tang, 1994; Bigelow, 2006), parental involvement, and enhancement of cultural awareness of mainstream teachers (Sakash & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995, p.7). Educational research

emphasizes an urgent need to involve parents of second language learners in school. Through strong teacher-parent partnerships, parents learn about effective educational practices and can better support their children's learning at home. Alternately, teachers gain valuable insights into children's family experiences and cultural backgrounds that they can use to adapt their classroom activities to children's learning needs (Sakash, 1995, as cited in Berk, 2004).

Studies of parental involvement assert that poor home-school communication results in a high rate of school failure of ELLs (Guo, 2006). Over the years, the research revealed that ESL parents' involvement "plague[s] many experienced teachers" (Faltis, 1997, as cited in Guo, 2006, p. 81). Research suggests that regardless of a teacher's experience, many of them have little idea about how to work effectively with parents from different cultural backgrounds. Studies suggest that the establishment of effective teacher-parent communication is challenged by the number of potential barriers: language differences, parent's unfamiliarity with the school system, teacher attitudes and different views on education, and cultural differences concerning home-school communication (Guo, 2006). ESL teachers presumably understand these cultural issues and have all the necessary skills to resolve them due to the nature of their profession. As a result, the school naturally delegates the responsibility in establishing communication with ELL's parents to ESL specialists (Lucey *et al.* 2000). However, as many scholars argue, ESL

teacher education and professional development does not prepare ESL teachers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families (Li & Zhang, 2004).

However, ESL teachers compensate for gaps in their cultural training or experience by becoming active practitioners and initiating home visits. Thus, many studies suggest that personal contact with immigrant families create a good opportunity for parents to meaningfully participate in the life of school (Sarroub, Pernicek & Sweeney, 2007; Sarroub, 2008). Similarly, Valdes (1996) asserts that home visits lead to building trust and result in greater parent involvement in schools. Valdes explains that teachers, concerned with inefficient traditional parent involvement programs, develop distinct family programs that focus on validating of culture and values of the families. These programs are aimed at parent education; parent involvement and parent empowerment (see Freire, 1970). Since ESL teachers have closer contact with ELLs (Gandara *et al.*, 2005) these studies shed light on the ESL teachers' potential extracurricular activities as well as on their beliefs in general in this research.

### **2.9. Conclusion**

Associated literature and studies conducted in Canada, US and internationally was examined and several of the most researched issues related to ESL teachers and their professional experiences were identified. One of the main purposes of this research review was to provide a context for ESL teachers' professional experiences in Newfoundland by situating them in the available literature. Furthermore, the aim of the literature review was to synthesize knowledge about this field and extrapolate major themes. Therefore, with knowledge gained from the literature review, an overview of the common issues raised in ESL in countries with ESL populations is offered here. The sections presented in the review on ESL teacher education, collaboration, curriculum and most common models of instruction show how I have been informed in this study and outline space where scholars of ESL pedagogy of Newfoundland and Labrador might be informed as well based on the results of this research.

One of the most discussed issues in the ESL literature from schools in the USA is the apparent lack of professional ESL teachers. However in Canada this is not the case, because ESL teachers are required to have degree in teaching. In relation to the discussed issue of ESL teacher preparation in American schools, some research claims that ESL teachers are not adequately prepared to work either with cultural diversity or with children with learning gaps who may also have experienced trauma. Further to this, as a consequence of low professionalism, ESL social status (professionalization) suffers.

Some commentary from the literature argues that low professionalization does not fully depend on ESL teachers themselves and there are outside factors that damage their status including a lack of resources and poor working conditions.

Due to existing intrinsic inequalities between and within a school community, some ESL teachers are unable to build solid collaborative ties with mainstream teachers and school administrators. Meanwhile, according to the findings in Canada and the US, collaboration between all parties involved in ESL education becomes a key element around such areas as ESL curriculum, parental involvement, aiding students with learning gaps and professional development.

### Chapter 3

#### Methodology

##### 3.1 Description of Qualitative Research

There are several considerations when deciding to adopt a qualitative research methodology. Corbin and Strauss (2008) claim that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. They can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known, or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively.

For this study that focuses on the experiences of ESL teachers in the Eastern School District I chose a qualitative method of inquiry as the most appropriate one. Qualitative research is a broad paradigm that comprises multiple methods of studying a phenomenon. However, its main difference from a quantitative one is that it emphasizes the quality of entities, processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Cronbach (1975) claims that statistical research is not able to take full account of the many interaction effects that occur in social settings (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). He gives examples of several empirical "laws" that do not hold true in actual settings to illustrate this point. Cronbach states that "the time has come to exorcise the null hypothesis, because it ignores effects that may be important, but that are not statistically significant" (Cronbach, 1975, p. 124). Qualitative inquiry accepts the

complex and dynamic quality of the social world. It uses a naturalistic approach in order to understand a phenomenon in a context-specific setting – whereas the quantitative approach uses experimental methods to test hypothetical generalizations. Each approach represents a fundamental paradigm. Qualitative research, broadly defined, means “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Where quantitative researchers seek causal determination, prediction and generalization of findings, qualitative researchers seek instead illumination, understanding and extrapolation to similar situations. Qualitative analysis results in a different type of knowledge than does quantitative inquiry.

A qualitative researcher designs a study with real individuals in mind, and with the intent of living in that social setting over time. This contrasts with the work of a quantitative researcher, who is concerned with aggregating large numbers without communicating with the research subjects face-to-face (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

One-on-one interviews were the most appropriate technique for this research project as this study is concerned with personal histories of the participants. Through storytelling the teachers engaged in narrative “theorizing” and, based on that, the teachers had a chance to re-examine and reflect on their beliefs and professional identities. The interviews allowed for the collecting of rich data that afforded the researcher the opportunity to discern major themes from the teachers’ stories.

In contrast with quantitative research design where the researcher is concerned with "what, when and where" about a studied phenomenon, the questions in a qualitative inquiry are aimed at "how and why" about a phenomenon. I formulated preliminary questions to guide interviews. However, the questions were constantly reviewed and were continually taking new shape, depending on the emerging topics. My intent consisted of looking into the complexities of the ESL teachers' experiences that, in part, are built around an ESL learner and their desire to integrate successfully into a new culture. For example, I was interested in discovering the role of the teachers in this process as well as their personal beliefs about the roles they assume. Thus, a qualitative research method, using elements of grounded theory, suited best for discovering and deepening the understanding of teaching experiences of ESL teachers embedded in the unique context of the Eastern School District in Newfoundland, capturing the nuances and meanings of each teacher's life from their distinct point of view.

### **3.2 Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory was first articulated in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss as a reaction against the extreme positivism that had permeated most social research. Specifically, they challenged the assumption of the "grand theories" that were utilized to uncover preexisting explanations for social behaviour. In their pragmatic approach to

social science research, "empirical reality is seen as an ongoing interpretation of meaning produced by individuals engaged in a common project of observation" (Suddaby, 2006, p. 633). Glaser and Strauss described it as an "inductive theory of discovery [that] allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observation" (1967, p.182). While grounded theory has in turn been critiqued for its assumptions of "an objective, external reality, a neutral observer who discovers data, reductionist inquiry of manageable research problems, and objectivist rendering of data" (Charmaz, 2003, p. 250), a more constructivist approach encourages researchers to take into account that experience is contextual and analysis is interpretive.

Grounded theory is regarded as an emergent and flexible methodology that is useful for analyzing qualitative data. It begins with a research interest or situation where the researcher seeks to understand a particular social phenomenon by examining and observing what the major participants see, do and perceive in such circumstance. Keeping in mind that a researcher must enter a grounded theory study without *a priori* assumptions, I avoided beginning my research with hypotheses, but rather intended to explore and look for new interpretations of reality portrayed by the teachers. In grounded theory a researcher must be an active element of the research process, making key

decisions on what categories to focus on, what data to collect and questions to ask, and more importantly, what meaning to ascribe to the units of data. This creative approach permeates the whole analysis of the data through asking questions and constant comparison between the categories.

The categories of the research were the themes that emerged from the teachers' accounts. These categories are: teachers' motivation, curriculum and resource issues, and different types of collaboration with major stakeholders of ESL in the District. Because the teachers talked extensively about collaboration, I divided it into several categories.

In addition to the strategies characteristic of grounded theory - such as constant comparison, asking questions and keeping close to the data - I also used its technical procedures of simultaneous collection and analysis of data, sampling, interviewing, coding and memoing. These will be discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

Glaser (1978) claimed that successful grounded theory research has a clear creative component. Even though Strauss and Corbin (1990) adhered to formal and prescriptive routines for analyzing data, they cautioned against overly mechanical application of the method. They maintained that "[c]reativity depends on the researcher's analytic ability, theoretical sensitivity, and sensitivity to the subtleties of the action/interaction (plus the ability to convey the findings in writing)" (p. 19). Charmaz

(2003, p. 256) adds that grounded theory offers a set of flexible strategies, not rigid prescriptions. While I used the strategies of grounded theory in my study, it cannot be described as pure grounded theory since the available sample was too small. Instead it provided tools that enabled me to examine a particular situation at a crucial time in its evolution.

### **3.3 Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this qualitative enquiry is to develop a substantive theory about the factors that contribute to or hinder the success of ESL teaching in Newfoundland as understood by the ESL teachers in the Eastern School District. Much research has been conducted in the area of ESL teaching and learning at the national and international levels. The main areas of focus are the issues pertaining to the decline of ESL programming concurrent with an increase in immigration (People for Education, 2010, p.18); professional identity of ESL teachers (Yeager and Sivell, 2001); as well as immigrants' needs identification and ways in which those needs should be met to facilitate integration into Canadian society. However, there is a lack of research regarding ESL teachers' views, experiences and practices in Newfoundland and Labrador. Due to the recent increase of this province's cultural diversity, it is vital to understand how the province meets the linguistic needs of newcomers. Therefore, the focus of this study is on

the experiences of the main stakeholders working directly with second language learners — ESL teachers. This study displays a general picture of ESL from the point of view of ESL teachers and provides valuable insights into their practice. The qualitative method applied in this study is consistent with a grounded theory approach that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The construction and components of the individual teacher's role are immensely diverse and complex. The intent of this inquiry, however, is not to detail a profile of variables that comprise the ESL teaching experience, but more to capture the major themes that can be extrapolated from the rich data. This research represents a culmination of the experiences of the participants in the project. In essence, I tried to capture the major themes of discourse the participants provided. They include: "motivation for teaching ESL;" "discussions of practice and theory"; "challenges that teachers encounter in ESL"; and "collaborative processes in their teaching". However, the small sample of five teachers did not allow for complete saturation of some of the concepts in order to initiate a new theory. Nevertheless, the data served to refocus and clarify existing substantive theories and to provide an understanding of and to explain the ESL teachers' "lived" experiences within the given context in the Eastern School District. The framing of the main concepts is accompanied by the researcher's commentaries suggesting varied interpretations of phenomena through carefully selected literature.

### 3.4 The Sample

*Sampling is investigative; we are cerebral detectives, ferreting out answers to our research questions* (Miles and Hiberman, 1994).

To fully understand the phenomena of ESL teaching in the Eastern School District, it is necessary to focus on the experiences of all the stakeholders involved in ESL. For this study, the researcher identified the main stakeholders as people who are directly or indirectly involved in lives of the second language learners. These parties include parents, mainstream teachers, ESL teachers and school administration. However, the aim of this study is to portray only the experiences of ESL teachers as, it is assumed, they are the stakeholders who may be most sensitive to changing demographics in the province and may face challenges that have yet to be voiced in Newfoundland and Labrador. They are the front line workers in this dynamic. The population of ESL teachers in the District is fairly small; therefore, all the ESL teachers in the District, except the one who withdrew from the study, were interviewed. The participants' common interests in ESL teaching characterize this group.

As Glaser and Strauss (1967) do not dictate a specific protocol for sampling in their original text, there were four participants used initially. This was deemed appropriate for the scope of this study considering that the small number of ESL teachers in the district.

The data obtained from the three remaining participants served as a starting point for gradual definition of the main categories as well as for further shaping of the sample structure, known as "theoretical sampling" (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe it as "the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his [sic] data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop the theory as it emerges" (p. 45).

In practical terms, as the need for richer data appeared, I integrated new insights for developing theory by adding two more participants to the three that had been interviewed. The additional informants shared the same main characteristics as the first ones: one of them presently teaches ESL in the Eastern School District, while the other works with adult learners but had previous experience teaching ESL in the District at primary school. This method is known as "snowball sampling." It should be noted again that I interviewed all the ESL teachers working in the Eastern School District at the time of the interview except for the one teacher who withdrew at the beginning of the study.

The interview questions and format was used as a guide, but it was modified as needed to pursue and enrich relevant concepts as they developed from the analysis of any previous interviews. Some of the initial participants were interviewed more than once in order to add to their first conversation and allow for a deeper understanding of their lived experiences.

Although the two additional participants provided different insights into the study, the data collection did not reach the saturation point — the point at which no new material was being collected. The new material added shape to some categories, however, it was not sufficient for developing a substantive theory. Nevertheless, major categories were identified and expanded upon through analysis and comparison to other categories or similar findings in this area.

Further, I categorized the interviews into major themes and offered objective interpretations grounded and supported by careful selections from the relevant literature. In addition, I purposefully provided personal commentaries on the topics that I deemed salient, grounding interpretations in personal beliefs. The literature on grounded theory research suggests that interplay between data and researcher in both gathering and analyzing data is not entirely objective. This interplay, by its very nature, means that the researcher is actively reacting to and working with data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Likewise, in the analysis and interpretation of data gathered for this study I drew on what I already knew to interpret what I did not know, all the while making sure that preconceived notions and judgments were at least acknowledged so they could be kept in check.

### **3.5 The Role of the Researcher**

At the beginning of the interviewing relationship, an interviewer's goal is to build rapport with participants. However, the rapport a researcher must establish in this process needs to be controlled (Seidman, 1991). That means, too much or too little rapport might lead to distortion of what the participants reconstruct in the interview (Hyman, 1954, as cited in Seidman, 1991). The interview must be marked by respect, interest, attention and good manners on the part of the interviewer.

Accordingly, I tried to follow simple rules of common courtesies that erred mostly on the side of formality. For example, introducing before the interview, asking if the participant minded being called by their first name, flexibility in scheduling the meetings and others that added up to expressing respect for the interviewee and the interview process.

The issue of confidentiality was secured and specified in the consent forms signed by the teachers. Some teachers showed concern for being identified and for this matter kept in touch with me throughout the interview process. In turn, I offered to share any material that could be cause for concern. Each interviewee received a copy of the transcripts for review. The participants could correct or exclude any part of the transcript of the interview they did not feel comfortable with. It should be noted that most of the teachers revised their interviews and extended on their thoughts in writing. Issues of ownership of the material did not arise.

I also agreed to share the first draft of the analysis with some teachers who wished to ensure that the information they shared was not distorted by my interpretations and that the participants were not identified. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to such sharing as member-checking, and they indicate that it contributes to the trustworthiness and credibility of the report. However, I retained the right to write the final report from my own perspective. By allowing the participants to be co-owners of the material, I established the condition for an equitable relationship when working with it (Seidman, 1991).

The interviews took place after classes during the day in the ESL teachers' office. The teachers did not object to my use of a recorder during the conversations. I did not take notes during interview process as I felt it would distract me and the participants and could negatively interfere with the process. Therefore, notes were taken after each interview in the form of reflections.

### **3.6 Analysis**

Grounded theory methodology affords the researcher the benefit of being constantly immersed in data analysis and comparison during its collection. Constant comparison and analysis means the researcher is constantly reviewing the data presented, looking for categorical connections, discerning theory and seeing how the emerging

theory is verified, confirmed or disproved by the incorporation of relevant literature (Creswell, 1998).

The data obtained from the five ESL teachers has been conceptualized and categorized according to the similar event or phenomenon it represents. In the course of the research many concepts came up, but after I identified particular phenomena in the data, these concepts were reduced to a number of more abstract units that allowed me to incorporate other groups of concepts or subcategories. In essence, I captured the major themes of discourse that the participants provided.

### **3.6.1 Coding.**

The themes emerged naturally during the interviews and they guided conversations into particular areas. These areas contained themes and categories identified during the interviews. The coding process was immediate and it helped offer a new perspective on the material and lead theme development in unforeseen directions. I did not force data into any preconceived categories but allowed the data to shape the codes through my interpretations of said data.

To be consistent with grounded theory methods, I started to define and categorize the data immediately using the process of data collection. I did not offer categories, but facilitated discussion in an unobtrusive and non-directive fashion. The coding process started with analyzing each sentence or paragraph. I examined the meaning of the

sentence or undercurrent that the wording or phrasing contained, constantly searching for an answer to the repeated question: "What is the major idea brought out in this sentence or paragraph?" (Marshall, 2006). After having named the concept, I did a more detailed analysis of it in order to find a relationship with already existing categories or concepts. This type of coding is known as open coding.

Although a limited number of interviews had taken place, I can safely conclude that due to the strength and conviction of the voices of the participants, some categories detail an emerging explanation or theory for ESL teachers in this context. A review of the relevant literature supports these findings and while further research is still required, subsequent conversations with participants and other educational stakeholders also substantiate the assertions made by the participants.

### **3.6.2 Memoing.**

I used memoing to conceptualize the incidents and ideas discussed during the interviews. Memo writing is an intermediate step between coding and the first draft of the completed analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). It is an important tool to refine and keep track of ideas that develop during a comparison of incidents to incidents and concepts to concepts in the developing theory. Memo writing helped me to keep focused on the research, to explore the codes, and elaborate on assumptions and processes that are subsumed under the codes. It occurred throughout the analysis process in the form of free writing, graphs, figures or diagrams that allowed for an outflow of ideas.

### **3.6.3 Writing.**

I found the process of writing very challenging and difficult in many ways. It was accompanied by controversies in interpretation of the same category or re-evaluation of already analyzed concepts. During the writing process, I was discovering various possibilities of interpretation of the same concept and many ways of comparing the emerging categories that hindered the writing process itself. However, this proved that the analysis in grounded theory is ongoing and emergent concepts and themes do not always require the rigor of interpretation.

Writing comprehensively and clearly may be difficult even for native English speakers. In my case, it was compounded by the lack of the necessary vocabulary due to

English being my second language. For this reason, the writing process itself occupied a large amount of time. Luckily, at the same time it provided more opportunities for rethinking and re-evaluating the main ideas in the research.

Grounded theory affords a researcher the benefit of being enmeshed with the data during the process of data collection. This connection with the data presented was ensured by constant comparison analysis, meaning I was constantly reviewing the data and looking for categorical connections, discerning theory and seeing how the emerging theory was verified, confirmed or disconfirmed by the incorporation of the relevant literature (Creswell, 1998).

The writing process started with preliminary interpretations of the data in the form of memos on separate cards. Then I sorted the memos on the basis of categorical similarities and the particular issues they addressed. In order to ensure a substantive base for the interpretations of the main themes, I noted the associated literature on the same cards. The sort structure with the consequent analysis comprised a framework for an initial draft of the project. After the first draft was completed, I obtained substantive feedback and guidance on the use of the theoretical framework to interpret the teachers' narratives from my academic supervisor. As stated, careful selection of the associated literature through consultation with my supervisor greatly helped the process of writing about the ESL teachers' experiences in the context of the Eastern School District in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Finally, the data was systematically analyzed, yielding a final product that is theoretically sound and can be put to practical use. The study proposes a new and relevant way of seeing ESL in Newfoundland and Labrador from ESL teachers' perspective. It captures the ongoing and fluctuating nature of the social processes within the field of ESL.

This work can be used as a basis for further examination of this educational phenomenon in Newfoundland and Labrador. It can also be used in the evaluation of educational programs and policies (Hutchinson, 1988) that are discussed further in the conclusions.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

#### **3.7.1 Harms and benefits.**

This research project explored the issues and challenges ESL teachers face within their work with immigrant children in the Eastern School District. I was using semi-structured interviews as a means of obtaining information from the participants about their experience as ESL teachers. The participants were provided with a clear understanding of the requirements and interview questions which they reviewed prior to the interview. The interview questions were not directed at touching upon personal issues, but at discovering each teacher's experience in their professional domain.

Participation in this project was expected to be enjoyable for the participants and hopefully it has given them an opportunity to be heard and to express their concerns, hopes and thoughts as it pertains to their experience in teaching ESL.

### **3.7.2 Privacy and confidentiality.**

The participants may be vulnerable to someone's determining who they are and what they have said, but their anonymity and confidentiality is protected by the use of a pseudonym and omitting the names of the schools they work in. They were given a hard copy of the transcript of their interview so they were able to make any changes they wanted. They also had the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the project.

The study is shared with the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and may be used for future reference by other parties interested in educational research. The thesis that results from this work will be published in hard copy and microfiche, and will be housed at the Queen Elizabeth II Library on the St. John's campus of Memorial University.

### **3.8 Limitations of the Study**

This study is bound to the unique context of Newfoundland and Labrador where the establishment of an ESL profession is a relatively new phenomenon. The teachers' stories

reflect the knowledge constructed within the realm of this region. The study explores how ESL teachers in the Eastern School District construct the meaning of their teaching practices in light of the new immigration initiative that presupposes an increase of newcomers to the province.

The teachers' interviews captured the thinking of the participants at a particular point in time; they did not uncover process or change in their thinking over time. Therefore, the interviews only mirrored the teachers' thinking limited to their perceptions at the time of the interview. Further to this, the findings are bound to the researcher's interpretations of the ESL teachers' personal accounts detailing their professional experiences.

The findings of this study may have a limited generalization to contexts similar to the one in Newfoundland and Labrador, where teachers are placed in identical working conditions like having to work in pull-out instruction with students with learning gaps. Furthermore, a limited number of interviews does not provide a solid background for transferring the findings to another ESL setting. However, the ESL teachers' accounts may resonate with accounts of other ESL teachers or compare with the existing national or international ESL research.

## Chapter 4

### Teacher Background and Motivation

#### 4.1. Introduction

In order to better understand the teachers' experiences in the context of this province, first themes that uncover their experiences and beliefs prior to becoming ESL teachers were explored. This chapter examines the teachers' motivation in choosing teaching as their lifelong career.

*A career view emphasizes the temporal dimension of motivation in terms of a vocational situation. The steps on a career path, known as the 'contingent path structure' activate long-term success in a challenging manner as intrinsic pleasure of being involved in one's profession and different extrinsic rewards which career advancement causes, are important (Dörnyei, 2001a, p.162).*

Furthermore, in this chapter the teachers share how their initial motivation has been reinforced. The first theme emerged from the inquiry about the teachers' prior experience and their paths to ESL, and naturally developed into a discussion about factors that affect their decision to continue teaching ESL. The last section of this chapter corresponded to the research question about the teachers' beliefs about ESL teacher qualities and how they may be unique.

#### 4.2 Motivations for Teaching ESL

Five ESL teachers who currently work or have worked in the Eastern School District participated in this research. For the purpose of confidentiality I numbered them. Three participants teach at primary school while two of the five work with adult learners. One of the teachers had previous experience working overseas as an English teacher prior to completing her professional ESL education, while the others started teaching ESL after they received their ESL training.

Some teachers suggest that a multicultural context they were exposed to played a decisive role in determining their future profession. For example, before doing her degree in ESL, *Teacher 1* worked with international children in a summer camp. She said:

*Most of them were Russians and Cubans and most of them had Russian and Cuban parents or somewhat ... So, I was just interested in that and it was kind of my first exposure to different languages besides French. So, I just kind of thought I wanted to be a teacher, work with kids and different languages.*

*Teacher 4* cited a multicultural setting in helping her further pursue working in a similar multilingual environment, implying that it satisfied her genuine interest in learning about different cultures on many levels:

*I was just interested in working internationally and I liked working with people from different countries. I have a genuine fascination with culture and evolution of culture and that was what always attracted me to other people's*

*cultures. How they set themselves up, how they structure societies and how families are composed.*

A multicultural context that satisfied their curiosity and desire to learn motivated both of these teachers. Similar to **Teachers 1** and **4**, **Teacher 2** also started her teaching career in an international setting. However **Teacher 2** admits that while living abroad a great demand for native English speakers is what influenced her switch to ESL. Here are her comments on the accidental nature of her choice:

*When I first went to [Korea] I didn't know what my responsibilities were going to be in the school and I ended up teaching English. And then I got interested in teaching English as a second language and just went from there. It wasn't really a decision, I just felt that way.*

Contrary to **Teacher 2**, **Teacher 3** indicates that she chose ESL during her studies at university when she was completing a degree in linguistics. Being intrinsically motivated and having an interest in learning languages, she deliberately turned to ESL.

**Teacher 3** said:

*I have a major in languages and during the course of that degree I took a second language acquisition course and I absolutely loved it. It was the thing I did when I took a break and I thought maybe I should pay attention to this. So it was clear to me from the third year of university.*

**Teacher 5** shared a similar experience, maintaining that her interest in languages became a lifelong career:

*I always enjoyed French from high school. And when I was in grade seven my parents sent me to the French island of*

*St. Pierre. So, after that I pursued it in high school and I went to university and studied it more. And I did Spanish and a little bit of German. So, just an interest in a language was there.*

When recounting their initial experiences, the teachers focused on the positive implications of a multicultural environment as well as interest in languages that governed their choice to work in ESL. It may be assumed that the teachers' perceived need and enjoyment (Chambers, 1999) for a multicultural setting determined their motivation. Therefore, two aspects can be applied to the teachers' initial career steps: contextual and intrinsic motivations. According to Dörnyei (2001b) the teachers' interest, curiosity and pleasure associated with teaching ESL are intrinsic rewards of teaching. He defines intrinsic motivation as: "Performing a behaviour for its own sake in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction such as the joy of doing a particular activity or satisfying one's curiosity" (Dörnyei, 2001b, p. 47).

Motivation is complex and includes multifarious interlinked strands (Chambers, 1999, p. 13). The motivation and experiences of the ESL teachers featured in this study can also be interpreted via Maslow (1954) who emphasized motivation as the key to understanding human behaviour. He proposed a hierarchy of fundamental motivational bases (cited in Chambers, 1999, p. 15). From Maslow's theory and the teachers' own comments it can be inferred that the teachers' initial experience in becoming involved in ESL satisfied their emotional and cognitive needs.

### 4.3 Keeping Motivated

The purpose of this brief section is to illustrate the teachers' accounts of the factors that keep them interested in continuing to work in ESL. This information will help to develop an understanding of the connection between the teachers' initial and present motivations and the circumstances under which their motivation has been transformed.

*Teacher 1* shared what motivated her to stay in this career. Her motivational incentives continued to be learning and, consequently, positive emotions connected to it. Applying the abovementioned framework, it can be concluded that *Teacher 1's* initial contextual and intrinsic motivation was reinforced. Here are her comments on the cognitive and emotional gratification that her ESL career supports:

*I enjoy the aspect of being with the kids and learning about different cultures and different languages. I eat that right up and I think I would be bored if I was in any other kind of situation and any other kind of setting.*

*Teacher 1* also validated her motivation for becoming an ESL teacher based on the distinct nature of her roles in relation to that of her ESL students. For example, elaborating on the perception of being an ESL teacher, *Teacher 1* drew a distinction between being a "classroom teacher" and being an ESL teacher:

*I love my job. I couldn't be any other kind of teacher. I think I am a patient person, but a different kind of patient person. I don't think I have what it takes to be a classroom*

*teacher. I think of myself as an ESL person first and a teacher second.*

Based on an understanding gained from all interviewees, to them teaching is more than simply providing students with instruction. By saying that teachers “should be willing to go over [and] above teaching itself,” **Teacher 2** implied the importance of empathic listening: listening to the whole child, which requires patience. Perhaps this is what **Teacher 1**, and all interviewees implied by being an ESL person first and an instructor second.

Another difference from being an ESL teacher and working in mainstream classes is the possibility to teach in small groups or individual students. According to **Teacher 5**, it is gratifying for both sides – the teacher and the learner. She explains:

*With teaching ESL I like that you have a small group of children and sometimes one to one. And you can really focus on the needs of an individual child and work with that need and develop lessons around what you discover working one on one with that child. And that's an experience you don't get in a large classroom. So, I really like that aspect of it.*

The teachers' comments imply that the teachers value their work in ESL, for affording them the opportunity to continue learning, develop professionally and feel accomplished as teachers.

*Teacher 5* explained that her knowledge and skills are needed: "I really like the fact, for the most part, children really want to know the language, so, it is rewarding."

Clearly, having motivated students is an important factor in the teachers' own motivation.

It is obvious that the connection between ESL teachers and their students is special - the teachers all shared warm feelings and deep caring for their ELLs. As Berman (2004) maintained, in order to understand students a teacher should nurture them. He states: "To nurture our students is to believe in them, to give them our best, to remain connected with them, in effect, to love them" (Berman, 2004, p. 22). *Teacher 4* echoes Berman's observation, emphasizing a teacher as a learner who maintains constant interest and connection with students:

*I learn as much from them as I teach them. In many cases I learn more how people think, how their culture affects their way of thinking. I think it's totally necessary because you can't empathize with other students unless you know their background.*

The motivational factors that maintained the teachers' interest in ESL were the attractiveness of working with children, a teaching situation (small groups) that is different from mainstream, and the opportunity to cater to the needs of individual students. Additionally, *Teacher 5* mentioned and, perhaps, expressed the views of all ESL teachers, that working with ESL students is a "rewarding" experience as the students demonstrate the need to learn the language.

#### 4.4 What Makes a Good Teacher

The emotional and intellectual interaction that Berman describes may be challenging for teachers who do not possess certain individual characteristics. According to Berman (2004) a multicultural environment is what challenges educators as it encompasses diverse living and schooling experiences, language diversity, varied expectations from a teacher as well as other attributes of a different culture. *Teacher 1* expands on personal qualities attributed to an ESL teacher, emphasizing cultural sensitivity as a central one:

*Patient, kind, willing to listen, because sometimes it's challenging to listen and you are kind of tempted to put the words in their mouth, but I think just letting them say what they can say. For ESL, cultural sensitivity is a big thing being able to cooperate with other teachers, having a kind of collaborative relationship. Having a pure interest in the students and wanting to see them succeed and not just because it's your job; because you just care about the student and want to really see them do well.*

*Teacher 4* explained that cultural sensitivity presupposes acceptance and empathy: "Sincere interest in meeting people, interest in helping them understand where they are and why it works the way it does is the way to go. You have to have a broad mind and you cannot be culturally insular." *Teacher 2* also emphasized cultural sensitivity as one of the essential ingredients of ESL: "Full of initiative; be interested in children and their cultures because to understand other cultures I think is very important."

A culturally sensitive teacher possesses a multicultural perspective that helps create a fair learning environment for all students. Therefore, teaching ESL students is not just about helping them retain content, but also about helping them become part of the school community (Macpherson *et al.*, 2004). Most ESL teachers try to create an environment that is representative of all cultures and they provide opportunities to explore attitudes toward their own and other cultures as well as opportunities to engage in critical thinking (Macpherson *et al.*, 2004). They also try to provide a safe environment in which students feel comfortable and where they can use and experiment with language. However, Canadian studies reveal that ESL teachers' success in addressing the needs of ELLs depends purely on their personal abilities and their level of sensitivity to the background experiences of ELLs (Faez, 2007, p. 31) as their education does not provide adequate multicultural preparation (see Faez, 2007; Nieto, 2002; and Schmidt, 2004).

The teachers provided differing accounts on their respective motivational underpinnings for choosing ESL careers. Three teachers identified a multicultural environment as a primary motivator for their decision to work in ESL. *Teacher 1* explained that a multicultural context was an incentive and became an important motivator in her pursuit of an ESL career. An interest in languages and language teaching discovered at school and university informed *Teacher 5* and *Teacher 3*'s choices to enter into ESL careers, respectively. *Teacher 2* revealed the accidental nature of her choice of ESL predetermined by her job circumstances. The literature provides definitions of the

motivators the teachers identified - contextual, that is a multicultural setting (*Teachers 1, 2, 4 and 5*) and intrinsic, which is derived from personal desire to learn about different cultures (*Teachers 1 and 4*) and an interest in languages (*Teachers 3 and 5*).

The teachers' motivation has also been reinforced during their actual work as ESL instructors. They expressed feelings of love for and enjoyment of their job. Notably, during their teaching the ESL teachers discovered their new professional identities formed by the culturally and linguistically diverse environment. They distinguished positive human qualities indispensable for their profession emphasizing cultural sensitivity as a core one. *Teachers 1 and 2* asserted that teaching ESL "goes beyond teaching itself." Even though they failed to provide further explanation for this statement, it has been assumed to mean that teachers do not only act as conveyors of knowledge, but that they have a connection on a more personal level with their students.

#### **4.5. Discussions of Practice and Theory**

In order to be open to a wide range of professional members with differing educational and professional backgrounds, the Department of Education offers teachers certificates that apply to all K-12 teachers. An ESL specialist from the Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador, Elizabeth Noseworthy, in a personal communication from March 20, 2009, stated:

ESL teachers have to have a Newfoundland Teacher's Certificate (Primary/Elementary, Intermediate or Secondary). In addition, they would have either a graduate degree, undergraduate degree or a certificate or diploma in the field of ESL in order to be employed in the Eastern School District. With respect to specific qualifications for various unionized teaching positions, there are no written policies that outline the requirements for employing ESL teachers (see Appendix).

Regardless of the fact that all ESL teachers are required to pass the certification standards, their opinions on the value of the education they received are ambiguous. The teachers shared their views on training offered to prospective ESL teachers, and reflected on the validity of their education over experience received during their professional career.

*Teacher 2* maintained that before landing a job as an ESL teacher she had already been an experienced teacher: *"My first experience of teaching ESL wasn't my first experience in teaching. So I had lots of teaching experience before I went and did ESL."* Since this teacher had started her ESL teaching career prior to receiving a degree, she offers a personal perspective on the impact her teaching experience had on her beliefs about training and experience. She implies that through experience she drew out knowledge grounded in the context of real teaching that was meaningful to her. The

teacher shares constructivist views on active learning (Dewey, 1916), standing for building knowledge through practice. She comments: *"The best training I had was experience. Going to the university is useful, but I think you have to put it into practice in your field to find out what works and what doesn't."*

Similarly, **Teacher 2** implied that balancing theory and practice can allow for a better understanding of teaching experience when asked what she values more: training or experience. The teacher places more value on experience, even while acknowledging the need for balance: *"You can't beat the experience. But then on the other hand everybody needs to know what they are doing, so there should be a balance. But I think experience is valuable."*

In a similar vein, **Teacher 5** suggested that experience is the way to obtain knowledge and skills needed to work with children. Nevertheless, she acknowledges a gap between her training as a language teacher and everyday teaching practice. **Teacher 5** shares:

*If we are talking teaching in general, I think experience is more valuable. But sometimes what you learn in a book - yes, it is all very valuable - you still have to be able to deal with children, though. Every year you learn a bit more and then finally it clicks - this is how you do it. No book prepared me for that. No degree prepared me for that.*

This teacher's comments challenge the assumptions of a traditional approach to teacher education in which "theory" precedes practice. Research conducted on teacher

education acknowledges the importance of "healthy interaction of theory and practice that professional action requires" (Munby & Russel, 1994, p. 1). Furthermore, the "practice-before-theory" approach suggests that this is what these teachers believe and allows for reflective practice in teachers' work, which provides a useful way to consider how teachers themselves learn to teach. As *Teacher 2* elaborates on how her experience was later informed by theory:

*And I found it really interesting doing the training after teaching, because I could tell a lot of things that they were saying if you do this in the classroom wouldn't work because I have the experience. I found the courses very confirming and affirming of what I have done.*

*Teacher 3* felt positive about training while doing her undergraduate degree with a major in Modern Languages: "My education was valuable just because what I happen to do. It was perfectly targeted for that." *Teacher 1* who did her Bachelor of Education in TESOL, reflects on some discrepancies between her academic knowledge and her teaching practice: "You know, everything learnt in school you just want to apply...and that quickly goes out of the window and you realize being in a classroom is a whole lot different than just learning about it."

Possibly some ESL courses do not fully reflect the dynamics and changing nature of the cultural and linguistic mosaic of the ESL context in Canada, nor do they take into consideration the contextual particularities of different provinces, like Newfoundland and

Labrador. Therefore, if the teachers received their education in other provinces, as in the cases of some of the interviewees, and returned to work to Newfoundland and Labrador, they might have to reconsider and rebuild that knowledge in accordance with this particular context. Besides, possible discrepancies of theoretical and practical knowledge may encourage the teachers to reflect on their formal knowledge and current experiential practice, thus finding meaning in the intersection of these two experiences. *Teacher 1* also believes that basic theoretical knowledge leads to good-quality professional practice. She comments that her theoretical knowledge may not be obvious, but reveals itself during her teaching. To the question of whether or not the knowledge she obtained at the university was helpful, she replied:

*Yes, somewhere in the back of my brain. It all stems from that, you know...basic methodologies they have and pedagogies. I mean it's there. You are not actually skimming it out in class every day. I think it's important to have that basis to reflect on and come back to these basic ideas and methodologies that you learnt in university.*

Contrary to these teachers, *Teacher 3*, who did her degree in linguistics, was sceptical about the idea of teaching ESL without any theoretical background. She was convinced that effective practice stems from solid knowledge of fundamental concepts of language teaching: *"I think you need to start with a good education. You need to understand second language acquisition to know the grammar and how language works. With experience hopefully it gets better."*

The teacher explained that the language learning process is different to any other subject learning and ESL teachers should be aware of that:

*And the things that are happening in the brain when you are learning a second language are completely different from what's happening when you are learning biology or math or anything else. And that's what interests me as what is that process and how to get learners through it.*

Apart from different processes happening in the brain during language learning, there are other attributes of a learner that have to be taken into consideration in relation to the knowledge ESL teachers are expected to have. These are learners' aptitude, cognitive styles related to personality types, learning disabilities that can manifest themselves as language disabilities and social identity. All play an important role in affecting learner performance (Richards, 1987).

A body of research on teacher's professional development needs also suggests ESL learners have diverse academic, language and social needs and represent a wide variety of previous schooling experiences and traditions, or interrupted schooling in the case of some refugees (Gandara *et al.*, 2005; MacPherson *et al.*, 2005; Varghese *et al.*, 2005; Clair, 1993). It's obvious that ESL learners need special skills and training to perform effectively at school. Therefore, the quality and the extent of a teacher's preparation are critical. According to the syntheses of studies conducted by researchers at the University of California, the most successful teachers of ELLs have identifiable

pedagogical and cultural skills and knowledge including the ability to communicate effectively with students and to engage their families. They also have extensive skills in teaching the mechanics of language and how it is used in different contexts and for different purposes (Gandara *et al*, 2005). Though some teachers suggest practice is more valuable than theory, all of them emphasize the necessity of balance between the two and one teacher (*Teacher J*) says a theoretical basis is very important.

Guntermann (1993) asserts that teachers cannot teach effectively without understanding how learners learn. Much of this knowledge is studied in courses on second language acquisition where teachers learn the developmental stages of cognitive growth, how the brain functions and the memory operates as well as learning styles and strategies (as cited in Faez, 2007). Accordingly, *Teacher J* implies that this knowledge is extremely valuable to the language teacher in organizing learning process effectively. And the other teachers also acknowledge the value of theory, though they might like to learn more experientially.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Key findings in this chapter are as follows: The main motivations for the teachers were love of language, culture and diversity, and the ability to work one on one with students in ESL settings. The teachers acknowledged the value of theoretical learning and university training but also tended to favour a more experiential approach to teacher

education. Some emphasized the specialized nature of the training needed by ESL teachers. The following chapter explores issues of curriculum and teaching.

## Chapter 5

### Issues of Curriculum and Teaching

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines issues of curriculum and teaching, including students with learning gaps, discussions of the pull out system and of different approaches to curriculum, and the teachers opinions in relation to teaching and learning.

#### 5.2 Students with Learning Gaps

Another argument in favour of specialized training stems from the need to professionally assist students with learning gaps. These are the children who have been in a refugee camp and missed a number of years at school or their education does not correspond to the same grade level in Newfoundland and Labrador. The teachers express their frustration about not having enough knowledge and lacking adequate skills to address the various needs of these types of students effectively. The educators understand how vital it becomes for these students to receive intensive, necessary language assistance in a timely manner so that they feel prepared linguistically to receive academic support in subject areas. *Teacher 1* estimates that approximately 75 percent of her students do not have a lot of formal schooling. She explains:

*It [teaching] is kind of hard now because all of my students mostly are what we have been coining as "gap kids" meaning that they don't have any prior education or they missed a number of years so there is no way they could keep up.*

**Teacher 1** believes the lack of previous schooling can be quite disconcerting for both teachers and students. Thus, it may marginalize a student and put him/her in a disadvantageous position in relation to other students in the class. Further to this, it certainly requires extra effort and professional knowledge from the part of mainstream, Special Education and ESL teachers to help them to "catch up" and integrate into their grade as soon as possible. **Teacher 1** asserts that ESL classes provide a "comfort zone" they may be missing in a mainstream class for children with "learning gaps". She explains:

*So there are large gaps in their schooling, so I mean they are trying to do grade six math, but can't even subtract seven from twelve. So, what's the point? It's better for them to be there doing like a group reading activity with me.*

All the teachers agree that ELLs, especially students with learning gaps, are in great need of more English language instruction time. **Teacher 3** expresses a strong opinion in this regard, describing the itinerant program as "detrimental." She says:

*In my opinion there needs to be a real push on the months of arrival, like the first few months after arrival where there is a lot of English instruction. And just to get them that push so they are comfortable at least to succeed in every level.*

Therefore, ESL teachers do not just teach ELLs English, but integrate other subject areas into ESL programs so that an ELL could progress academically. However, teaching ELLs becomes a vicious circle when a student does not have command either of English nor of the content area of school subjects. **Teacher 1** emphasizes that ELLs need the language first:

*I will do a little assessment when I first see them to see where they are with math. You know, once they have more language. I might be able to say - ok, lets see what are you doing with your math, but I find that too heavy right now with just the language that I can't touch the math.*

**Teacher 2** insists that ESL teachers must not derail from their direct responsibility of teaching language by trying to focus on other subjects. She argues that ESL teachers need to possess knowledge specific to the area of Special Education, which ESL teachers do not typically learn. She is saying that children with learning gaps need support separate from what the ESL teacher can offer:

*The needs of kids with "learning gaps" should be addressed separately. I think it's probably good that they have an ESL training, but I don't know if that matters. These kids have too many issues to be addressed by the ESL teachers.*

While **Teacher 3** implies that ESL teachers should not deal with all linguistic, psychological, cultural issues pertaining to the adaptation of ELLs with learning gaps,

**Teacher 1** believes a collaborative approach of all the parties involved will significantly facilitate the adaptation of ELLs with gaps. She shares her thoughts:

*I think everybody needs to kind of take responsibility for this child and make sure that the child is ok. Everyone is equally responsible and sometimes ESL teachers we feel that everyone kind of says: "Oh, they are your student." And so all the responsibility for that child was put on us, but the child is a student in your school, so it's the principle's responsibility, it's the guidance councillor's responsibility, it's the classroom teacher's responsibility, it's the ESL teacher's responsibility.*

The teachers understand the challenges of schooling, which induces them to make choices and changes in the schooling structure. They adapt through their everyday experience and develop knowledge about their teaching that is organized around particular issues, concerns and priorities related to the schooling process of the District. The teachers expressed the need for a great deal of support in the early months and for a team approach in which special education teachers and others are involved as well as the ESL teachers.

### 5.3 Pull-out System Discussions

In 2007, the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment released an Immigration Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador that recognizes the benefits that immigrants bring to the province (*An Immigration Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador*, 2007). The Strategy is aimed at designing and implementing programs to improve the retention of immigrants in the province.

The Strategy details the breakdown of ESL students in the Eastern School District as of 2007, the location for this current study. In the Eastern School District, the majority of ESL students are in the K-9 student population. For example, from the most recent data obtained from the personal correspondence with Settlement and Immigration Consultant, as of May 2010, there were 237 ESL students: 137 in elementary, 37 in intermediate and 63 in high school (personal correspondence from Sheldon O'Neill, May 17, 2010 - see Appendix). Overall, the Strategy states that the number of foreign students at schools requiring special language support grows steadily every year, especially in the urban areas of the Eastern School District. For example, as of June, 2006 there were 193 ESL students: 113 in elementary, 38 in intermediate and 42 in high school (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007). Therefore, the demand for qualified ESL teachers is increasing based on the growing number of ESL students.

The teacher-student ratio varies from 27 to 30 students per teacher. The elementary school ESL teachers work in pull-out instruction and have from one to five students in a class, depending on the availability of the students. Pull-out ESL programs remove students from mainstream classrooms for a portion of the day to give them specialized instruction in English. It is most common in elementary schools where a designated ESL teacher works with small groups of children (Rennie, 1993, p. 3). Five ESL teachers from the Eastern School District were asked about working in a pull-out system with this number of students.

All of the interviewed teachers expressed dissatisfaction with pull-out instruction. *Teacher 1's* response is based on personal experience as well as her studies on the pull-out model of instruction in general. She maintains: "*Research shows a pull-out system is not the most effective, but, again, with the number of students it's not possible to do it any other way.*"

There is no consistency in the number of ESL students in each school. Thus, in schools with a small number of ESL students, pull-out learning might be seen as the most suitable solution.

The ESL teachers mentioned several issues regarding pull-out instruction. Firstly, due to the lack of time allocated for second language learning, which is only once a cycle, this system does not provide the possibility for ESL teachers to adequately meet the academic needs of newcomers. With this limited amount of time, only basic

communicative needs can be addressed. **Teacher 3** states: "Because of the itinerant program, because ESL is such a fundamental need at lower levels, having an itinerant program where kids are getting how many hours per week? It's just not working. It's detrimental."

**Teacher 5** expresses doubt about the compatibility of a pull-out system with a valid curriculum due to the limited amount of time allocated to teaching. She corroborates the statement made by **Teacher 3** criticizing insufficient ESL programming:

*Imagine a great curriculum in two hours in a seven-day cycle! That's really a task because a great curriculum can't be effectively offered two hours a week in a seven-day cycle. You are barely surviving and you are barely giving them enough in that short time. If you had the kids for an extended period of time each cycle, you could offer a program that is more comprehensive. Our children would only benefit from more ESL instruction. More contact time is important for any curriculum to be effective.*

**Teacher 2** echoes the sentiment regarding the amount of time assigned for ESL teaching. This teacher maintains that pull-out instruction results in additional challenges in establishing consistency in the programming designed by the teachers for each individual student:

*It's difficult, because it's too much time between the times you see [the] children. So, as a teacher, you have to remember what you dealt with today, and three days later you continue with it. But then in three days that you don't see the child and they have done all other things and they probably forgotten...maybe not forgotten, but it's probably*

*not on the front burner. So it does make it much more difficult with a pull-out system certainly.*

According to similar research conducted in the USA, more than 55 percent of the participants in the study, also ESL teachers, work in classrooms where their students receive some sort of pull-out instruction. The research finds this type of instruction as a strategy for providing academic support to be among the least successful strategies for teaching ESL students. The reasons include: Students' lost opportunities to learn what their classmates are exposed to; instruction that is inconsistent with what students who remain in the classroom are learning; and valuable time lost in transitions (Gardara *et al.*, 2005).

While some ESL students' needs lie in the area of language acquisition, others struggle with basic concepts of mainstream subjects. Some of these students, due to their living situations and life circumstances, have never been in school prior to coming to Canada. They represent the neediest layer of ESL students, according to **Teacher J**, and are greatly affected by the lack of time for English language instruction the pull-out system offers:

*If they have gaps in education with no English, it's pretty much taking up all my time to get them to basic English like oral skills, get them to do some basic reading. They don't know how to read and to write in their own language. But I can't take on the grade 5 social studies curriculum. They need extra time, extra teachers and extra support and they are not getting it yet.*

The needs of those students with learning gaps present an additional challenge for ESL teachers as some of these students are illiterate in their mother tongue. Therefore, teachers assert that the needs of students with learning gaps ought to be addressed separately from the students who already have a grasp of the English language as well as an understanding of the general concepts of mainstream subjects. **Teacher 2** concludes that having to follow one curriculum for all ESL students, if it existed, would be challenging because it would not meet the needs of all ESL learners. According to this teacher, an availability of diverse resources would be more suitable in this present ESL context:

*What I think is needed is a lot of various supplies so that we, teachers, choose the things to meet the needs of individual children with varying backgrounds. So we have a need for curriculum that could be used with the kids that is made up to a grade level and just for the language and then we would also need a curriculum that could be used for children that are coming with gaps, so that we can help them adjust to the classroom.*

Students with learning gaps are the ones that are most affected by insufficient time for English language instruction. **Teacher 4** also emphasizes the importance of offering more hours per week to these students:

*In the short term, however, I think reducing the ESL student-teacher ratio would provide our children with much needed additional ESL instruction. This is especially*

*crucial for our ESL children with learning gaps. I would be absolutely thrilled to see this happen.*

**Teacher 5** is dissatisfied with the amount of time offered for ESL instruction that contradicts the urgent need for ESL learners, especially those with learning gaps, for intensive ESL help. She maintains that ESL teachers can only offer what she calls "survival language" for these children, which is definitely not enough for them to perform well academically:

*It's survival language for beginners so that they can do the basic reading and basic writing and that kind of stuff. It's unfortunate, but in the situation when you have them all day I could do all kinds of language development in a shorter timeframe in a cross-curricular fashion. If I had these children all day, I could do a unit on social studies, health studies and meet health outcomes or social studies outcomes.*

It is obvious from the interviews that the major challenge of pull-out instruction is to find the best option for ESL students with learning gaps and provide them with needed language skills to help them progress in other content areas. **Teacher 5** explains that through consultation with special needs teachers, reflection on her own teaching experience and through personal initiative she succeeds in facilitating the learning process for these students within the given time constraints:

*Currently, I have children who do not have a grasp on the basics in their own language, so I consult regularly with special services teachers to get ideas on developing*

*activities with a focus on literacy. As well, I use a lot of knowledge acquired through 25 years teaching a second language to children with varying degrees of ability to create literacy activities and simplified versions of learning tasks. I have also managed to get special services to take my children who have gaps and offer them extra English classes focusing on literacy skills.*

Another disadvantage of pull-out instruction the teachers cited, besides a time deficit, is an inability to group students according to their language level. *Teacher 1* indicates that students are grouped by school and not by their proficiency in English, which is, again, preconditioned by the pull-out instruction that does not afford much freedom in making alternative choices. She claims she actually "enjoys travelling from school to school to see her students," but expresses concerns about the ineffectiveness of lessons organization that pull-out instruction entails: "I have to group them [students] and it might not be the best situation, but it's either I group them or I'll see them twice a cycle as opposed to five times a cycle."

The diversity of language levels amongst ESL students in different schools is another common complaint of many ESL teachers. They explain that there is insufficient time allocated for such a variety of language needs, particularly where students are grouped in accordance with the school they attend. Similar to *Teacher 1*, *Teacher 2* expresses her frustration with this: "I have three kids at three different schools that could

*easily be one group. So I do it in one school and then I go and repeat the same thing in the next school."*

While some of the interviewed ESL teachers are dissatisfied with pull-out instruction, which, they feel, creates unrelenting barriers for teachers and students in achieving desirable learning objectives, other teachers discussed its positive aspects. Believing that the ultimate goal is to create a comfortable and healthy learning environment for ESL students, **Teacher J** finds certain benefits in this type of ESL teaching. She maintains that pulling a student out of the class offers certain benefits:

*Sometimes kids want to come out. It's a little break for them. The older they get, they become a little more confident with you, but in the classroom they are more self-conscious, they don't want you there as they get older. They don't want to stand out in the class. But the little ones are fine with you going in.*

From this teacher's comment, one can conclude that the pull-out system of teaching affords flexibility, and that its efficiency can also be preconditioned by the ratio of second language learners per ESL teacher. This teacher goes on to say:

*I think going in is good, pulling them out for a short period of time...I don't think it is ideal. If there were more ESL teachers so that the children could get more ESL time, the pull-out system would work much better.*

As an alternative to the pull-out system, some teachers advocated for opening a school or a newcomers' centre that would offer intensive language programming.

*Teacher 5* offered the alternative of assigning a special classroom for this purpose. In doing so, a school would ensure the observance of the principle of inclusiveness and equality. *Teacher 5* added:

*Maybe we should have a school or two, one school in the East end and another one in the West end with the government paying for bussing upfront. The bus would pick up all the children in the East end and they would go to one particular school. It could be an existing school that has an empty classroom and those children would go there and do intensive English immersion. The kids still could be integrated into regular classrooms for music, phys ed, art, singing, maybe health. With this model their language would improve much more than in two hours of ESL instruction in a seven-day cycle.*

This teacher explicitly indicated that this topic was being discussed among ESL teachers: *"I think the ESL teachers feel the same way about a newcomers' program. I would prefer to see the kids in a school that currently exists, that has that classroom available."*

Another teacher opposed separating ESL students into an ESL school arguing that this idea does not encourage inclusiveness and acceptance of diversity within a community. She asserted that secluding ESL students in a separate school would marginalize them, thus making it difficult for them to integrate. This is *Teacher 2's* comment on the idea of opening a school for second language learners:

*The thing is when they do that [isolate learners in a separate building] it tends to marginalize the kids. So there*

*is good and bad to that. Because you stick only to one place that is ESL. That [is] what happens in a high school. They are all together and they get in a clique of their own language group and don't integrate with other children. If they are by themselves they are not going to sit on a chair alone like that. So, they don't mix with the other kids. Because when they are together they get in clique of their own language group and they don't integrate with other children.*

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory better explains *Teacher 2's* point of view suggesting that learning is a social process and that social interaction, and not isolation, is important for cognitive development. The social and cultural activities a child experiences and grows up with influence a child's development. It can be drawn from the sociocultural theory that being a part of the school community fosters second language learners' integration into mainstream classes and gives them a sense of acceptance, thereby motivating them to learn social skills through communication. Similarly, while some of the interviewed ESL teachers advocate for the idea of having a separate school for ESL students explaining that it would allow for more of a focus on language learning, they do not encourage complete isolation from mainstream classes.

It is clear from the teachers' interviews that the ESL teachers' objective is to help them gain confidence through language acquisition and become equal citizens of Canadian society starting with a strong educational background. Accordingly, dissatisfaction with the current scarce opportunities for adequate ESL instruction leads

the teachers to negotiate alternative ways to accommodate the newcomers' diverse language needs.

However, the placement of ESL students in one segregated school may raise many political and social issues. Thus, it may only exaggerate ESL s' differences and create social inequity. Moreover, standing out from English speaking students for the language differences may label ELL's as "disadvantaged." Alternately, these ESL students require special attention to their needs that may be achieved through the various means suggested by the ESL teachers. These include increased time for instruction, the support of a team including classroom teachers and special education specialists, and separate ESL classes or a separate school. Therefore, the issue of how to improve language delivery service while not excluding ESL learners from mainstream classes remains open for further discussion.

The teachers expressed two contrasting opinions on pull-out instruction. On the one hand, they stated that it allows for an individualized approach in teaching that has the advantage of creating a more comfortable learning environment especially for older second language learners who are embarrassed by having an ESL teacher with them in the mainstream classroom. On the other hand, some teachers concluded that pull-out instruction entails many disadvantages, such as lack of time for efficient learning and the grouping of students according to school versus their language skills or age. With regard to insufficient time allocated for ESL classes due to the pull-out system, the teachers

expressed major concerns for students with learning gaps, saying that they are the ones that need more English language instruction and assistance with English language in other content areas. As an alternative to pull-out instruction, *Teacher 5* proposed the idea of opening a newcomer's centre, which would allow for more intensive English language programming for ESL learners where the students would be integrated into the mainstream classroom for such subjects as art, physical education and music and where they would have adjunct ESL support in other subjects. This teacher indicated that the ESL instructors feel frustrated about having to deal with the issues that pull-out instruction entails.

In addition, the teachers believe that the pull-out model of ESL instruction may be one of the causes for the absence of a curriculum. The topic of curriculum sparked the most debate and is discussed in the following section.

#### **5.4 Curriculum Discussions**

Perhaps the most debated issue during the interviews was centred on the absence of an elementary school curriculum. The teachers' concerns are embedded in the lack of teaching resources and materials; the inconsistency in lesson scheduling that pull-out instruction entails; and a general uncertainty about curriculum for elementary students who have varying levels of ability to embrace cultural and linguistic diversity.

To understand the essence of the curriculum discussion it is necessary to consider and reflect on the teachers' beliefs and personal curriculum philosophies. The section illustrates that the teachers' philosophies on an ESL curriculum are preconditioned by the necessities and concerns around ESL programming. Therefore, the teachers offer a practical view on curriculum, stemming from what is needed rather than philosophizing on the notion of curriculum in general.

**Teacher 2**, for example, viewed curriculum as a set of organizational teaching tools that can be adapted to various scenarios, which the teachers can anticipate:

*You need a wide variety instead of just a curriculum. You need curricula. I would say. You need a whole lot of different things. And we just need to have almost just like a library of available materials that we can pull out as needed and we are familiar with. Thus, we could take a use in various situations that we have and that would suit all of us. So, curriculum for me is a set of tools I can use in my work as an ESL teacher.*

Similarly, **Teacher 4** expressed the need for general prescribed operating procedures that the Department of Education formulates, which are aimed at achieving particular outcomes. This teacher explains that having a set of guidelines would lead to consistency in and standardization of learning goals in the language-learning process:

*I believe you need a standardized thing to be able to plan, and without a curriculum you are not moving in a direction like that. So even if I developed my own curriculum for students, I had a strategy and the strategy was ok. I wanted to go from here to there. By the time you get to the end or*

*some kind of an end. ESL students would be able to use the Present Perfect in sentences, for example. The curriculum is a set of guidelines. Working on a large scale like a school board or something like that it is a total necessity. If we don't have a curriculum outcome, teachers are just doing whatever they want to do.*

**Teacher 5** echoed similar concerns saying that a curriculum should contain outcomes and guidelines for ESL teachers, thereby organizing the teaching process. She iterates that this opinion was formed from personal experience she gleaned from working with the Eastern School District:

*I see a curriculum almost like expectations and outcomes, like by a particular time in the child's learning he/she would be able to perform a particular task. A curriculum should list the kinds of tasks you would expect children to perform at a certain stage and there should be resources from which you can pull the activities that correspond to the tasks or outcomes.*

One of the integrative elements of the curriculum is assessment that allows a teacher to gain a picture of the students' linguistic and academic performance. **Teacher 1** expresses the need for a centralized officially developed ESL assessment kit that could put ESL in line with other disciplines:

*I would like to have some of the assessment kits that other subject areas have but it costs a fortune. We are still looking for an assessment kit that we would use - a standardized one that is not just what we put together ourselves. I would like to see more things available to me but it depends on the financing.*

*Teacher 1* mirrored the same sentiment asserting that ESL programming would facilitate and coordinate the teachers' work. However, this teacher did not favour the idea of a prescribed curriculum. She indicated that it would not facilitate the embracing of each student's individual needs. Therefore, a set of guidelines-based curriculum is needed to organize teachers' workload and allow consistency that follows a prescribed educational framework:

*It would be nice to have it [a curriculum] because it would give some direction because you would know where you start, where the middle is and where the outcome that you aim at. So it would make my job easier for planning wise in setting expectations for the students. But realistically, it [the student's individual needs] is [sic- are] so individual that it would be hard even if it were some set of curriculum. But to have general guidelines, just to have these things covered before they move to this point. Maybe for me now it's just general guidelines to see if I am on track and there is some consistency in what we are teaching.*

The ESL teachers bear classroom responsibilities similar to the ones of mainstream teachers': they perform language assessment, lesson planning that may include program development for individual students as the students are not grouped according to their language proficiency, but their availability at a particular school, and progress evaluation at the end of each semester. To make up for the lack of specifically designed teaching and assessment tools and resources that the Department of Education should provide, the teachers have to create their own teaching materials. *Teacher 1*

maintained that ESL teachers work collaboratively and share resources that help them design programs suitable for each ESL student:

*We are developing our own curriculum because there is nothing and we'll have to constantly put together bits and pieces. We don't really have a book that we follow. So, we are trying to put together our materials and share materials with each other. It's all about kind of sharing.*

**Teacher 5** concluded that working on class preparation is challenging as it occupies a great deal of time and can be mentally taxing: "That is very hard time-wise, and finding the resources is time-consuming and requires a whole lot of planning."

By assuming so many duties of their own accord, the teachers show their dedication to serve ESL learners. They put their time and effort into selecting the best resources, adapting materials and consulting the guidelines of the Department of Education to better meet the learning needs of their students. To accomplish this goal the teachers use not only their professional knowledge, but also strong communication skills in order to negotiate the programming with mainstream teachers. This is what **Teacher 5** shared:

*Every night you just spend a lot of time creating. You have to use your knowledge as a second language teacher to create good learning opportunities for your students. Sometimes you can use English as a first language task. I look through the outcomes and I think: 'OK, I am going to try these four things' if I think the child is capable but just needs exposure and practice. And I come up with my little lessons, - and later I'll speak to the teacher and I'll say: 'OK, this is what I have been doing. Have you noticed an*

*improvement in this particular area?' So, yes, it's my own curriculum, but I always consult the Department of Education guidelines and the mainstream teacher.*

Evaluation and assessment are integral components of the teaching-learning cycle and can be used to follow learners' progress and to reflect on a teacher's instruction. An effectively organized evaluation process confers meaning to a teacher's work and promotes a better understanding of student's needs and learning styles. It also guides and improves learning and instruction. Due to the absence of a formal curriculum for ESL students in Newfoundland and Labrador, and thus the lack of learning outcomes, the teachers admit that, collaboratively, they have managed to put elements of an assessment together. Through this collaborative assessment, they are trying to bring consistency to individual programs they create for each learner. However, according to the teachers, the evaluation process is informal and has become an integral part of their everyday teaching process. **Teacher 3** said:

*You can hear their vocabulary, you can see their reading and there is formal assessment we have a couple of times a year and that's a kind of like a checklist. You can see they are moving up or what stage they are at. But a lot of it is informal day to day. For me that's more an assessment to hear than a formal assessment to do twice a year.*

Monitoring second language learners' language development occurs through observation of their performance during classes. **Teacher 2** indicated that the purpose of evaluation is to let a teacher understand which needs have to be addressed and what

language teaching means would best suit an individual student's needs. She added that through evaluation ESL students shape their individual programming:

*By various responses that you get you can see where a child is. You are constantly evaluating ESL, not formal evaluation, but you see and say that this child is not ready for that because they need a certain skill before something and you have to go back and address that skill. That way, a child contributes to how you are using a curriculum.*

In designing a solid program, teachers not only consult a classroom teacher and share teaching resources with one another, but they also view their students as active contributors to ESL programs. For example, **Teacher 2** believes ESL students' language needs help her identify the main areas of emphasis within individual programming; thus adding to a curriculum that, in turn, would be able to offer multiple resources to match the diversity of needs represented in the ESL classroom:

*They [the students] can't help [but] decide what is good for them. Sometimes they don't realize they are contributing. I don't ask a child of seven: "What do you need as a curriculum?" I think a curriculum is developed by looking at various needs of children and say, this child has this particular need and we have something in our store of curriculum to be able to address that need. So, in that way I think every child can contribute. The more varied children you have coming through the system the better your curriculum should be because you will have to have things to meet those or these needs of a particular child.*

**Teacher 1** mirrored the same opinion, adding that a student's interests are taken into consideration when designing a curriculum:

*I am trying to adjust my teaching to their needs. If I find something they are interested in, I will hone in on that and try to build something around that idea. Or if I notice something in their writing or reading they are lacking I will work on that.*

However, the question of whether a curriculum could embrace linguistic diversity and address cultural issues in the present context provokes further discussion. For example, **Teacher 2** argues that by being overloaded with too many cultural components, a curriculum may become too overwhelming for teachers who in their turn, will have to be selective and flexible in following and adjusting it to the needs of individual students. When asked if the content of an ESL curriculum would be able to embrace and allow for cultural variety, **Teacher 2** replied:

*No, I don't think so. I think you need different things for different children. Well, if we put all the stuff together that would meet the needs of all the children, not every child would need everything that is available.*

Furthermore, she elaborated that focusing on the culture of every ESL student lies outside of in-class activities, explaining that there is a lack of time to address cultural issues. She also argued that a language teacher should centre on the academic development of a student, ignoring cultural particularities:

*If we could have more time with the kids it would be fine, but I still think we are teachers of the school. So your focus has to be on academics not on culture. To address cultural things wouldn't be my priority not because I think it's not important but because my job is to teach those kids English.*

**Teacher 4** recommended caution when discussing culturally related topics that may instigate a conflict in the classroom. The teacher implied that it was better to focus on local cultural issues and the future than to dwell on the past:

*They need to connect to people on basic levels and to ignore one level of this cultural phenomenon, or their cultural baggage, and pay attention to it on another level. By baggage I mean that they focus on the differences from here versus there, and that becomes counter-productive to their acculturation into the society they are trying to integrate into and become part of. It becomes baggage, so to speak, because immigrating ESL students will sometimes obsessively lament on what they've left behind (their baggage) and how different it was in the old country instead of focusing on the future and what is common between their native culture and their new one.*

The teacher explained that the main idea that lies behind the approach of choosing appropriate content area is to discover similarities and not differences between the classmates:

*If you focus too much on all the differences in those basic needs; how our relationships with family members differ from one culture to another or how we treat different family member as an example, then it might be a problem.*

The teacher implied that an ESL educator should focus on common attributes or manifestations of international student culture and use it as a basis to continue building

trust with the students. However, Carrasquillo and Rodriguez (2002) assert that educators must place a positive value on students' cultural differences in order to encourage the development of self-esteem (p. 55). In support of this view, **Teacher 4**, who teaches elementary school students, said that most importantly you must create an atmosphere of acceptance regardless of what a teacher focuses on in particular. She admitted that she had a special attitude towards her students:

*I always worry about the correct term to use when referring to ESL children, however - newcomers? ESL children? New Canadians? You know, you always want to make sure you don't say something to make them feel uncomfortable or expose them to something in the curriculum that might be offensive. You don't want to "other" them - a term sometimes used in the ESL world. I see children as children and if I were to admit it, I have a much bigger soft spot for my ESL children. Does that mean I look at them differently? If so, then it is in a good way.*

**Teacher 4** also asserted that some forms of culturally inappropriate behaviour should be addressed at later stages when students are acculturating, have a better command of English and are able to accept expectations regarding behavioural social norms: "*Sometimes, it's easier to ignore that they are rude and find out why and address it later when they understand you and the language more.*"

Otherwise, ESL teachers may focus on negative and socially unacceptable behaviours during classroom time. This negative attention could discourage students from active participation during in-class activities and impede their engagement in the learning

process. Notwithstanding some existing discrepancies between the teachers' beliefs and preconceptions about how ESL students should behave in class, **Teacher 1** asserted that any problem - whether academic or behavioural - that arises from a misunderstanding can be resolved through explanation:

*If a child has other than academic issues I will set up and meet with their parents so it's just a matter of translation. We get together with a teacher, parents, translator and myself to make sure everything is okay. A lot of it is just clarity. A child doesn't know the expectations set up by the school, they don't know the rules. So, you can say NO to a child and he or she understands the NO but she/he won't understand what you say NO is.*

**Teacher 4** maintained that learning about students' culture and their past learning experiences increases a teacher's sensitivity to cultural differences and helps to develop an appropriate teaching approach in an ESL class:

*In many cases I learn more how people think, how their culture affects their way of thinking. I think it's totally necessary because you can't empathise with other students unless you know their background. You don't develop teaching strategies unless you have a hint or some knowledge of the way they were taught.*

Summing it up, **Teacher 3** concluded that it is inevitable for an ESL curriculum to be culturally-diverse and content-wise because an ESL class is all about diverse cultures. She believes ESL teachers together with ELLs espouse inclusion and create a comfortable learning environment, while what happens outside of ESL classrooms should raise concerns:

*A lot [of] what we do starts with what they know in their own language, stories from their own language. So, I guess, in that way the materials that we choose tend to be multicultural. I think the issue with multiculturalism... we are all multicultural here. In ESL it's not a problem. The problem begins when they [the students] leave ESL and go out in the mainstream classroom. Then multiculturalism is not valued, accepted or promoted. Then you have a problem.*

The teacher asserted that an ESL environment at school is multicultural implying that it inherently represents cultural and linguistic diversity that are valued and respected. Furthermore, ESL classes constitute a secluded form of community within a mainstream community, which ensure the nurturing and flourishing of cultures. It can be concluded from the teacher's comments that respect for diversity is mostly bound to ESL classes, whereas in real life ESL students may struggle for acceptance. Therefore, the mainstream community, according to this teacher, may not see diversity as an enrichment of the community, but as a threat. Hence, it may marginalize and exclude individuals of other cultures from outside of the main community.

According to Rimniceanu (2007) it is particularly relevant for small communities, like Newfoundland and Labrador:

*The core values of multiculturalism that espouse democratic principles are aimed at benefitting all the members of the society equally. However, practical application of principles of multiculturalism is limited. Especially it is difficult to relate to those principles in rural Canada and provinces with low immigration (p. 9).*

Rimniceanu (2007), in her literature review on issues and initiatives in education, asserts that immigration and education are two areas that are strongly related to Canada's successful trajectory of social cohesion. She suggests that multiculturalism is one of the aspects of Canadian life that needs to be cultivated through education. There are a number of educational programs that are being implemented at provincial schools to support multiculturalism, for example, Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) or Roots of Empathy, to name a couple. However, these educational programs and services may be insufficient for a mainstream school population in order to help students to perceive ESL students as equal members of their community.

To conclude, not all the teachers share the idea of having a multicultural ESL curriculum. However, all of them agreed that ESL students shape the curriculum by their learning needs. The primary and junior high ESL teachers (*Teachers 1, 2 and 5*) did not acknowledge any issues with acceptance in the mainstream class and admitted that the lack of time does not allow them to address cultural issues separately. They explained that ESL students need the *language* to effectively communicate with their peers. Therefore, they try to be selective and flexible in addressing individual student's *language* needs. These teachers imply that any issue can be resolved through explanation and clarification. Conversely, the teachers who work with high school students (*Teachers 3 and 4*) demonstrated more concern with problems of acceptance in the mainstream class.

*Teacher 3* lamented that it is the mainstream community that may present a threat for ESL students due to the fact that multiculturalism is not promoted outside the ESL classroom and does not stand on the forefront of general education. The high school teachers pointed out that it was important for ESL teachers to learn about students' culture in order to increase their cultural sensitivity and thus, be able to discover similarities to focus on instead of dwelling on the differences.

The ESL teachers are divided over the necessity of prescribed programming, taking into consideration the variety of academic and language needs presented in the classroom. Therefore, most of the teachers recommend a curriculum that would allow for flexibility and adjustment to individual students' learning needs. They expressed the need for teaching resources such as assessment kits, general guidelines and, consequently, language outcomes that would bring consistency to the teaching process.

Taking into consideration the lack of a formal ESL curriculum at the elementary level, the ESL teachers (*Teacher 1, 2, 5*) related that they create programs on their own by identifying students' language needs and the sharing of resources. *Teacher 3*, who works with high school students, designed programming based on the courses she taught for 25 years in the Eastern School District that has become an official ESL high school curriculum.

Consistent with the goal of the Immigration Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador (2007), promising to "[provide] improved educational services for K-9 ESL

students across the province," (p.11) there is a likelihood that the issue of limited programming and resources will be addressed by the department of education in the near future.

As it has been demonstrated in this section of the study, the responsibilities of ESL teachers in the Eastern School District are complex and demanding. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the hard work and specific contributions of ESL teachers to ESL education in Newfoundland and Labrador.

### 5.5 The Meaning of Teaching

This section illuminates the ESL teachers' subjective opinions on teaching and learning. Furthermore, it may be of importance to understand the interconnection between how they view curriculum with relation to ESL in the province and what meaning the teachers give to teaching as a phenomenon. In one's subjective opinion, these notions are interrelated and cannot be considered separately from each other. In previous sections, the teachers shared their views on curriculum, seeing it as a set of tools and resources available to teach successfully.

For **Teacher 2** teaching provides the impetus for students to become independent life-long learners, providing them with essential skills that would encourage them to continue being learners:

*Teaching is empowering somebody to learn. You try to make life-long learners; you have to give them the skills to continue learning even when there is not somebody there. It's not like taking food and putting it into a baby's mouth. You have to teach them to do it themselves. I think you give them the skills to be learners.*

**Teacher 5** emphasizes that mastering the language will help ELLs successfully move through the school system and provide them with opportunities for a better life in Canada. For **Teacher 5**, teaching goes beyond simple language instruction. To the question about the meaning of teaching, she asserts it is through language that she empowers her learners.

*That's a broad question. It is providing the children with the desire to learn and fortunately a lot of our ESL children already have that. Providing them with the tools they need to make progress and to move on in life. If I can provide them with good learning opportunities and the appropriate tools to put it all together and make this new language work so that they can do well in life, then I am teaching something. I can teach them to read, I can provide them with a vocabulary and tools for them to put together and make the language work. From experience I also know that teaching includes more than teaching the content. It is about helping the child on so many other levels.*

**Teacher 1** explains that by assuming a role of a facilitator, a guide or an assistant, she creates opportunities for learners to express their needs and become involved in their own learning. The teacher identifies reading as one of the fundamental skills for becoming successful academically: *"I think teaching is to act as a facilitator to give the children what they need. Right now it's basic skills, reading. Giving them skills to read so they could learn."*

**Teacher 1** assures that language cannot be taught in isolation from culture — it represents and undertakes a role of an intermediary between ESL students and school and the community. The teacher accomplishes this role through educating the parties involved in the learning process about beliefs, attitudes and values shared by individuals: *"I am a language teacher so I need to teach them language, culture and what's accepted here. It's teaching other people around them about the students and their culture."*

In order to be able to teach in ways that are culturally appropriate for second language learners, an ESL teacher needs to be engaged in learning about students' beliefs and values. *Teacher 4* views learning as an integrative activity of the teaching process that occurs within the context of a classroom, the school, the community and a particular society. This learning leads to building understanding and trust between a teacher and a student, thus deepening understanding of the teachers' role as an educator:

*I am learning from the students all the time. I learn as much from them as I teach them. In many cases I learn more how people think, how their culture affects their way of thinking. I think it's totally necessary because you can't empathize with other students unless you know their background. You don't develop teaching strategies unless you have a hint or some knowledge of the way they were taught.*

Indeed, the literature says language educators have long recognized that learners bring to the language classroom a complex web of attitudes, experiences, expectations, beliefs and learning strategies (Benson, 2001; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993) that the teachers need to acknowledge. For example, *Teacher 4* shares that learning from students helps her recognize the differences between various learning styles historically adopted in one's culture, and based on her previous assumptions about teaching approaches, build better understanding and closer connection with ESL students. According to this teacher, this knowledge facilitates engagement with students on a personal level that, in turn, reflects positively on teaching and learning:

*So, Chinese students are used to a teacher-centered educational style. So as long you say what the answer is and don't promote cognitive thought, they are very comfortable with that method. Arabic students are more comfortable with open dialogue, because they come from an oral culture. And if you know that they are from an oral culture then you find a way to connect with them. So you can connect with them on a more personal level.*

While this teacher's quote may be an overgeneralization, it does suggest that the teacher is aware of the need for adapting to cultural expectations.

**Teacher 5** examines language issues that ESL students may encounter. This teacher believes students who speak the same language may have similar problems in acquiring English. She emphasizes the importance of awareness about the peculiarities of verbal communication of across cultures, to find a better approach to English language teaching in class:

*I learn from my students as well. I learn what works and what doesn't. You learn what issues a lot of language speakers have with English. Like certain things Spanish speakers find difficult or Chinese speakers find difficult. When you have Arab students you have to learn how to teach them to write from left to right - all these kind of things that you pick up as you get in touch with children speaking different languages.*

**Teacher 5** also explains that learning and teaching occurs from the moment she meets with a student. She acts in accordance with constructivist theories by transferring responsibility for learning to the child. As in the quote presented below, the teacher expressed the desire to learn a child's mother tongue. She believed by doing so she

afforded this child an opportunity to function as an equal member of the culture and develop confidence in self-identity. Additionally, this sharing aids the teacher to learn more about students' interests and identify activities suitable for an individual student:

*And I learn all the time. Literally I do, because every time I take them up the stairs we count in their language and after class, coming back, we count in English. So, I have been learning a bit. Every day they start, and they say and I repeat. And then they will test me. You allow them to teach you because it's so important for them to use their own language and demonstrate it for you. You also learn about different activities from the child's perspective. What you thought would be interesting for them, it may not be interesting from their perspective.*

All the teachers admit that learning is an indispensable process between people from different cultures. As they work in a multicultural environment their teaching and learning intertwine. *Teachers 4 and 5* maintain that learning about students' culture helps them connect to students on a more personal level. *Teachers 1 and 2* relay that by providing the students with necessary language tools and acting as facilitators in the students' learning, they allow them become independent learners and thus do well in the future. *Teachers 4 and 5* added that learning about ELL's language and culture could help teachers identify common difficulties that students from similar cultures may encounter while learning English, and develop teaching approaches that suit these students best. The next section will discuss in more detail the teachers' beliefs about how

their students learn a second language and how the teachers' roles as learners influence these beliefs.

### 5.6 How Students Learn

During the interviews, the teachers also shared their beliefs about learning and teaching. Regarding how ESL students acquire language, *Teacher 3* asserts that the first language of her students sometimes interferes with the English language acquisition process and that this fact has to be taken into account by an ESL teacher. However, she also sees some of the transfer in a positive light:

*I think most of it is creative and productive. It's a mix with first language. With older children, with whom I am now, it's a mix of transfer and their own inter language grammar. So, it's partly creative and partly transfer.*

She maintains that students already have a set of skills and implicit metalinguistic knowledge that can be drawn upon when working in another language, and all they have to do is to label this term in the second language. *Teacher 3* also acknowledges the presence of different styles and this knowledge helps to design teaching strategies that satisfy students' learning needs. *Teacher 3* researches each student to find out if their language acquisition occurs through transfer or generalization:

*How you teach according to that depends on what the structure is and what their first language is, how much it is*

*coming from language transfer and how much is coming from over generalization from English rules, so it depends on what I am teaching.*

**Teacher 2** is flexible when choosing appropriate teaching methods, strategies and approaches for an individual student through her recognition and acceptance of personal and cultural diversity as evidenced in class. Through learning about students' individual styles, the teacher accommodates them in class using appropriate methodology and strategies:

*I've had some students who feel most comfortable when I support it by a written word. I have one child now who likes to sit down with a book that he can have the book there to support. So he would rather read to me a page than talk to me from his head. And eventually he will learn to do the other as well. So, it's not necessarily fun activities.*

Five teachers agreed that resorting to sign language and mimicry substantially facilitates communication in class with ESL students. For example, **Teacher 1**, drawing on her "experiential knowledge" from her teaching practice with ESL students shares that this strategy also promotes language learning: "You reduce to facial expressions, sign language, pointing and things like that. But if you do it like that, the students quickly learn and they need to find the words."

**Teacher 1** also shares her beliefs that ESL teachers, especially those who started to work with beginner students, have to avail of their acting skills to bring the kids to the level of communication. She comments, with a smile on her face:

*I find body language is a big thing. Facial expressions, using my hands and my whole body. Sometimes I have to do a little song and dance. So I think you have to be somewhat of an actor as well, because if you don't have words you got to use what you got.*

Compatible with Vygotsky's concept of a zone of proximal development ("the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers," 1978, p. 86), **Teacher 1** views collaboration between more and less knowledgeable peers as beneficial for both parties, implying that the strongest student also benefits from explaining and clarifying the material to a less knowledgeable one. In the quote below, the teacher is saying that she usually practices this method when the group allows: "*Sometimes, I am trying to pull out the strongest and they might help. I wish I had more chances like that.*"

Similarly, **Teacher 2** implies that learning is a collaborative effort that allows participants to work on a problem that at least one could not effectively work on alone. She replies:

*The kids work together sometimes, because I can use Vadim to teach Teo words because of his vocabulary. He speaks*

*English fluently, so he can teach a lot of words to a child who doesn't know how to say them. Sava keeps talking and Teo would talk to Vadim more than he would talk with me.*

The perspective of these teachers on peer collaboration affects the way they organize their classroom activities with ESL kids. They believe students help each other to construct language utterances as they come into contact and interact. According to the second language teachers, collaborative work among language learners provides an opportunity for them to internalize and mutually construct a collective understanding of language forms and meanings. The power of this collaborative experience has support in Vygotsky's (1978) developmental theory where social interaction is a mechanism for individual development, since, in the presence of a more capable participant, the novice is drawn into, and operates within, the space of the expert's strategic processes for problem solving. During problem solving, the experienced individual often guides, supports and shapes the actions of the novice who, in turn, internalizes the expert's strategic processes (Donato, 1994, as cited in Lantolf and Appel, 1996). This process of providing mutual assistance and support of an expert to a novice student was coined by Vygotsky as "scaffolding" (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, the ESL teachers' approach to language teaching is in sync with the study on Second Language Research (Donato, 1994, as cited in Lantolf and Appel, 1996) that showed that learners themselves are capable of providing guided support to their peers during collaborative interactions in ways analogous to expert

scaffolding documented in the developmental psychological literature (p. 44). However, the teacher (*Teacher J*) seemed to adhere to the Piagetian approach toward language acquisition, considering the influence of age and developmental stages on how students learn English.

Consequently, any ESL class may create a unique context for the teachers and learners to actively engage in "dialogically constituted guided support" or "collective scaffolding" regardless of the level of proficiency in English of the learners (Donato, 1994, as cited in Lantolf, 1996, p.46). Through guided participation and a teacher's assistance, the learners may become actively engaged in the process of a collaborative dialogue using not only the target language, but other means of communication they avail of at that moment, such as mother tongue, gestures, mimics, visual aids and others. Therefore, the ESL teachers can always use group work in their ESL classroom and thus, provide a better opportunities for the learners to expand their own knowledge and extend the linguistic development of their peers.

### 5.7 Conclusion

To conclude, in spite of the differences in the teachers' beliefs about students' learning, all the teachers recognize individual differences in class and thus adjust their teaching to the students' needs. *Teacher J* believes that students learn the language by either transferring their knowledge of concepts from their mother tongue or generalizing

the rules. *Teachers 1 and 2* say that sometimes with beginner learners they have to resort to facial expressions and use a lot of visual aids in order to facilitate students' learning. They emphasize positive outcomes of collaborative learning, where students are encouraged to work together to solve problems.

The positive traits of collaborative relationships have also been discussed in the teachers' work. They pay much attention to the joint work with all the interested parties involved in the ESL education, such as mainstream teachers, administration, parents and the community. The next chapter will discuss the relationships the ESL teachers maintain with each group.

## Chapter 6

### Collaborations

#### 6.1 Introduction

An examination of ESL education in Newfoundland and Labrador led to the recent introduction of some prevalent changes in the District, including: the establishment of a Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program as part of the settlement process for immigrants to help newcomer students and their families settle in their school and community; the appointment of an ESL representative at the Department of Education; the assignment of six permanent (instead of contractual) ESL teacher positions; and the development of a junior high ESL curriculum. These changes are the result of collaboration among the District's ESL teachers.

The two focuses of this chapter are: the ways of thinking about ESL teachers' multiple roles and how ESL teachers construct and manage their ESL programs within the Eastern School District. In addition, this chapter will offer an interrogation of teachers' vision and understanding of collaboration, and how collaboration enhances ESL students' academic performance in the local context. For the purposes of this discussion, four key ESL teacher roles are identified and explained. These roles focus on four primary integrative processes: teacher-student interactions; teacher-family relationships; ESL teacher-mainstream teacher collaboration; and ESL teacher-school district administration.

As stated, the role of the ESL teachers in this study is considered an integral part of the wider educational system. The ESL teachers value interpersonal communication amongst all parties — ESL teacher colleagues, mainstream teachers, students' families, community and administrators — who influence students' academic and personal growth.

This framework allows the narratives of the ESL teachers to extend across multiple levels of collaboration, which are analyzed and compared to the current literature. The ESL teachers' narratives are presented as evidence of their theoretical understandings of the importance of collaboration during the teaching process, which, in turn, goes beyond the walls of the classroom. Their collaboration includes students, their families, mainstream teachers, other support workers such as special education teachers and SWES workers, a community and the school district administration. The narratives will provide anecdotal evidence that shows the importance of the ESL teaching profession. In addition, this interrogation will help to elucidate the importance of ESL programs and their impact on ESL students' overall academic outcomes and social integration into a new culture.

## **6.2 ESL Teacher-Parent Collaboration**

A theme that emerged from the teachers' interviews was the importance of a student's family as the primary facilitators of a child's process of adapting to a new society. Student's families are viewed as a fundamental unit for building a positive image

of teachers and the school community. Therefore, through maintaining two-way communication between school and home, the concerned parties can build mutual trust and respect towards each other's roles in the educational process of a second language learner.

The ESL teachers agree that maintaining contact with families of second language learners requires initiative, and admit that establishing contact with parents presents several issues, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The interviewed teachers perceive that work with the students' families is possible through the construction of multidimensional venues of communication. Interpersonal communication can occur at different levels: parent/guardian-teacher interviews, teacher's home visits, parent/guardian involvement in school council groups, and so on (Gandara *et al.*, 2005). The main idea behind promoting home-school connectivity is to help parents or guardians anticipate and understand their child's academic efforts and performance as well as to become active participants in a child's out-of-home life.

Over the last two decades, a growing body of research suggests that it is essential for a family member to be involved in a child's school life as children can benefit from such relationships (Berk, 2001; Gandara *et al.*, 2005; Helm & Warren, 1998; Simich-Dudgeon, 1986). The research indicates that when parents provide support, encouragement and instructions at home, which support or meet the teacher's requirements in school, children then get used to such bilateral assistance as well as

maintain good communications with their school peers and teachers through school activities. This type of parental input, described throughout the research, is known as "parent involvement" (Simich-Dudgeon, 1986, p. 3). Likewise, the ESL teachers emphasize that a child's education is not limited to the boundaries of school, but also occurs outside classrooms – at home and in the community.

A study of ESL students' academic achievement suggests that poor home-school communication presents one of the main reasons for students' educational failure and high dropout rate (Guo, 2006). Over the years, research has also repeatedly revealed that limited communication between ESL parents and teachers has been a serious problem facing educators (Guo, 2006).

Having the same aim as parents, to provide the best education for ESL students, **Teacher 3** confirms Guo's findings, asserting that communication with parents is instrumental in being able to monitor an ESL student's academic progress:

*I think it's a kind of old fashioned way of teaching — the teacher and the parent are kind of working together to keep the child on track. Having a good rapport with the parents is crucial. Knowing them is crucial.*

This quote parallels findings that emerged from a study on the impact of teachers and parents on a student's wellbeing. In this study, Berk (2001) affirms that the engagement of teachers and parents in a meaningful dialogue enhances student's academic achievement:

Through strong teacher-parent partnership, parents learn about effective educational practices and can better support children's learning at home. And teachers gain valuable insights into children's family experiences and cultural backgrounds that they can use to adapt classroom activities to children's learning needs.

Epstein's (1985) study on parental involvement concurs regarding the family's role in student achievement at school, saying "the evidence is clear that parental encouragement, activities and interest at home, and parental participation in schools and classrooms positively influence achievement" (p.19).

While some parents can easily communicate with teachers, for others it is much more difficult. Their obvious socioeconomic inequality, at least at the beginning of their settlement process, positions them at a disadvantage. Their living at the margins of survival hinders the creation of peer-like relationships with the community. This holds true for refugees who come to Newfoundland from war-torn countries. There are additional objective barriers, such as a different language and possible cultural misunderstandings that may dramatically impede communication between ESL teachers and parents. *Teacher J* asserts, in such a situation, where communication between school and families is minimal at the beginning of the settlement process, a strong and supportive family is crucial for a child:

*If the family unit is strong by the time the family comes to Canada, the child will be successful. When the family unit falls apart - and I don't really mean a couple together; I mean the parent-child unit. As long as there is a strong*

*parent, the child will succeed. The problems come when the parents get overwhelmed with the immigration process or get stuck in their goals. You can see it immediately in the children. The children get lost.*

This teacher talks about the almost insurmountable challenges that many immigrant families confront during their settlement process. She maintains that these challenges affect children's academic performance and integration.

*Teacher 5* indicates another challenge that parents face, which may hinder their involvement in their child's school. She says that even when ESL parents value education and show concern for their child's academic performance, they may fail to meet school requirements and fail to be involved in school activities due to their unfamiliarity with the Canadian school system. The teacher is certain that a lack of awareness about how the school system works is another issue that needs to be resolved:

*If the parents have expectations for their children and the parents demonstrate interest in and put value on education, it is obviously going to encourage their children. Sometimes the parents are unaware of how our education system works. Why do we assume that they know? There needs to be some sort of assistance for them.*

Both *Teachers 3* and *5* raise a very important point, revealing how difficult it is for parents to be involved in their child's school life if they do not speak the same language, are unacquainted with the school system or are simply overwhelmed by their life-circumstances.

The abovementioned barriers articulated by the teachers are supported by a study that suggests that a number of potential obstacles challenge the establishment of fruitful parent-teacher communication. The study shows that "language differences, parent unfamiliarity with the school system, different views regarding education, and cultural differences concerning home-school communication are among the main causes hampering teacher-parent communication" (Guo, 2006, p. 83).

As a result of language barriers and settlement issues parents face, they fail to understand what expectations the school system has for them. **Teacher 2** explains that schools set common requirements for all parents regardless of their social, linguistic and economic background. Thus, to help a child to integrate faster into the school system, ESL parents are expected to perform and be involved in their child's school on a basis equal to all other parents regardless of their language needs. **Teacher 2** also acknowledges teachers' and parents' differing views of education due to cultural factors that may also complicate home-school communication. Therefore, like **Teacher 5**, **Teacher 2** also strongly believes that ESL parents need to be informed about unfamiliar school practices:

*Any Canadian school system expects parents to read on a regular daily basis with and to their children and to make sure that they read all the notes in the agendas and that they sign all appropriate forms that keep coming home and all these kind of things. In some countries there are no expectations like that in the school. The ESL parents need*

*to understand that. They need to understand how the agendas work and I explain that to them.*

Similarly, *Teacher 1* shows concern for second language learner's families and reinforces the opinion of *Teacher 2* about informing ESL parents on school requirements. She recognizes the differences that exist, which make parents of ESL student unaware about the way a Canadian school operates. She assumes that being from another culture, families may be unaware of the degree of involvement parents should have in Canadian schools:

*Both parents are supposed to have a very significant role in the education of their children in our education system. As an ESL teacher I have taken meetings with parents from other cultures. I explain to them how our Canadian system works and what we expect from parents.*

As a result of the abovementioned challenges, some teachers may perceive parents of second language learners to be uninterested in the education of their children. It is not an uncommon perception of an immigrant parent by an ESL teacher and the school in general. Another study on parental involvement confirms that such an opinion of parental non-participation may also exist due to the gap between the parents' beliefs about school and a school's expectations of parents. Even when parents really do care, they may conduct themselves in a way that leads teachers and other school personnel to conclude that they do not care (Freeman & Freeman, 2001). In Freeman and Freeman's study on

second language acquisition, they found that the gap between home and school was, indeed, wide.

Immigrant parents, challenged in many ways on their arrival to Canada, entrust their children to school educators and are happy for their kids simply to be in school. This opportunity to study is welcomed because oftentimes in their country of origin they have been deprived of this opportunity. For not being informed about unfamiliar school practices, feeling disempowered due to language barriers, the social and economic challenges they face and acknowledging overwhelming demands from the school system, these immigrant parents have no other choice than to rely fully on teachers.

When asked if parents share the ESL teachers' concerns about their children, one interviewee (*Teacher J*) answered:

*As far as I know - no, because the parents for one don't have the language, two - they don't know what the expectations for educational institution are here. They are just so trusting that when they come here, their kids are in school and everything is ok. I don't think they realize the extent of what's going on.*

Similarly, Simich-Dudgeon and Trinity Coll (1986) in their study on parent involvement assert that the lack of skills and knowledge relating to schooling in Canada constitute one of the barriers for parent participation in second-language education:

"...parents are willing to become involved, but do not know how to help their children

with academic tasks at home, and in general, are fearful of doing more harm than good" (p. 12).

However, not all the interviewed ESL teachers share the same experience with parental non-participation. *Teacher 3* asserts that parents of second language learners undertake certain initiatives in creating home environments that support the learning needs of their children. These parents also attend school-sponsored activities, maintain open channels of communication with the teachers and continually monitor their child's progress in school. *Teacher 3* believes living in a small community brings plenty of advantages for teacher-parent communication:

*The advantage of being in such a small place is that you have this personal connection. I know parents in three or four different ways. So they are very comfortable and supportive of the teacher. Anything that I tell the parent I am sure I will get the parent's support.*

It is assumed that there are two main issues that determine the level of parental involvement in a child's school life. Firstly, it is a monumental task for many immigrant parents to integrate into a different culture, which may limit their involvement in their child's school life. Integration into a different culture can be mentally and physically taxing and is a time-consuming process that might take parents' attention away from their child's challenges at school. Parents might not understand the schools' or the teachers' expectations and requirements because of the language barrier or their personal beliefs

about schooling. Their value for education may be different from the school's or teacher's and may contrast with what the school expects of their children.

Not all immigrant parents have the same educational, social and economic background on coming to Canada. Obviously, there is a huge difference between middle class parents who emigrated for professional or business reasons and ones who are refugees with little formal education, no English skills or a history of trauma. These factors may determine the teachers' differing perceptions of the parents as well as the degree of parental encouragement for ESL students. In turn, these social factors have important bearing upon academic motivation and performance (Ladky & Peterson, 2007).

The second factor that determines the level of parental involvement in a child's school life is the effort to settle in to a new community, a new country and to achieve some socioeconomic status which, for many, especially for middle-class professional immigrant families, is one of the highest priorities. This upward mobility can derive from former personal experiences in their countries of origin that in some cases may not have met their expectations. As *Teacher J* stated previously, "parents get overwhelmed with the immigration process," which may distance them from their children and negatively reflect on their children's achievement at school. It may lead to the loss of strong family bonds and to what some teachers might call "parents non-involvement or non-interest" in a child's school life.

The teachers interviewed for this research are quite clear about the reasons for parental non-participation in school communities, alluding to challenges some immigrant and refugee families might be grappling with. *Teacher 5* said:

*The parents of children who come from war-torn countries are new to this country and the school is not their priority. They have so many other issues to deal with and sometimes it takes a while before their other issues are settled before they are ready to address school. This is absolutely understandable.*

*Teacher 1* also agrees that the parents are not ready for participation in the school community while dealing with some basic issues of adaptation: “Families that have come from a refugee camp are really needy.”

The teachers interviewed for this study deal mostly with socially and psychologically vulnerable refugee parents who have an overwhelming number of issues – from adaptation in Canada to dealing with trauma. The ESL teachers emphasize that a family’s experience in a war-torn country may alter their priorities, rendering school a lesser concern for these parents.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs presents an excellent model for understanding human motivation. “Needy” ESL parents, as *Teacher 1* refers to them, are not ready to place top priority on their child’s school. The theory explains that when basic physical and physiological, and then acceptance and belonging needs are met, a person is able to proceed to another level of the hierarchy and become engaged in self-realization

(Maslow, 1968). That means, parents may become more apt and open to a constructive and transformative dialogue with teachers when their basic settlement needs are met. These basic settlement needs may include language learning that results in finding a job or making connections with a community. According to *Teacher 2*, who has much experience working with newcomers, new families face emotional and psychological challenges upon their arrival and should have more opportunities to address these particular needs. *Teacher 3* expresses her concern about the lack of immediate assistance to newcomers that, in her opinion, is instrumental to their well-being. The degree of support provided to immigrant families and their child's academic success are interlinked:

*There are a lot of things I would like to see happen. But from what I see there are other issues like counselling upon arrival, or other forms of assistance they [the families] are not getting. And I think they play such a big role in academic success that even if they are given a premium school program they need help with all those other things especially for a certain group of students. There needs to be more partnership with other agencies on their general well-being - from mental health to nutrition.*

*Teacher 1* mirrors this sentiment and reveals that ESL teachers do not only teach, but that they also provide material help to families of second language learners. For example, this teacher offers donations:

*The families that are coming from refugee camps are really needy. They are trying to put things together and you know...teachers will bring in donations. We have always kind of in the past been that contact person between home and school.*

Newfoundland has all the characteristics of a small community where relationships are built on a personal basis. It is not surprising that the ESL teachers take an amicable approach towards their students that manifests as home visits and making donations for needy families. Obviously, the ability to be flexible in communication appoints an ESL teacher to the role of mediator between school and home. Generally, this perception of the ESL teachers is very common in the District.

Such a perception of ESL teachers could stem from the fact that smaller communities are more secluded and less subject to dealing with people from other cultures. Naturally then, ESL teachers as a group are perceived by a school community as more culturally competent and knowledgeable to be able to bridge the communication gap and act as facilitators of integration and acculturation for second language learners and their families. Truly, before the SWIS worker position was introduced, ESL teachers seemed overwhelmed with the scope of duties and responsibilities they held. Their additional, non-teaching responsibilities ranged from bringing in donations, delivering permission slips and organizing meetings with parents and translators. The following comment from *Teacher 1* epitomizes how concerned parties are encouraged to share responsibilities to accommodate immigrants and contribute their joint efforts to help second language learners to overcome challenges the new culture and environment may present:

*All the responsibility for a child was put on us, but the child is in your school, so it's the principle's responsibility, it's a guidance counsellor's responsibility, it's a classroom teacher's responsibility, it's an ESL teacher's responsibility. Anyone who has contact with that child has a responsibility to help him or her.*

Some of the ESL teachers believe through acting as a bridge between school and parents they may ease parents' access to the mainstream community, thus strategically equalizing opportunities for ESL learners. Although the teachers did not articulate the fact that some ESL parents are completely unable to meet the school requirements at the beginning of their settlement, they demonstrate their concern and commitment to helping families with integration by establishing personal contact through home visits.

Power (1999) states, "While home visits are time-consuming, in homes where English is the second language, a visit can provide more information than any other experience" (Power, 1999, as cited in Freeman, 2001).

The teachers believe home visits provide a lot of advantages for school, parents and learners. As *Teacher 1* asserts, home visits can remove the barrier of the unknown that a Canadian school might constitute for parents of second language learners; thus helping to overcome possible awkwardness in communication:

*I think I have that connection because the parents and the families feel more comfortable with you because you have been in their home, sat and had tea with them. It makes them feel they have that other person that they can trust when they go in the school. The classroom teachers change, but the ESL teacher remains constant.*

Indeed, four of the ESL teachers interviewed for this study continue to maintain informal contact with families they have visited. Most of the teachers believe getting to know the internal workings and dynamics of each student's family, affords them an opportunity to discover, as Freeman and Freeman (2001) call it, "a new consciousness and a new way of looking" at the world (p. 264). They agree informal meetings with parents have positive impacts on the families as well. Parents discover that the teachers care, respect and value their families and that they do their best to educate their children. All the interviewed ESL teachers exhibit genuine interest and concerns about the families and each individual student. For example, *Teacher 1* maintains that an ESL job goes beyond just language teaching: "I will stop by if they have a new baby and bring a present or if I need to bring some clothing to the house. I will stop for that."

*Teacher 2* commented that her initial informal home visits have grown into more personal, friendly relations that are based on common interests: "I still do have contact with parents for various reasons. Not just for a problem, but sometimes they have kids of the same age as your kids."

However, another ESL teacher has a different opinion on the extent of her involvement in a learner's life. *Teacher 5* asserts she is not in a position to assume responsibility for facilitating student's learning outside the classroom, explaining that

there are possible legal implications related to maintaining close contact with a child and parents:

*My friends, who are not employed in the education field, volunteer and help the children with their homework in their homes. I wouldn't do it myself, because there are many legal issues with that. You have to be very careful if you are a teacher, like [with] taking children in your car.*

The teachers try to find ways to assist with the needs of ESL students and their families. **Teacher 3** asserts that a small community affords even more opportunities for a teacher to learn about a family from different perspectives, saying that teachers establish "personal connections" with families.

The teachers' opinions about the extent of their involvement with students' families are different. Some teachers (**Teachers 1 and 2**) believe home visits create a comfortable and trusting environment for parents. They see that personal contact and a mutual creation of the meaning of schooling between parents and teachers allow for a better understanding of a core social milieu of a child. In turn, they assert, parents feel informed and engaged in the academic life of their child. Alternatively, **Teacher 5** rejects such extensive involvement on the grounds that too close communication with students may result in legal issues. Regardless of their beliefs and even if they do not visit themselves, the teachers provide academic assistance in students' homes and attend to families' needs through arranging volunteers. In this way, the teachers facilitate the parental monitoring of an ESL students' academic progress.

By demonstrating an interest and understanding towards immigrant families, the ESL teachers increase the level of acceptance, inclusion and sense of belonging of the parents. This inclusion increases the likelihood of parental engagement in the learning experience of their child.

According to all ESL teachers included in this study, the family of ESL learners plays an instrumental role in a child's academic success and social integration into Canadian school culture. *Teacher 3* indicated that families in which the bond between a child and a parent is strong provides an environment that is beneficial for second language learner's academic and personal growth. All the ESL teachers agreed that establishing good relationships and knowing the family of a second language learner is crucial.

However, the ESL teachers also identified several issues regarding collaborating with parents of second language learners. The major concern they had was coined "parental non-participation" and is explained as a lack of language, uncertainty of a family's socioeconomic situation and lack of parental awareness of a school's expectations. These obstacles, according to the teachers, do not favour the establishment of collaborative communication between teachers and parents. To resolve the issue of communication, some teachers hold information sessions at school while others pursue more personal contact, choosing the informal atmosphere of the family home. It is through home visits that some ESL teachers find common language with families, reach

mutual understanding of each other's cultural differences and gain deeper insight into a student's life outside school. Likewise, through home visits the teachers inform the parents about potentially unfamiliar school expectations. *Teacher 5* objects to home visits implying that there may be legal implications. However, this teacher arranges in-home assistance when it is needed through people who are not involved in school system. Two of the interviewed teachers (*Teachers 1 and 2*) have an approach that is far beyond formal relationship regarding establishing contact with families. They help needy families with donations. Each interviewed teacher deals with refugee families and admitted that these families have a lot of needs related to their settlement in Canada. Consequently, the teachers stand for a closer collaborative process with all the stakeholders in order to better assist newcomer and thus, allowing them to focus on their child's education. They are somewhat divided as to whether or not the ESL teacher him or herself is the best person to provide this support, though the majority do seem to perceive this close involvement with the families as an advantage in terms of how well they can serve the students.

### **6.3 Community Support for ESL Teachers and ESL Students**

The ESL teachers interviewed for this study shared their thoughts and beliefs about the role of the community in the adaptation of newcomers. They provided insight into how the Newfoundland community is reacting to immigrants and discussed the

problem of inclusiveness. Additionally, the interviewees revealed challenges in relation to the reluctance of immigrant communities to make connections outside their group. The teachers elaborated on possible repercussions of such behaviour. The discussion also focussed upon the community's influence on language learning and adaptation of newcomers in general.

As mentioned, **Teacher 5** stated that the Newfoundland local community is very small and the influx of immigrants to Newfoundland is quite low. It has been mentioned previously that the number of immigrants is gradually increasing every year (see page 7). Therefore, it is worthwhile to determine how this increase resonates in the local community.

**Teacher 4** asserted that small communities provide certain benefits for immigrants and, as a rule, are more open and engaging for outsiders. In turn, this openness offers better language learning opportunities for second language students. However, **Teacher 4** also pointed to possible exclusion and the need for people to work to make the community inclusive:

*In a smaller community they [immigrants] stand out more and if the community is not inclusive they will stay in that group and the learning is not accelerated. But if the community makes an effort to make international students come to our festivals, and people go out of their way to get them to come into the community it is far more effective for learning another language.*

One recent study on immigrants indicated that, even from an economic point of view, small communities are more beneficial for newcomers:

Refugees in Canadian small towns and rural areas represent only 5% of immigrants to Canada. Findings further show that refugees living in small urban areas, smaller cities, and rural areas tend to integrate well and more rapidly from an economic standpoint, regardless of their country of origin or official language competency (Bernard, 2008, p. 8).

According to **Teacher 5**, the community in St. John's - the capital of the province - is friendly to new people. The teacher adds that the community, similar to what the newcomers experience, undergoes transformations in values, notions and attitudes when a person from another culture arrives:

*I think the community is very accepting. My kids say they go to different centres and make friends. Immigration is coming on mainstream here, so I think there is a learning curve for our community, but I feel the community is addressing the issue and they are welcoming children in. And for a child to feel a sense of belonging is absolutely crucial.*

Similarly, **Teacher 3** agrees the community is hospitable towards immigrants and also affirms that hospitality plays an indispensable role in helping schools and families to reach the point where collaboration becomes possible:

*We depend a lot on the mainstream community for integration. Like the churches are really involved in getting students out in the camps and all kinds of different ways. The importance of the welcoming community is paramount. There are always ways to improve, but in terms of attitude,*

*in my opinion, Newfoundland has a fairly good attitude so far towards immigrants and immigration.*

**Teacher 4** elaborates on how the community's attitude towards immigrants may affect their language learning. She explains that an inclusive community allows for a more positive and healthy tone for community-student relationships, thus enhancing a more meaningful dialogue between these parties. At this level, communicating may foster recognition of the other's perspectives and create new, shared understanding of the meaning of communication in the present context:

*It's a pretty dynamic and complex relationship. I think students learn better if the community is receptive. If the community is inclusive and international students feel welcomed, there is a positive reinforcement for those students who want to acquire more language to make deeper connections.*

Furthermore, **Teacher 4** maintains that there is a danger of social isolation for immigrant families if they fail to establish relations within the community. The families that remain within their own cultural group and do not attempt to communicate with local people may miss out on many opportunities to be informed about and integrate into Canadian society (Helm & Warren, 1998, p. 5). **Teacher 4** explains that such secluded behaviour may be predetermined by a natural desire to belong to a group of like individuals, which is embedded as a survival instinct, even of animals:

*I think smaller groups flock together to form support groups for each other. It's a natural phenomenon even in animal*

*communities. If you want protection, what do you do? You come together. In a larger urban community smaller groups are more apt to move together and become more isolated and stay within that realm.*

A study on newcomers focusing on Canadian immigrant communities by Helm and Warren (1998) revealed findings that echo this idea. They stated:

*Immigrant communities tend to keep to themselves, and get all their news from the ethnic media. When language difficulties are combined with a desire to hold on to homeland traditions, an immigrant's cultural perceptions may remain exactly the same, year after year, as when they first arrived in Canada. Over time these views distance them more and more from the thinking of other Canadians, especially regarding issues such as sexual stereotypes, family violence, and women's role in the family (p. 6).*

Obviously, the ESL teachers do not commend such reclusive behaviour that may negatively affect language learning; rather, the ESL teachers advocate for mutually beneficial communication. They believe newcomers should also be accountable for their social integration and demonstrate a concern for becoming a part of the larger community. *Teacher 2* suggests families should take advantage of any chance to communicate with locals:

*More interaction with English speaking people would be better. I know some of the groups that we have here-immigrants. They get in their own little group and they are using a lot of their first language which doesn't help anybody.*

From this quote, it is clear that this teacher believes that immigrants who stay within their cultural micro groups place themselves at a disadvantage with regards to English language acquisition and adjustment into the social aspects of Newfoundland. However, the teacher's perception that it is harmful to use the first language seems very misguided. Numerous studies have found that a strong first language is crucial to academic progress. Additionally, choosing to belong to a particular cultural group, immigrants have an opportunity to improve their self-esteem. Following Tajfel and Turner (1978) developed a social identity theory that explains why people decide to belong to this or that social, economic or cultural group:

When people are assigned to a group, any group, they immediately, automatically, and almost reflexively think of that group, an in-group for them, as better than the alternative, an out-group for them, and do so basically because they are motivated to achieve and maintain a positive self-image (Brown, 1986, p. 544).

It is understandable that immigrants who find themselves in a foreign environment strive to preserve their identity (or their sense of self), which manifests itself in the keeping of family traditions and most importantly, speaking almost exclusively in their mother tongue. By associating themselves with people from their own culture and language, they may more easily establish positive self-image and thus settle more successfully in a foreign environment than individuals who do not become accepted as equal members of any social group. In other words, it can be assumed that the sense of

"belonging" *Teacher 5* was referring to is achieved much more easily in an ethnically congruent group. Therefore, it may seem misleading to think that "staying in their group does not help anybody," as *Teacher 2* stated, for in reality it may be beneficial for all involved. Also, the immigrants may not have much choice. The local community may not always be as welcoming as some of the teachers seem to think.

From the point of view of language acquisition, small communities provide more opportunities, according to *Teacher 5*. To this effect, she shared an example of the language experience of her students that reinforces her observations about the community in Newfoundland:

*I started working with a bunch of Kurdish men and they all stayed here. They settled in St. John's for about six years. But after six years they started to disperse to other cities just to get work. Newfoundlanders do the same thing. But many of them had come back and said: "My language is way ahead of my peers" who moved to Toronto, Vancouver or Calgary." I asked why. They said "Because they just stay in their groups and don't have any connection to the exterior community." So I think it is better in a small community than in a large one.*

Meanwhile, building on *Teacher 4's* observations regarding the advantages of a small community in Newfoundland, it can be inferred that immigrants may have an opportunity to accelerate their integration and settlement. However, the inclusiveness of the Newfoundland community may not go beyond accepting newcomers on the level of every day communication. A real problem occurs when immigrants try to establish social

and economical ties. At this point, immigrants are likely to encounter many roadblocks on the way to finding employment; this, in turn, can lead to feelings of marginalization and rejection. Consequently, the retention rate of immigrants in the province is quite low, as immigrants start looking for better employment opportunities in other provinces.

The provincial government has acknowledged this issue and launched initiatives with the view to expanding labour market integration programs for newcomers. This document declares:

The Government is committed to work with partners to ensure a 'welcoming' society for immigrants, which goes beyond being friendly or hospitable. It means welcoming immigrants into our communities, our workplaces, our homes, and our lives. This will involve awareness throughout the province of the contributions immigrants make and the value of a more diverse society (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007).

The strategy specifies once again that making the community aware of the benefits of having immigrants in the province may positively change the dynamics of the Newfoundland society and make it more attractive for immigration. Additionally, a more open society may dramatically facilitate integration of immigrants and help exclude some issues related to it.

All of the interviewed ESL teachers bestowed great importance on the community in helping a second language learner adapt to a new culture and to facilitate

the language learning process. The ESL teachers maintained that the Newfoundland community is welcoming and accepting and offers plenty of opportunities for a newcomer to socialize and integrate. However, the ESL teachers also indicated that the community is also undergoing a revision of its belief system: According to *Teacher 5*, "there is a learning curve for our community."

Alternately, the interviewees raised the issue of slowing down the integration process on the part of immigrants who are reluctant to engage with local people mostly due to language barriers. The ESL teachers suggested that such isolation is not beneficial for any party. Helm and Warren's (1998) findings support this belief; the researchers also disapproved of the social inertness of newcomers with relation to the mainstream community (p. 5). However, Helm's conclusions did not take into consideration the findings of Tajfel (1979) who explained this phenomenon from the point of view of social identity theory. According to this theory, immigrants maintain a positive self-image in a native tongue environment (as cited in Grey, 1988, p. 170).

The extent of parental involvement in schools depends on how they are accepted and engaged with the community. As well, the more actively the immigrant family moves towards integration, the better impact it will have on the academic progress of second language learners. Therefore, support in this process, both from within the school and elsewhere, will be crucial to the success of these ESL students.

#### 6.4 Integrative Processes between the Eastern School District Administration and ESL Teachers

Teaching ESL students is embedded into a broad social context. The main concern of current educational practice for ESL teachers is enhancing the students' learning and achievement by consolidating all the stakeholders involved in the student's success. As stated in the provincial immigration policy, "Diversity - Opportunity and Growth (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007): "The number of ESL students has been steadily increasing as has the number of schools where ESL programming is necessary. It is therefore incumbent upon many institutions to work together adequately to provide educational services to this clientele" (p. 15).

These integrative processes include not only the immediate environment of the ESL learner with which the child has direct contact, such as family, but also their community, their educators and the school administration. None of the stakeholders in an ESL student's education exist in isolation. They are interdependent, both influencing and being influenced by one another. ESL teachers have a broad range of informal responsibilities to make all the sections in this mechanism work. They admit that their profession presupposes a mediation role between all interdependent groups. *Teacher 1* maintains: "*Anyone who has contact with that child [an ESL student] has a responsibility to help him or her.*"

This section will discuss how ESL teachers perceive themselves in the role of mediators, what beliefs they hold on their role in the integrative process with school administration and the Department of Education and what challenges they face in establishing and maintaining these relationships. An analysis of the teachers' narratives will reveal how these collaborative practices impact the teachers' creation of shared meaning of teaching and what changes these interactions may bring for social and cultural processes and structures in a wider sphere.

The ESL teachers' biggest concern is their students and their academic achievement. Both of these groups find themselves in inconvenient learning and teaching conditions where neither one receives adequate support. For example, the teachers stated that their students do not receive enough ESL classes per week for what an intensive beginners' program should constitute. *Teacher 3* stated:

*In my opinion there needs to be a real push on the months of arrival, like the first few months after arrival where there is a lot of English instruction. I am talking mostly about elementary [ESL students], but it concerns all levels.*

The teacher talks about the importance of intensive ESL programming especially at the beginning of students' schooling in Canada. *Teacher 5* assumes that such inability to initiate a better ESL program may stem not only from the lack of financial support, but also from the taken-for-granted attitude that exists in administration towards ESL teaching. She relayed:

*I am not sure how well people at higher levels understand what it means to be an itinerant teacher; I am not sure they get what it means to teach a language in two hours in a seven-day cycle. I think everyone feels good when they say "We offer ESL." But when we get down to fine tuning, what are we really offering and how could we make it better? I think they would know the difference, but I think maybe it is financial. There needs to be a shift. There needs to be awareness first before the shift is going to occur.*

Through constant communication with each other, the teachers look for ways to better their teaching practices and improve ESL delivery. For example, **Teacher 5** talked about a newcomer's centre and even shared her ideas how it can be accomplished:

*Maybe we should have a school or two, one school in the East end and another one in the West end with the government paying for bussing upfront. The bus would pick up all the children in the East end and they would go to one particular school. It could be an existing school that has an empty classroom and those children would go there and do [an] intensive English immersion. The kids still could be integrated into regular classrooms for music, phys-ed, art, singing, maybe health. With this model, their language would improve much more than in two hours of ESL instruction in a seven-day cycle.*

**Teacher 3** echoed the same sentiment: "I think all the ESL teachers feel the same way about a newcomer's centre. I would prefer to see kids in the school that currently exists that has [an available] classroom."

There is no data on whether these discussions have resonated in the Department of Education, but they would definitely be useful in terms of ideas for improving ESL.

service in Newfoundland and thus, support the teachers' work. When teachers are able to take an active part in educational reform, it speaks volumes about the degree of advancement of democracy in education. The ESL teachers in the Eastern School District are seen as advocates for the learners when they collaborate with other professionals and they may be the most knowledgeable parties regarding changes that need to be made in the domain of ESL.

Following the federal immigration policy, the provincial government's immigration strategy, Diversity - "Opportunity and Growth" (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007) aims to establish a collaborative partnership "with all the interested stakeholders to increase and enhance programs and services." This strategy acknowledges the need for program planning and delivery of ESL for the K-12 population and specifies ways of attaining set goals. To that point, it recommends: "Hire an ESL Program Development Specialist to review and revise curriculum, to identify suitable learning resources, to provide teacher professional development and to coordinate all other provincial activities related to ESL" (Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007, p. 16). The plans from the Strategy have been put into practice and in 2008 the Department of Education hired an ESL specialist to revisit ESL programming in the province. This has been another step forward

on the way to recognizing the importance of focussing professional educational resources in this fast-growing, demanding area of education.

The hiring of this ESL specialist has met the expectations of some ESL teachers for the new initiative. They see it as a step toward full recognition of the ESL teaching profession. In their interviews, the teachers enthusiastically shared the good news of the introduction of a number of permanent ESL positions in the Eastern School District; a fact that has made the teachers more confident and less stressed about annual job seeking.

The teachers expressed their readiness to further work toward collaboration with school administration and government. Yet, the teachers lamented that there are a lot of factors that still need to be considered. For example, *Teacher 1* felt perturbed that ESL teachers still lack many supportive resources for their classes and they are left without much choice but to spend their own money on the needed supplies:

*There are some books that are authorized resources for ESL. So schools can order these books for their students and the school get reimbursed. So, it was a part of the Department of Education. But the little miscellaneous stuff like that... I mean we get some money every year but we'd rather see it towards different books and we'll just pay for the crayons as we need those type of thing[s].*

She continued:

*I am sure any teacher spends a lot of money out of their pocket for their students. Maybe ESL teachers at the elementary level spend a little bit more because we are*

*itinerants. We have to go from school to school. The school doesn't provide all the things we need for the students.*

Regarding support from school administration, there are a variety of attitudes toward ESL that potentially limit the extent to which the ESL teachers feel at ease in their job. Some schools are supportive, while others seem to neglect the area of ESL. **Teacher 3**, who works in several different schools, explains this inconsistency in support:

*"Sometimes there is a lack of appreciation for what we do. But there are others who are very accommodating, very understanding. So, it depends on a [particular] person, [rather] than administration in general."*

**Teacher 2** explained that the differing attitudes towards ESL result from the personal beliefs of administrators in education: *"In many schools the support is excellent. It varies from place to place because people being human and being individual and having life and various things... I find it really good and I am in six schools."*

**Teacher 1** shared the same sentiments about the varied nature of personal attitudes resulting in the amount of support for ESL provided at schools:

*I think it's different from school to school. Some schools are fantastic and they don't have the resources because they don't have money, but they will give and do whatever they can. Some schools, they may have the resources but they just don't feel it's probably a priority for them. So they are not forthcoming with that [the money]. I think it's very individual. It varies from school to school. Some individuals are fantastic and others are not so cooperative.*

Present day ESL education in Newfoundland and Labrador will take time to develop and mature. For the required changes to occur in the established system of education, an understanding of the need for transformation is required with many decision makers. The design and implementation of this transformative agenda presupposes interplay of varied factors, from financial provisions to time-planning through coordination of corresponding resources. *Teacher 3* explains why conditions in today's schools do not yield an "ideal" teaching and learning setting for either ESL teachers or their students:

*In a realistic way, I don't have the right places to work in those schools. I work in a library in one school where sometimes, when I am there, there are two classes working at the computer. So I am trying to do class work there and they are chatting [about] what they are doing at the computer. And in another school, I work in a book closet or share a room with a special education teacher, but I do have my own table. But up until last week, I was working on a primary table sitting on primary chairs, which is hard on your knees. And then in another school, you never know if there is going to be a classroom for you. So, you know, room is a big issue.*

She continued, commenting on the lack of classrooms interfering with lesson planning:

*I have nowhere to store things and you end up breaking your back carrying around so much stuff and then you go to a school and they say: "Oh, I thought you would bring it today. I forgot to mention that."*

Yet, *Teacher 3* understands that school buildings were constructed even before ESL emerged as a phenomenon of school education emerged; therefore, the situation cannot be resolved instantaneously:

*I am not complaining. You have to look at it realistically. These schools were built years and years ago and we didn't have any immigrants nor was ESL ever considered. This is very new for the city. They can't build a bigger school because kids came from another country.*

As stated, each ESL teacher represented in this study was interviewed twice. During the second interview, the ESL teachers were more excited about anticipated changes in ESL and most of them admitted that they had felt an increase in support from administration since their first interview.

*Teacher 2* said:

*There has been more support from the administration lately. It's all changing. And there is an ESL person in the Department of Education since January. Things are definitely improving. She is making curriculum for these kids with gaps and getting books for us to order.*

While showing their discontent with the peripheral role of the ESL program in the province that is evidenced in cramped working space, lack of resources and misunderstanding from the part of some school administration, the teachers were optimistic over the fact that the ESL programming is being revised and improved.

The abovementioned challenges draw the teachers together and encourage their collaboration with the aim of improving their teaching practice. However, the interaction between the ESL teachers and administration has shifted from being a subordinate relationship where the ESL profession was auxiliary to being a more collaborative form of communication that manifested in the appointment of the ESL specialist at the Department of Education who became the voice for ESL teachers. This move led to some positive changes in ESL teacher status, as admitted by the interviewees: The government has secured six permanent ESL positions via contract hiring.

Regardless of the positive changes the interviewees articulated, some of the teachers were reluctant to share their thoughts in relation to administrative support, while others had positive experiences. From the teachers' interviews on building integrative processes with school administration, it can be concluded that this process requires attention and sustained support over the long-term.

#### **6.5 ESL Teachers and SWIS Workers – Establishing Collaboration**

In 2008, the workload of ESL teachers changed due to the newly created SWIS (Settlement Workers in Schools) program that deals specifically with immigrant families. The settlement workers are housed in the Association for New Canadians (ANC) building in St. John's. The ANC is the provincial organization that provides adaptation services for immigrants to Canada. The range of the SWIS workers' duties and responsibilities is

wide, but is aimed primarily at meeting the needs of immigrant families that vary from family to family. The workers' responsibility includes assisting families with their daily routines, shopping, translation at doctor's appointments and delivering permission slips to students' homes. Generally, the settlement worker program is designed to meet the needs of newcomers. *Teacher 2* discussed a SWIS worker's duties in this new position:

*Anything that is not academic-based should be handled by social workers. If the teachers have a permission slip, they contact a social worker and this person will arrange for a translator. And so, they have kind of taken on that role to alleviate some of our load.*

*Teacher 1* added that parents of second language learners had become very attached to the ESL teachers who offered the parents a needed "comfort zone." She explained that she maintains relationships with the families she assisted before the settlement worker program had been created:

*It has taken a while for parents to come to realize... like "ok, you don't need to come to us, you can go to this person now and they can do that." But they still have that comfort zone with us and I am not going to say: "Don't talk to me, go to the SWIS person." If I don't have anything to do, I don't mind doing that [helping the parents]. It's nice to see where they live and seeing a child in a classroom setting is different than seeing them in their home setting. And just get a better understanding of them and where they are coming from...and it all helps, I think. So, it's very important.*

However, **Teacher 5** expressed a different opinion about the social worker program, asserting that the issue of communication between school and home still remained unresolved:

*Dealing with the communication between home and the school is an issue. We have settlement workers and they play a role in that, although after a year of living here families are less of a priority than new families [are] for these workers. While I understand how busy settlement workers are, that is still a concern for me.*

**Teacher 2** echoed the same sentiment about this program, saying it lacks consistency and fails to run smoothly in some schools. She explained:

*[The] social worker program was working very well but it's not working so well at the moment. We have new people – it's a big turn over. Last year it was working really well. The fact is that the people we had last year, by the time the end of the year came they would be in it for a year and they knew all the children and their parents. But with new people they had to get to know these people so it's not working quite so well and can be frustrating sometimes because of some misunderstanding between two groups who have to figure out what their responsibilities are.*

**Teacher 2** believed that this frustration can be avoided if the teachers undertake the initiative to guide new settlement workers through the introduction period to the students and their families and become available at demand: “*The idea of having social workers is excellent and it is the responsibility of teachers to try to make it work.*” In other words,

the teacher talked about the importance to work collaboratively with settlement workers in order to achieve good results with this new initiative.

The settlement worker program was designed to establish and maintain communication between school and home, thus alleviating the non-academic workload of ESL teachers. However, it presents additional challenges for ESL teachers. Firstly, the teachers have to build relationships with families through the settlement workers who are intended to act as an immediate liaison between school and home and who, unfortunately, are not always aware of their responsibilities. The SWIS worker program is very new and is still being coordinated and adjusted to the needs of the main party concerned—the newcomers, which can explain the lack of clarity regarding roles. As *Teacher 2* indicated, a large turnover of social workers does not allow for the program to work effectively. In turn, parents at times are left confused as to who to address when a problem arises and, eventually, parents choose to approach people they trust, often ESL teachers. In this regard, ESL teachers are again viewed as rescuers of a broken chain of communication between school and home.

With the creation of the SWIS worker program in 2007, the workload of ESL teachers changed. This initiative, sponsored by the Government of Canada, was intended to provide support through the ANC to immigrant and refugees families who are adapting to their new life in Canada. The ESL teachers acknowledged this program as useful; however, they expressed concern about the problems of misunderstanding often

encountered in work with settlement workers. Two teachers asserted this program creates additional challenges for ESL teachers by failing to establish well-organized cooperation between these two groups.

### 6.6 Building Partnerships with Mainstream Teachers

This section illustrates ESL teachers' beliefs about collaboration with mainstream teachers and how they perceive their role in this regard. According to the ESL teachers, maintaining a consultative relationship with classroom teachers has many benefits for all concerned parties: second language learners, ESL teachers and classroom teachers alike. Collaboration between ESL and mainstream teachers contributes to a faster integration of a second language learner into the mainstream classroom. Day-to-day communication with classroom teachers facilitates the educational process for teachers and students alike. The interviewees demonstrate that ESL-mainstream teacher communication assumes two forms of negotiation: coordination around teaching-learning processes and negotiation of meaning about particular cultural phenomenon of ESL students that might be misunderstood by mainstream teachers.

*Teacher 1* and *Teacher 2* expressed strong beliefs about the necessity of collaboration with classroom teachers. *Teacher 1* views herself as a mediator between stakeholders, including classroom teachers: *"As an ESL teacher, I need to make sure there is a consultation between a classroom teacher, parents and a school administration. I am always in consultation with a classroom teacher."*

In a similar vein, *Teacher 3* suggested that collaboration engaged all the stakeholders in team work: *"When everybody gets to know each other for the same reason - the child - the collegial spirit solidifies."*

**Teacher 2** believed an ESL student would benefit more if the concerned parties sustained an informative dialogue on the learning progress of each ESL student:

*It's a must to communicate with a classroom teacher, because the students are with that person more than they are with you. So, I think a classroom teacher would know more about that child than I would. So I am trying to get as much information from him or her as possible.*

Indeed, mainstream teachers may have better knowledge about the ESL student's performance in subjects other than English language. Therefore, mainstream teachers may be a valuable resource for an ESL teacher regarding how to build ESL classes more effectively around the interests of a particular student. Alternatively, ESL teachers, through communicating with parents on more personal grounds through home visits, may possess better understanding of a child's learning behaviour determined by culture, family circumstances and educational background. Thus, by exchanging information, offering suggestions and expressing their points of view on each student with the aim of meeting the student's learning needs, teachers strive to improve the learning and teaching process.

It is important to understand that ESL teachers take upon themselves multiple duties that range from designing individual programming to maintaining contact with parents. **Teacher 5** found sustaining contact with all stakeholders challenging and even "overwhelming:"

*Getting together is very important. It's really hard though, because you are talking about 33 children and three or four*

*other stakeholders. It is a little overwhelming. But even a little bit of contact with everyone, initial contact and then follow-up contact, helps the situation and helps the child.*

Occasionally, communicating with mainstream teachers comes down to assisting them with teaching resources. *Teacher 1* implied that mainstream teachers are not prepared to work with second language learners and need assistance of ESL teachers. This is what

*Teacher 1* stated:

*I give mainstream teachers [teaching] materials, because classroom teachers are at a loss. They don't know what to do with these [ESL] students. The students can't work independently. They need a teacher.*

The interaction between classroom and ESL teachers is primarily aimed at accommodating the needs of an ESL student. It can take many forms, from discussing the progress of each student to negotiating a schedule around the priorities for an individual ESL learner's needs. *Teacher 1* said:

*I made an agreement with the teachers because I said to them before: "I can give you a schedule when I am coming to take them this time and this time." We then both kind of worked on an agreement then I said: "Whenever I am here I will come." If you want me to take them, if there is something special going on, we can leave them in a class.*

Some ESL teachers are flexible in scheduling their classes. For example, they come to school to assist second language learners in other subjects during mainstream

classes, if asked to do so by a mainstream teacher. This is what **Teacher 5** said in this regard:

*Sometimes, when I go to get a child from class the teacher will say: "would you sit today, we are doing this activity," and if I don't know the activity or I think the teacher needs me there with her for that period of time to help the ESL child along, I will sit there with the child while she is doing the activity and work with her. I have done that even for math lessons to provide that one-on-one guidance.*

The need for two-way communication is mutual. Firstly, ESL instructors may implicitly follow the progress of a second language learner through maintaining constant information sharing with the mainstream teacher. Secondly, the ESL teachers assist classroom teachers with workload organization for ESL children, consulting on adequate teaching materials; interpreting some uncommon behaviour of second language learners that they may find confusing or different and coordinating their work around finding and implementing best practices and teaching strategies for individual ESL learners.

Classroom teachers who have not experienced cultural diversity in their classrooms may find it challenging to accept behaviour that does not fit into a standard of personal and social conduct in Canadian schools. In the research dedicated to the issue of enhancing achievement of language minority students, Garcia, Wilkinson and Ortiz (1995) explain the importance of underscoring that behaviours are governed by cultural norms, values, beliefs and practices. Consequently children from culturally diverse

groups or backgrounds tend to have noticeable behaviours that, similar to physical and linguistic differences, quickly differentiate them from children of the dominant culture. Misunderstandings stemming from classroom teachers' possible cultural myopia may impede communication between classroom teachers and second language learners. Thus, ESL teachers who, due to their experience in multicultural settings, recognize and accept the diversity of social and personal behaviours of second language learners usually mediate these perplexities in communication. For example, **Teacher 5** demonstrated how she helped a mainstream teacher to identify the reasons for a particular student's behaviour in a non-judgmental way:

*There is probably some misunderstanding; like I tried to explain to classroom teachers when the kid in grade 6 didn't come to school for several days that he didn't go to school for three years. That in Canada you have to go to school, but for this child it's like having to go fishing. You might do it occasionally, but you don't put the same priority, the same value. You have to understand where this child comes from. He lived in a refugee camp, he didn't go to school. So you have to put your mind in that child's body. And the parents lived the same life.*

However, ESL **Teacher 3** argued that in the school she works in, mainstream teachers have gained considerable experience with ESL learners over the years and have developed a cultural sensitivity that helps them find a common way of speaking with ESL students and, possibly, to dialogue with ESL teachers on common grounds of multicultural awareness: "Some teachers have lots of experience with ESL students or

*students from other countries. They have that sort of welcoming attitude, when they start from the fundamental belief that basically they are the same."*

Through dialogue, the teachers negotiate new meanings of a particular cultural phenomenon and develop new understanding of their role as teachers. *Teacher 3* believed that through demonstrating genuine interest for each student and committing to their unique role in each student's life, the teachers improve on their teaching practices:

*I see good teaching practice all around me. In this school, for example, I would say most of the teachers are truly exceptional, because they are committed, well-educated, interested. They are all mainstream teachers but we are all doing the same thing.*

This quote shows that *Teacher 3* is engaged in productive collaboration with mainstream teachers. She implies that this possibility becomes real only when both parties adhere to similar educational goals and display enthusiasm for setting up ESL learners for success.

In summation, all ESL teachers emphasized the importance of cooperation with mainstream teachers. They asserted that this form of collaboration has positive repercussions on a second language learner and consolidates the spirit of collegiality of all concerned parties.

According to the ESL teachers, both ESL and mainstream educators adhere to the same teaching goals concerning second language learners: facilitating integration of these students into a mainstream class. While a couple of teachers maintained that mainstream

teachers in their school are not adequately prepared to work with ESL learners, *Teacher 3* says mainstream teachers in her school are "exceptional" in this regard.

Generally, collaboration between ESL and mainstream teachers is premised on sharing information about their observations and knowledge regarding particular skills, as well as family and educational background of an ESL student. As a result of consultation with classroom teachers, ESL specialists provide language support and facilitate assimilation of second language learners within mainstream classes. However, ESL educator *Teacher 5* found such an expanded role "overwhelming," despite admitting that consultation with main stakeholders is important in identifying and meeting the needs of an ESL learner.

### 6.7 Collaboration of ESL Teachers

The ESL teachers' accounts demonstrate that integrative collaborative processes are premised on seeking support from their colleagues, sharing of ideas and beliefs about teaching in the present context and, as a result, shaping their identity as a group.

According to the interviewees, the need for teamwork stems from the common goals that relate to meeting the needs of ESL learners. Moreover, similar working conditions create an additional reason for drawing the teachers together.

Through cooperative teamwork, the teachers appreciate their uniqueness as an ESL teacher-group. Their professional insights on collaboration have emerged from

observations of in-class practices of others and open discourses with their colleagues. The present context of their teaching requires joint efforts of ESL professionals and affords plenty of opportunities for collaboration and networking. For example, the teachers reported the need to work together on programming, resource sharing and, most importantly, feeling part of their professional community.

The teachers valued all aspects of collaboration, which they see as an inherent part of their profession. Hence, they hold shared ideas, insights and beliefs about their identity. **Teacher 4** explained that exposure to culturally diverse social contexts reshapes a teacher's identity to the extent that they become accepting of differing worldviews:

*You have to have a broad mind and you can't be culturally insular. And I don't think you can get that if you just stay here [in Newfoundland and Labrador] your whole life. You've got to travel. We are a pretty homogeneous culture here. Almost everyone I meet in ESL has travelled. They are similar type of people and they really connect quickly and easily.*

**Teacher 1** claimed that the ESL profession has specific issues, one of which relates to working conditions. ESL teachers as a group stand out from other educators because they all face similar challenges that are distinct from what mainstream teachers experience in their teaching. Therefore, common professional requirements, which are characteristic of the ESL teachers in the District, point to the need for a strong, supportive group that holds a solid spirit of collegiality:

*With other ESL teachers we've always had a good relationship. We always share, we are a different group and we only have each other. We are so different than classroom teachers. We are trying to stick together and help each other as much as we can.*

ESL teachers tackle the same issues such as curriculum, work conditions, contract renewal and others that draw them together for support. As such, work symbiosis is essential in the pursuit of improvement of their teaching. As a group, through sharing their perspectives and negotiating new knowledge of teaching they are empowered to forward the policy and practice of ESL education and thus, reconstruct the social values of their profession. Despite time constraints and demanding classes, they are committed to each meeting others' needs through collaboration. *Teacher 1* alludes to the emotional aspect of their relationship:

*I think that as a group, ESL teachers, we are very dependent on each other for that support. Because I don't think that unless you are an ESL teacher, you would necessarily understand the ins and outs. I do really think you have to understand the job. That's why we are all kind of flock together. We are the only ones who would really understand each other. So, it's nice to have that kind of support.*

Collaboration presupposes mutual sharing of ideas, learning and thus, construction and reconstruction of knowledge about different social phenomena. Learning becomes an

integral part in this collaborative dialogue as *Teacher 2* asserted: *"I learn from other teachers. We have time once a week when we share ideas and things. So you are learning all the time."*

Actively participating in this dialogue, as *Teacher 2* mentioned, allows for a valuable reflective practice as well as for professional development and growth. In this sense it can be an informal talk after classes that serve as a ground for negotiating a sense of teaching in the present schooling context. Critical reflection on their daily teaching, such as curriculum discussions, challenges of pull-out instruction, building contact with parents, limited resources support, working with students with "learning gaps" and more lead to the creation of mutual understanding of a particular teaching or cultural phenomena.

During the interviews the teachers used the pronoun "we" when referring to all of the ESL teachers, which again demonstrates their collegial spirit. *Teacher 2*: *"I think that as ESL teachers we do everything we can with what we have for the students."*

The Newfoundland ESL teacher community is relatively small: there are only 7 teachers currently allocated to the Eastern school district and 2 teachers allocated to the Western School district (personal correspondence from Elizabeth Noseworthy, Department of Education, from July 6, 2009 - see Appendix). Considering that all teachers are faced with comparatively similar challenges along the road of facilitating and teaching ESL, their small number makes the team effort even more valuable for learners.

From the interviews, one can conclude that the experience of the ESL teachers in the present schooling context is unique. The small group of ESL teachers in the Eastern School District grapple with similar challenges on a daily basis, which draws them closer to each other for support. It would seem impossible for an ESL teacher in the District to work autonomously and independently from this group due to the lack of resources. As *Teacher 2* mentioned, ESL teachers "flock together" out of necessity. Otherwise the challenges may be insurmountable.

Apart from expressing the need for each other's support, the teachers also embrace a recursive process directed at attaining common goals such as sharing, knowledge and learning. They claim that they stand out as a group based on the specific nature of their profession, saying that it would be difficult for an outsider, or non-ESL teacher to understand them.

The ESL teachers agreed that their collaboration is grounded on reciprocal support and sharing of knowledge and experience with the view to improving their teaching and best meeting the needs of their students.

### **6.8 Conclusion**

ESL programming has recently become a focus of attention in Newfoundland and Labrador due to the economic need of attracting and retaining more immigrants to the province. As a result, the ESL teachers' work is viewed as instrumental in the process of

the effective adaptation of newcomers. Their professional activity is engrained in the complex social context that requires the ESL teachers' attention.

Since ESL programming and the distribution of financial support largely depends on the decisions of school or school district administrations, the ESL teachers feel responsible for resolving this issue by making personal contributions such as materials and time to second language learners and their families.

The ESL teachers' narratives facilitated the identification of seven main groups (ESL students, their parents, ESL teachers, mainstream teachers, administration, SWIS workers, and the community) that directly or indirectly influence the success of the integration of second language learners and their families into the community in the province. Therefore, the ESL teachers believe building relationships with all the concerned parties, within the given context in the Eastern School District, is fundamental.

According to the ESL teachers, these interactions lie in various domains that interrelate. These domains embody challenges that define the tone and amount of communication needed to reach the final goal in this locale – to accommodate the needs of ESL learners. In this regard, the ESL teachers adopt multiple roles. For example, they become mediators between parents and school, and they become consultants and partners in three areas: first with mainstream teachers, administrators and special education teachers ; second, with other ESL teachers and SWIS workers, and; third, with second language learners and their families.. All of these domains require special approach and

consideration as the parties carry various responsibilities in relation to the second language learner.

The ESL teachers provided evidence on the positive consequences of collaboration among and within the parties. For example, they indicated that interest on the part of parents as well as understanding and commitment from mainstream teachers or a welcoming community enhance a second language learner's opportunity of academic success.

Generally, collaboration among the groups is premised on spreading awareness about issues and possible challenges of second language learners related to their integration into mainstream classes with the view to attending more effectively to the learners' needs. Without collaboration, the ESL component of the Eastern School District would not be possible.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

Conducting a literature review at the beginning of this journey helped me uncover the most interesting areas of ESL that were taken into consideration while the questions of inquiry for the ESL teachers were framed. Through using elements of grounded theory research, I attempted to identify the strands of inquiry interwoven through the body of the thesis. The strands originated from teachers' accounts on how they came to this profession (motivation) and gradually developed to their external relationships within ESL (curriculum, collaborations).

The qualitative approach applied in this study was intended to inform a better understanding of the professional experiences of the ESL teachers in the Eastern School District, taking into account the context of their teaching.

#### **7.2 Findings**

The ESL teachers' accounts revealed multiple challenges that are intricately entwined with the local context of immigration in the province. The teachers are motivated and feel positive to work towards improvement of ESL. However, they agreed that while ESL is in the process of development, there are still areas that require professional attention from stakeholders.

The overriding concern of the ESL teachers was limited time allocated for ESL instruction and the many responsibilities involved in the work of the teachers. The lack of instruction time negatively affected how ESL students progressed; this was especially detrimental for students with learning gaps. As a result of instructional time constraints, the teachers grouped as many ELLs as possible during their pull-out instruction, regardless of their language proficiency or grade level. Consequently, the teachers reported an inability to consistently follow the students' progress and adequately assess them.

The teachers also acknowledged the challenge of adequately addressing the needs of the students with learning gaps who have experienced war trauma or lived in other extraordinary circumstances in their home countries. However, the ESL educators believed their preparation was sufficient for working with ELLs in the present context. They indicated that it was important to have academic preparation in ESL although some of them emphasised practice and experience as the most valuable training. All in all, most teachers said that they needed a balance between theory and practice. Interestingly, the teachers who came to the profession before receiving training were more inclined towards experiential learning; whereas the teachers who had academic training before their practical training valued education more. In the literature, the issue of the relationship between practice and theory is the subject of an ongoing debate. There is a tendency to

believe that ESL teachers should try teaching first so that they can confirm or disprove their calling.

In addition to time constraints, the teachers lamented the lack of an ESL curriculum. They explained that curriculum guidelines would standardize the requirements for each grade level and thus facilitate their work – the teachers reported spending more time on preparation than usual and viewed curriculum as an organizational tool. However, taking into consideration that the number of ELLs fluctuates each year, some teachers disagreed with having to follow fixed curriculum guidelines. To effectively manage work with linguistically diverse students, the teachers suggested having flexible curriculum instead, which would allow them to adapt it to the changing needs of ELLs. Similar concern was expressed about the lack of standardized assessment tools, which would allow the teachers objectively to identify the level of language proficiency. The teachers agreed that the availability of these resources could dramatically facilitate their work. In this regard, the teachers asserted that their ELLs play the active role in shaping ESL programming.

Another challenge that the teachers noted was the lack of adequate working conditions. The teachers reported teaching ELLs during other lessons, not having a desk where they could store their materials, or having to sit for hours at low desks. These findings about the inadequate working conditions add to the discussion on ESL teacher professionalism, suggesting that these factors may hinder the quality of teaching, which,

in turn, hinders the professionalization process (Breshears, 2004, p. 25-27). Moreover, most ESL jobs in the district are contractual, which means the ESL teachers have to renew their contract or look for another position every school year. However, the teachers stated that presently they have more job security than before - the Department of Education has introduced two full-term ESL positions. Overall, the unsteady hiring situation for most of the ESL teachers is still present and it adds to the list of challenges of working as an ESL instructor. The literature claims that scarce resources, poor working conditions and absence of permanent ESL positions for all teachers are indicative of the ESL teachers' marginal role among other teachers (Auerbach, 1991; Courtney, 2009).

The ESL teachers acknowledged the shortcomings of their present circumstances but view them as temporary (such as the lack of curriculum, time, and inadequate working conditions) and compensate for these issues by working collaboratively with each other and with all involved parties. The teachers provided evidence of the effectiveness of joint efforts in adequately addressing the needs of ELLs and dealing with various issues. The findings showed that their collaboration is unique in the way that it is premised on a personal approach towards each member of the school community being involved in the process of helping the ELLs adapt. As a small group, the ESL teachers provide each other with support, work with mainstream teachers and school administration, establish communication with SWIS workers and build relationships with the students' families. The teachers implied that the primary reason for collaboration was

to improve the students' learning and to maintain and develop their professional knowledge. The literature suggests multiple conceptual frameworks for identifying the teacher community as a community of practice, for example, applying notions of community from literature in sociology, social work and anthropology to the unique school context (Grossman, Wineburg and Woolworth, 2000, pp 13-14). The ESL teachers from this study displayed commitment, personal engagement and individual responsibility in how they cooperate with others. However, there is no evidence as to how the teachers forge the bonds of community, struggle to maintain them, work through inevitable conflicts of social relationships and form structures to sustain relationships over time (Grossman *et al.* 2000) Therefore, further research is needed to investigate these dimensions of ESL teachers' work as a group.

### **7.3 Recommendations**

As stated at the beginning of this study, at the time of the study the ESL teachers in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador had not been given an opportunity to talk about the challenges or the support they need to ensure that every child whose mother tongue is not English can successfully integrate into their grade level and adapt to the Canadian lifestyle. Policy makers at the municipal, regional and provincial levels can use this information to strengthen and improve the ESL services as well as support the

initiatives and work of the ESL teachers. Based on the research findings, the following changes are recommended:

**1) ESL teacher education**

- a) Provisions can be made specifically within the ESL teacher preparation program at Memorial University of Newfoundland to better prepare prospective teachers to deal with issues of diversity. The university should provide all pre-service teachers with an opportunity to gain the experience that is fundamental for working in a culturally diverse environment. There should also be prescribed course content dealing with issues of adequate teacher preparation to work with children with learning gaps and effective communication with the immigrant community. The provincial Department of Education could also regularly organize professional development sessions for ESL teachers that respond to the range of cultural and educational challenges of ELLs, especially ELLs with learning gaps.

**2) Improved working conditions for ESL teachers**

It is incumbent upon the Department of Education, District and school administrations to make efforts to address the needs of and improve the working conditions of ESL educators through the allocation of specially designed ESL classes and the provision of the necessary teaching materials and resources. This can be done through the following steps:

**a) *Develop a clearinghouse of existing materials and resources to aid ESL teachers.***

The Department of Education, TESL Newfoundland and Labrador, ESL teachers and other interested parties could collaboratively organize a clearinghouse that is administered through school districts or other central offices. This clearinghouse should gather curricula materials, assessment tools, research and materials for professional development. Within this initiative, ESL teachers may establish a centralized data system where they can search the required materials, seek professional advice from their colleagues, or exchange thoughts and ideas.

**b) *Develop a program resource evaluation package.***

The Department of Education should develop and make available to the District's schools a package of evaluation tools to evaluate the quality of local programs for ELLs and identify areas for improvement. The package should focus on the use of resources that the ESL teachers indicated they needed most:

- a) More time to teach students
- b) More time for collaboration with colleagues
- c) ESL development materials
- d) Adequate working conditions
- e) Additional preparation to work with ESL students with learning gaps.

The Department of Education and other administrative bodies responsible for ESL programming should identify provincial or local support resources that schools can use to make any needed ESL program improvements.

*c) ESL curriculum development.*

This study has shown that current ESL teachers did not have general ESL curriculum guidelines and, instead, that they used mainstream curriculum as a tool to design ESL programs. During the interview phase of this research, an ESL specialist from the Department of Education was administering the collaborative work of educational specialists to create ESL curriculum guidelines that were recently made available to the teachers. The introduction of new ESL curriculum guidelines may become an interesting area of further research to examine how ESL teachers work with new curriculum.

**3) Develop and begin to implement a rigorous research agenda.**

Continued research in ESL should be commissioned and supported. There is still much to learn that is of critical importance to the success of ESL education. It would be especially helpful to have further investigation in those areas that raised the ESL teachers' concern, such as ESL teacher professionalism, issues of professionalization, ESL teacher assistance, newcomers' school, ESL teachers as a community of practice and other topics that the research revealed. A bigger sample of participants over an extended period of time would enable a more

thorough examination of these topics. All in all, ESL education in the province presents an array of areas that need to be examined and issues that need to be uncovered.

The issues mentioned in this study may require the joint attention of policy makers and implementers as well as other interested stakeholders to develop and maintain organizational infrastructures in the domain of ESL. Providing the teachers with the necessary resources will allow for educational inquiry and research, thus enhancing teachers' commitment and improving ESL teaching overall.

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### Appendix A

#### Appendix A Letter from Mary Devereaux

Olga:

The Dept. of Education website ([www.gov.nl.ca](http://www.gov.nl.ca)) - Go to the Links for Dept. of Education-Teacher Certification) would have the documents on certifying teachers generally. With respect to specific qualifications for various unionized teaching positions, there are no written documents that I am aware of in terms of the requirements for employing ESL teachers. We do have a policy which speaks to current modern standards. I am copying this email to my colleague in Human Resources so that he can add any additional information on this issue for your review.

Good luck!

---

Mary S. Devereaux, M.Sc., R.Psych  
Senior Education Officer-Student Support Services  
Suite 601, Atlantic Place I St. John's NL A1C 6C9 I  
TEL: 709.758.2391 FAX: 709.758.2706

"Be the change you want to see"

Olga Viltchek <[ylviltchek@gmail.com](mailto:ylviltchek@gmail.com)> on Friday, March 20, 2009 at 2:31 PM  
<0330 wrote:

>Mary,

> Thank you for your reply. Are there any official requirements you could

>refer me to? I would need to use this reference for my thesis.

> Thank you

> Olga

>

>

>On Fri, Mar 20, 2009 at 1:59 PM, Mary Devereaux <

>mailto:

|

> wrote:

>

>

>Olga:

>

- >ESL teachers have to have a NL Teacher's Certificate (Primary/Elem.,  
>Intermediate or Secondary). In addition, ESL teachers would have either a  
>graduate degree, undergraduate degree or a certificate/diploma in the area  
>in order to be employed in the ESD.

>

>

- 
- >Mary S. Devereaux, M.Sc., R.Psych
  - >Senior Education Officer-Student Support Services
  - >Suite 601, Atlantic Place 1 St. John's NL A1C 6C9 1
  - >TEL: [709.758.2391](tel:709.758.2391) FAX: [709.758.2706](tel:709.758.2706)

Appendix B

Letter from Betty Morgan

Re: Fwd: Re: Re:

Inbox.X

Reply|

Betty Morgan to Gillian, [meshom\\_details](#) 5/17/10

Gillian/Olga:

The breakdown of ESL students currently enrolled with the Eastern School District is:

137 Elementary

37 Intermediate

63 High School

Apologize for the delay in getting back to you re this information.

Cheers,

From the desk of ...

Confidential Secretary to Mary Devereaux & Susan Murray

Programs Division, Eastern School District

Phone: [709-757-4660](tel:709-757-4660)

Fax: [709-757-4699](tel:709-757-4699)

[bettsmorgan@esdnl.ca](mailto:bettsmorgan@esdnl.ca)

"They can because they think they can." (Virgil)

>Gillian Blackmore B.A., B.Ed. M.Ed.

>Program Specialist - French Programs/ESL

>[4.709.757.4625](tel:4.709.757.4625)

>C.709.758.2706  
>Eastern School District  
>PO Box 64-66, 215 Water Street  
>St. John's, NL A1C 6C9  
>[gillianblackmore@esdnf.ca](mailto:gillianblackmore@esdnf.ca)  
>  
>----- Original Message -----  
>

**Appendix C**

Reply|  
O'Neill, [show details](#)  
Sheldon to me 6/12/09

Hi Olga,

Nice to hear from you. All is well here, but I am still waiting for summer to arrive J.

With respect to numbers of immigrants who have arrived in the province, Newfoundland and Labrador is committed to receiving 155 Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) every year as per the Government of Canada's agreement with the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

The number of immigrants through the Provincial Nominee Program however, varies each year. In 2006 there were 512 permanent residents to Newfoundland and Labrador, in 2007 there were 550, and in 2008 there were 623 (which is a 13.3% increase).

With respect to those immigrants who avail of the mainstream federal immigration system, unfortunately with the lack of an information sharing agreement, we do not have access to that information.

I hope this information is what you are looking for. I would also like to read your thesis, with your permission of course, as I am the Consultant responsible for the ESL file in the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism. I can always use additional information and resources. If you have any further questions, or need further clarification please do not hesitate to contact me via email or telephone.

Create a Great Day,

**O'Neill**

*Settlement and Integration Consultant*  
Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism  
Human Resources, Labour and Employment

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador  
3rd floor, West Block Confederation Building  
[sheldonocill@gov.nl.ca](mailto:sheldonocill@gov.nl.ca)  
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#### Appendix D

##### **Informed consent for Research project participation: ESL teachers in the Eastern School District.**

I am a graduate student in the Department of Education at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. I would like to invite ESL teachers to participate in a research project about how ESL teachers in that district construct meaning in the context of increasing immigration to the province. I am interested in exploring the experience of ESL teachers and capture the major themes provided by the participants. The study may raise questions about some neglected areas in ESL training and/or support for ESL teachers, students and programs and integrate the knowledge and information from participants into a conceptual framework that could be employed in ESL curriculum development, policy making and professional development.

Your participation will include being interviewed once for 45 minutes to an hour. A second interview of the same length may be added if it seems necessary after the first interview.

If you don't wish to be identified, I will protect your privacy by using a pseudonym for your name and for the school you work in. I will give you a hard copy of the transcript of your interview so you will be able to make any changes you want. You have the right to withdraw from the study any time before I start editing my work. At that point, I will be in the final stages of the writing process and will not be able to remove quotations from the document.

This study will be shared with the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at Memorial University and other appropriate members of the Memorial University of Newfoundland. The thesis that results from this work will be published in hard copy and microfiche, which will be housed at the Queen Elizabeth's Library on campus.

I appreciate your giving time to this study, which will help me to learn more about the challenges and successes of being an ESL teacher in the Eastern School District. If you have any questions, please, feel free to call me at 749 25 25, E-mail: [viltchek@gmail.com](mailto:viltchek@gmail.com). You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth Yeoman at telephone: 709 737 34 11 and e-mail: [eyoman@mun.ca](mailto:eyoman@mun.ca).

The proposal for this research has been approved by the interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at Memorial University. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at [icehr@mun.ca](mailto:icehr@mun.ca) or by telephone at 709 737 83 68.

Thank you,

Olga Viltchek

Please sign below if you are willing to participate in the research project outlined below.

Signature

Print name

Date

**Appendix E****Questions for the semi-structured interview:**

1. How did you decide to become an ESL teacher?
2. What attracted you most to this area of teacher practice?
3. Describe how you got a job after university graduation?
4. How did you feel when you first entered ESL class?
5. How would you describe your first experience working with ESL students?
6. How many students did you teach?
7. How do you find common language with ESL learners? How challenging is it?
8. What language teaching strategies do you use in class?
9. How is your attention distributed among students during ESL class?
10. How is your work distributed among students?
11. How do you perceive your own role with regard to your contribution to language teaching?
12. How do you perceive the learner's role in the process of ESL?
13. What role does the community and parents play in children's second language learning?
14. Do you feel support from the school and community in facilitating your work?
15. Describe the programs and resources provided for your particular group of ESL students.

16. How do you work with the programs and resources?
17. Comment about the level of support you receive. Describe the benefits and challenges.
18. What training do you have? What kind of ongoing professional development is available and what do you feel you need?
19. Does your education and training you had satisfy the demands in your teacher practice?
20. Do ESL programs help to maintain, conserve and enhance multiculturalism, bilingualism and diversity in the society? If so, how?
21. Do you feel this is an important goal in this province? Why?
22. What kind of difference does your ESL teaching make?
23. Describe the ESL domains that are working well. What are the challenges? How can they be improved?





