

**From Stigma to Strength:
A Case of ESL Program Transformation in a Greater Vancouver High School**

Guofang Li
University of British Columbia

Abstract

The rapid increase of Asian immigrant students in Canadian classrooms demands more systematic and increased language support to ensure all English language learners (ELLs) achieve success in school. However, research has found mixed results on the usefulness of current English as a Second Language (ESL) support programs and a growing dissatisfaction among students and parents about ESL, suggesting further investigation is needed to improve the provision of ESL in the schools. This paper details how one school and one ESL teacher responded to the needs of newly arrived Asian (i.e., Chinese) ELL students by documenting the school's and teacher's journey in revamping the pull-out ESL program into a culturally responsive English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program with a focus on immersion, community engagement, and a pedagogy of cultural reciprocity. The case has important implications for redesigning current ESL programs in the context of changing immigration.

The Context: New Immigration Patterns and Old Challenges in Language Learning

Vancouver, the most “Asian city” outside Asia, has the second largest number of Chinese immigrants in Canada after Toronto. In fact, the number of Chinese immigrants to Vancouver grew by 63.9% from 2001 to 2011. In 2011, 30.7% of the Chinese immigrants in Canada resided in British Columbia; 95% of them lived in the Greater Vancouver Area (The Canadian Magazine of Immigration, 2016). In addition to a higher educational background, more new immigrants, particularly Mainland Chinese, also came with greater financial resources than previous waves of Chinese immigrants, with a growing number of entrepreneur, business, and investor-class immigrants. It must be noted that a number of these new well-off families are one-parent “astronaut families,” with one parent working outside Canada and one parent (often the mother, known as a peidu mom “陪读妈妈” or a mother who accompanies her child for studying abroad) residing in Canada to take care of their school-age children. Consequently, students from Chinese backgrounds continue to arrive at younger ages and in more significant numbers, presenting daily challenges to classroom teachers, many of whom have had limited teacher education or professional development in teaching English language learners (ELLs) (Webster & Valeo, 2011). These students, often classified as ELLs or English as a second language (ESL) learners, are now the majority (over 50%) at more than 65 of 550 elementary and secondary schools across Metro Vancouver (Skelton, 2014). The rapid increase of ELLs, coupled with reduced government funding for ELLs in BC schools, has resulted in a crisis in ELL education (Wild, Helmer, Tanaka, & Dean, 2009).

Historically, Asian students in North America have been treated as homogenous and are stereotyped as a “model minority” who have little difficulty achieving academically at high levels (Li & Wang, 2008; Ma & Li, 2016). Their success is often attributed to the strict parenting enforced by their parents (often mothers) known as “tiger moms” who prefer an authoritarian

style of parenting and push for their children's academic excellence through intensive out of school educational enrichment programs and other extracurricular activities (Li & Wang, 2008). However, a body of studies on ELLs' achievement trajectories and social and academic integration in Canadian schools has revealed a persistent achievement gap between ELLs and their non-ELL counterparts, especially in reading and vocabulary measures (Garnett, 2010; Gunderson, 2007; Pavlov, 2015; Roessingh, 2008); and this gap continues to affect ELLs even when they enter higher education (Crossman, 2014; Roessingh & Douglas, 2011). Among Chinese students, contrary to the "model minority" image, over 60% of Chinese immigrant students are found to have failed to acquire competency in either English or their native language, thus failing to find cultural affirmation within the classroom, dropping out, or avoiding academic subject courses with critical language demands (Gunderson, 2007; Toohey & Derwing, 2008).

The Issue: ESL as a Stigma

In light of the achievement gaps identified above, researchers and educators have argued for more systematic and increased language support to ensure all ELLs achieve success in school. ESL support programs, known as ESL pull-out programs, typically take ELLs out from regular classroom instruction to receive individual or small group ESL instruction. However, reports are mixed about the content and quality of ESL pull-out programs in Canadian schools. While ELLs' academic English has been found to be their major challenge in studying the mandated academic subjects, and passing the large-scale high-stakes tests (provincial exams, literacy and numeracy assessments) for the graduation requirements, the majority of ESL pull-out programs focus on basic interpersonal and conversational skills (BICS) that are irrelevant to subject area courses (Cummins, 1981). As a result, as one student in Han and Cheng's (2011) study indicated, "ESL [classes] just focus on English ...[but] you [still] can't understand other courses" (p. 90). Many ESL teachers also reported feeling overwhelmed by the linguistic diversity in the classroom and did not know how to address different proficiency levels (Cooke, 2017).

These curricular and teacher factors have contributed to ELL students' and their parents' dissatisfaction with the ESL programs. In his study of immigrant students' achievement in British Columbian schools, Gunderson (2007) found that immigrant students in secondary schools were in ESL classes on average for 3.60 years. He also found that the ELL students' (as well as parents') perceptions of the usefulness of ESL support were split, with a large number of them having negative attitudes toward ESL pull-out programs, considering them as "roadblocks" to their gaining admission to university (Gunderson, 2007, p. 268). Other studies also reported widespread dissatisfaction with and resistance to pull-out ESL programs among Chinese parents, believing that the curricula are not effective in helping ELLs gain the cultural, linguistic, and academic competence needed to integrate into the school community (Deschambault, 2015; Guo & Maitra, 2017; Hittel, 2007), thus perpetuating ELLs' marginality in schools and hindering their English acquisition (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995). Consequently, many parents of ELLs expressed concerns about the negative connotations or stigma associated with the ELL/ESL label (e.g., not being smart or being a second class citizen) and wanted their children to exit ESL programs (sometimes called by parents as "low-level ghettos") as soon as possible even though they were unable to progress through regular English language classes without language support (Gunderson, 2007). Many parents, especially the Chinese parents of high socioeconomic status

(SES), relied heavily on academic enrichment programs as a way to get out of the ESL ghettos, creating tremendous stress and anxiety both among the children and the parents (Gundersen & D'Silva, 2016; Li, 2006).

It is evident that there exists “significant incongruence between ELLs’ unique linguistic, sociocultural needs and the apparent lack of systemic, coordinated ESL-service responses among Canadian schools” (Ngo, 2007, p. 4). Current research evidence suggests that there needs to be a culturally reciprocal perspective that includes both an understanding of ESL provisions in the school and parental expectations and perceptions to serve ELLs better. To date, studies on ESL programs and reports of innovative program redesign have been scarce. Only three publications can be located. Wyatt-Beynon, Ilieva, Toohey, and Laroque (2001) described a high school English co-op program that coupled ESL instruction with work experiences for ELLs who are primarily dependent on their first languages. Roessingh (2004, 2008) described the creation of an adjunct course that was linked to a high school English literature course in an urban high school in Alberta. These two programs, however, were constructed within the budgetary and policy constraints of urban schools and without including parental perspectives. Since school SES and parental perspective matter, it is essential to see how both school and parents can influence each other in shaping ESL provisions in different SES contexts.

This paper aims to address this gap by documenting a teacher’s (John, a pseudonym) journey in negotiating multiple stakeholders including school administration and a group of newly-arrived, high SES Chinese parents to revamp a stigmatized pull-out ESL program into a curriculum-based English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program with a focus on academic language, community engagement, and cultural reciprocity. The work described here was based on the author’s consulting work with the teacher and the school during 2016-2018 that entailed formal and informal conversations and discussions with the teacher and staff about the ESL program, workshops with parents of ELLs, and classroom observations. John had an MEd in English Language Arts (ELA) and had been working for nearly 20 years as an ELA teacher in the greater Vancouver area. At the time of the program revision, he was studying for his Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) diploma at a local university.

The Journey: Redesigning the ESL Program

The Old ESL Pull-out Program and Its Stigma

Schools in the greater Vancouver area have seen an increase in the number of Asian, particularly Chinese, students. The abundance of private schools and highly ranked public schools in the area add to the appeal to new Chinese immigrants who place a high value on education. As a result, the number of ELL students whose first language is not English is on the rise in many local schools including the Pacific West School (pseudonym) featured in this paper. Like many other schools in the area, in Pacific West School, there has been a growing pool of Asian (i.e., Mandarin-speaking) students attending the school, and their academic achievements tended to follow a similar pattern: they excelled in the areas of math and science, could pass social studies and history courses where assessments were based more on content than on the quality of the writing, but had low scores in ELA classes where assessments were based on high proficiency in both oral and written academic English.

Recognizing that these students had high academic potential but were experiencing academic language challenges, Pacific West School began to work to meet the needs of this student demographic in recent years. The school initially followed the same principle as other schools by starting a pilot ESL pull-out program designed to support the language needs of those students who excelled in math and science but were below grade level in their academic English. Each day, ELLs were pulled out of mainstream content area classes (ELA, Social Studies, Science, and French) for four periods to receive sheltered instruction in small classes with an ELL specialist teacher. The only mainstream classes these students attended with their English speaking peers were physical education, electives, and math. Students remained together as an ESL cohort and their homeroom was located in the basement of their building, which further separated them from the larger school population.

While this was a step in the right direction, the organization of the program as a pull-out ESL program created some challenges, and the academic and cultural gaps that started to appear required the school to reassess how it was meeting the needs of this select group of students. Because such a significant portion of their classroom time was spent separated from the mainstream English speaking population, as a cohort, these students were not using English beyond their ESL class. Since they did not integrate well with English speaking students, they were reluctant to participate in other school activities. Consequently, the students regularly reverted to their mother tongue—something the school soon realized was defeating its intention for language learning through English immersion. Interestingly, their isolation gave them a sense of power supported by their language and culture: they spoke their mother tongue in all of their classes despite teachers asking them to speak English, they sat together in mainstream classes, and worked together during group work activities (speaking their mother tongue rather than English to negotiate assignments). While such empowerment is what all teachers want students to feel, especially as it relates to their mother tongue and culture, this situation was not helpful in developing their academic language in English or “Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency” (CALP) (Cummins, 1981), something essential to their success during and beyond high school.

Additionally, their parents were found also to be isolated from other parents, with them only interacting with other Chinese parents. Aware that their children were isolated in the school, it was not surprising that parents of these students did not want their children to stay in the program. Like the other Asian parents reviewed in the other studies in the earlier section of this paper, they wanted their children to get out of the ESL program as soon as possible. For their children to catch up with mainstream students and make progress in their core academic subjects, these parents chose to enroll their children in intensive after-school enrichment programs: known in the community as “after-school-school.” While they intended to support their child’s academic progress, these enrichment programs often added extra stress to the students because they did not focus on the core curriculum and, instead, forced students to follow an alternate curriculum that asked them to read literature and learn content far above their ability and grade level. These programs were also incredibly expensive, and, more problematically, they falsely guaranteed student success in Canadian high schools and beyond. These programs also levied a heavy workload on their students, causing children to divert their focus away from their classroom studies to complete the readings and homework for their “after-school-school” programs. Pacific West teachers were able to quickly identify that these extra classes were causing the Chinese students to come to school tired and unable to focus on their school studies. The homework from

those programs then led to unnecessary stress and anxiety not only for the students and their parents, but also their teachers. Due to the disconnection of these tutoring classes from the core curriculum in school, students were busy but were not making satisfactory progress. On the contrary, because they were in so many these “after-school-school” enrichment classes, they were unable to focus on their school work. Similar to the Chinese parents in Li’s (2006) study, these parents were increasingly dissatisfied with the program in the school. In the end, many students left the school with only a few staying on until graduation.

It was clear to John and the school staff that these students, along with their parents, were not integrating into the school community. Realizing that the program was not working as they had hoped, John and the school administrators took time to re-envision whether or not the traditional model of ESL pull-out worked. At the time, the previous ELL specialist teacher left and John began the TESL Diploma program at a local university and was learning about culturally responsive teaching practices and content-based language teaching models. He saw the immediate relevance of his professional learning to the issues the school’s ESL pull-out program confronted, and he shared with the school administrators and staff his ideas about how to better support these students whose first language was not English within mainstream classes. John held a series of formal and informal conversations with the principal and colleagues, and he was eventually charged by the school to redesign the program. One of the first steps John took was to follow culturally responsive teaching principles by taking time to understand the parents’ and students’ needs and to inform them about the distinct academic differences between a pull-out ESL and an EAP program.

Listening to Parents: Reshaping the Program

One crucial aspect of culturally responsive teaching is to make both the students and their parents feel like they are part of the school community. Au (2007) argued that effective instruction that builds on the values and experiences students bring from home is a possible way to narrow the literacy achievement gaps. Valuing students’ home experiences means that teachers must make instruction consistent with a worldview that resonates with the cultural values of many non-mainstream groups, such as that of the Chinese parents in the school, while maintaining high academic expectations and standards for learning. Li (2006) suggested that successful programs and classrooms for diverse learners must be built upon understanding parents’ culturally different values and beliefs in education and educating parents about school programs and how they work. With this principle of cultural reciprocity in mind, John began the redesign of the pull-out ESL program to ensure that it would meet the specific needs of the Asian students attending the school. The first step was to listen to the concerns of the parents by reaching out to the parent community.

In 2013, recognizing that the school needed to better connect with the Asian parent community, the principal decided to hire a bilingual English/Mandarin cultural liaison officer who could support administration and teachers when they needed to communicate with Mandarin speaking parents. Since few members of the staff understand Mandarin, the liaison officer has become an invaluable asset to the school and has helped to improve the sense of community for the non-English speaking parents. Since 2014, with the help of the liaison officer, John hosted a series of meetings with the parents of ELLs. During these meetings, John took the time to

address parent concerns about academic progress and address the school's concerns about enrichment classes that could potentially have a contrary mandate to the school. He also collected parent questions or concerns and used this learning to guide follow-up meetings. Also, John invited the school guidance counsellors to these meetings. The goal was to help the parents feel comfortable accessing resources available to them and their children at the school rather than looking outside the school for support. With each year, these gatherings have become more and more focused. In 2016, John invited me to offer two workshops in Chinese to the parents of ELLs in 2017, with the first one focusing on understanding the parents' challenges in helping their children and the second one on understanding their children's socioemotional, academic, and linguistic needs as new students in Canada. Contrary to previous parent-teacher conferences, attendances of these gatherings were high, and parents were highly interactive. Feedback forms from parents were overwhelmingly positive about the topics discussed and all of them expressed the desire to have more such gatherings to help them better support themselves, their understanding of the school program, and their interaction with their children. According to the parent liaison person, these teatime conversations led to a stronger sense of community among the parents of ELLs and the school, and supported parents as they navigated communication with teachers and administration.

The Birth of the EAP Program

The Asian parents' concerns and suggestions for academic English learning had led John to explore several scholars such as Gibbons' (2009, 2015) and Zwiers' (2014) work on building academic language in mainstream classes. Zwiers (2014) noted that "[a]s students leave the primary grades, their academic success depends more and more on their abilities to use academic language—the language used to describe abstract concepts, complex ideas, and critical thinking" (p. ix). Similarly, Gibbons (2015) argued that teachers can support students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in their content classes by adapting their lessons to include materials and resources that help the specific linguistic skills needed for success in a given level, oral and written. For ELL students, these linguistic skills include the development of students' high frequency and multiple-meaning words that appear in different subject areas (often called Tier 2 vocabulary) and low frequency, context-specific vocabulary that occur in specific subjects in school (Tier 3 vocabulary) (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002), as well as genre knowledge and disciplinary language skills needed for success in mainstream English, social studies, and science classes (Gibbons, 2015).

In addition to the need for support in content-based language acquisition, one crucial aspect of cultural responsiveness is to build capacity, confidence, and efficacy in students as agents of their learning, with the capacity, confidence, and efficacy embedded in the students' cultural backgrounds and local communities (Au, 2007; Gay, 2010). Building on these culturally responsive teaching principles, John redesigned the traditional pull-out ESL program to support the Chinese students in achieving mastery in academic English. Building on the research finding that it takes between five and seven years for students to reach native speaker fluency when learning in a full immersion setting (Cummins, 2000; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000; Thomas, & Collier, 2002), the program, renamed as the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Program, was redesigned as a five-year program. It was then offered to a cohort of Asian students entering Grade 8 each year through until their graduation at the end of Grade 12. Starting with this group

of learners at Grade 8 and continuing on for next five years is critical as research has shown that students arriving between ages of 12–14 are most at risk (in comparison with those who arrive younger or older) in achieving academic success as they “appear to be stuck between languages, with neither [first language] L1 nor [second language] L2 providing what is necessary for them to achieve academically before time runs out” in either the first language or second language (Roessingh, 2008, p. 102).

Different from the traditional pull-out program, students attend mainstream classes, except for the sheltered ELA class that John also taught. This was achieved through careful consideration of “time, timing, and timetabling” (Roessingh & Field, 2000) to directly place these academically competent learners in core academic courses, coupled with sheltered ELA support. These considerations and support are considered critical elements of ensuring successful high school graduation for ELLs (Roessingh & Field, 2000). As John was both an ELA and EAP specialist, he could ensure that the core ELA curriculum was taught to the cohort, in addition to developing strong foundational skills that support their academic language development. In Grade 8, this cohort was also pulled out of French class to support the development of their CALP. They were then placed back into French or Spanish in Grade 9. Aside from these two specific classes, the Grade 8 EAP students were fully immersed in all of their other classes: social studies, math, science, and all electives. They were also dispersed into different homeroom classes, with no two cohort students in the same homeroom class. This design had resulted in a definite shift towards their ability to use English more in social settings as well as opening up the EAP students to more diverse friendships throughout the school. Students also receive extra support in Grade 9 as the transition to high school from Grade 9 to 10 is found to be a critical period for many ELLs who, without enhanced support, may be “lost in translation” with a substantial decline in marks due to low literacy levels, limited academic vocabulary, and anxiety about meeting expectations (Miles, 2014). In Grade 9, this group attended one tutorial block with John who supported their CALP across the disciplines. In all other cases, the students are fully immersed in the larger school population.

In addition to the high support for academic language learning, another important application of culturally relevant teaching was to address students’ sense of isolation and stigma as ESL students. With the help of the principal, John moved the program from the lower level of the building to a classroom on the upper floor of the building where students could see the school activities and interact with other students easily. To support their transition into high school, students in the Grade 8 cohort were paired with senior students who acted as mentors and lunch buddies.

Adding to the support for content-based language acquisition, the program also aimed to make connections between students’ in-school curriculum and their cultural backgrounds and local communities through curriculum-specific excursions such as visits to local historical sites such as Chinatown, The Museum of Anthropology, The Museum of Vancouver, and The Vancouver Art Gallery. These excursions were used to complement their in-class projects and academic language development to provide the students with opportunities to apply academic English in real-life situations in culturally relevant contexts outside of the classroom. An example of the in-school and out-of-school connection was studying a text in connection with the Chinese students’ own cultural heritage and their local communities. One such example was

studying texts like, *The Jade Peony* (Choy, 1995), then taking the students on a historical tour of Chinatown led by an urban historian of the city. Visits like this helped students make connections between the book they were reading and the real world they were seeing around them. Additionally, students were asked to choose their books in their first language related to a theme studied in class. They then had to analyse the theme, characters, and literary devices, and translate thematic quotes. This would then be presented to the class and would be followed by some engaging cultural and academic discussions. This kind of student-centred activities valued students' first language and cultures, their opinions on the reading, as well as their ability to take more responsibilities in their reading; thus, these activities helped build students' confidence as learners and increase their self-efficacy as readers and writers.

In sum, John and the school administrators re-envisioned the program around current research trends focusing on high immersion, high support, content-based language acquisition practices to support the newly arrived Asian students who tend to possess a high level of oral fluency in English, but their academic English fluency is often far below grade level. In addition to facilitating ELLs' social and academic integration and focusing academic language and content support, John actively engaged in dialoguing with the parents during the process. These programmatic changes and social efforts helped shift the optics of the language support provided to this unique group of Asian students and increased parent confidence that their child would find success within a North American educational setting.

Reshaping Parents: The Change in Parents' and Students' Attitudes

Since the transformation, the school has been seeing a marked improvement in the academic achievements of the ELL students, with the EAP cohorts needing less and less academic support after Grade 10. According to John, students in the current program expressed the idea that they felt confident with their academic skill-set, with several students pursuing Advanced Placement (AP) studies in both literature and humanities courses, courses that previous ELL students usually tried to avoid. This alone showed a marked increase in ELL students' confidence using academic English. John also noted that ELL students in the EAP cohorts, unlike those in the previous pull-out programs, valued the support they received from the EAP program and became "cultural navigators" (Habacón, 2009) for their parents. Students expressed the idea with John that they shared what they did in the program with their parents and convinced their parents that they needed the support provided by the program. One Grade 10 student in the spring of 2017 asked her mother to fire all of her tutors because she realized that she could do better and study better when she only focused on her school work and sought one-to-one support from John and her other teachers. John noted that, for this particular student, finding help from her class teachers had been a huge stepping stone and was a clear indicator that her confidence in herself and the school program was improving. Improvements like these were having a positive ripple effect on their parents, who were learning from their children that the support offered in the school was not only sufficient, but exceeded that provided by outside-of-school enrichment programs.

In the feedback forms on the two parent workshops I offered, all the parents expressed in the feedback forms that they appreciated the opportunities to have discussions with other parents on their children's issues. In particular, the parents of the new cohort of Grade 8 students shared

that they really benefited from small group discussions and exchanges with parents of students in higher grades. Additionally, parents reported that they learned to have less anxiety over their children's academic studies and to practice letting their children become more independent and make their own decisions about their own learning, such as whether to engage in extracurricular tutoring.

According to the parent liaison who regularly checked in with the parents, the new-coming immigrant parents felt welcomed into the school community and saw the program as "very inclusive." She noted a striking difference among the new-coming and current parents as compared to those a few years ago in that the current parents did not feel their children were isolated linguistically, culturally, or socially in the school. Consequently, they were more willing to be integrated into the school community. More Asian mothers were volunteering at school functions than in the past despite language barriers. These differences showed a newfound trust in the school among the Asian parents.

Conclusion

This paper describes a language teacher's journey of transforming a traditional ESL program to provide high-quality EAP education for the newly arrived Asian immigrant students in the school. It is apparent that the issue of academic language proficiency, critical to the new immigrant students' achievement of high academic standing and future admission to colleges and universities, has presented both a tension and an opportunity for both the school and the parents to reflect on their own practices and effect changes in their own domains that best serve the interests of their children's academic, socio-emotional, and linguistic needs.

This cultural reciprocity could not be achieved, however, without the ESL teacher being "a change agent" and a "cultural mediator" (Li, 2013) who applied research-based best practices to make the school program and curriculum responsive to the parents' concerns. The agency and advocacy John exhibited through his work as a "go-between" between the school and the parents suggests the critical role teachers can play in tackling some of the reported cultural chasm, school-home language disconnections, and power imbalance between mainstream schools and minority parents (Li, 2008; Li, 2018; Roessingh, 2006). In this case, John's agency was mobilized by his beliefs in cultural reciprocity and positive attitudes toward immigrant parents' "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), his motivation to engage in professional learning, and his proactive stance to connect his professional learning with real world challenges within the context he taught.

These mobilizing factors suggest that teachers' capacity to take actions is central to school-based curriculum development. Many teachers may already possess many of these agentic qualities and need to make a conscious effort to activate their "professional capital" (Fullan, Rincón-Gallardo, & Hargreaves, 2015) by constantly engaging in reflective practices to improve conditions that surround the classroom. Fullan & Hargreaves (1991, 2016) suggest that teachers can do so by engaging with others in collaborative or interactive professionalism that starts with teachers locating, listening to, and articulating their inner voice, developing a risk-taking mentality, redefining their role to extend beyond the classroom, seeking variety and avoiding balkanization, committing to working with colleagues, monitoring the connection

between their development and their students' development, and practising reflection in action, on action, and about action. In addition to teachers' individual responsibility and inquiry, teacher education professional development and learning must also pay deliberate attention to addressing teachers' development of agency and make developing such collaborative professionalism "the centerpiece" of its training strategy (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016, p. 22).

The school administrative support was also a critical ingredient for the example of success presented in this paper. The administrator's noticing the issue, creating a bilingual liaison/assistant position to better reach the parent community, involving John in decision making about program change, and supporting John's initiatives on parent engagement activities provided "agentic spaces" (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015, p. 2) that allowed him to exercise his agency and expertise in ELL education to reshape the program to meet the needs of the students and the worldview of the parents. Both the teacher and the school's attitudes toward minority parents and their concerns for the traditional ESL pull-out program were drastically different from those documented in similar situations in several low-SES inner city schools where schools resisted any changes to its ineffective programs (see Duffy, 2003; Hittel, 2007; Li, 2008b for examples). The case presented here demonstrates that in addition to teacher agentic capacity, agentic spaces provided by the school are also critical to evoke change, suggesting the need for schools to develop effective structures or ecologies of teaching to encourage and enable teacher autonomy and agency in program transformation (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015).

Further, the SES factor must be noted for those who intend to do similar work. This mutual reshaping between parents and schools took place in a highly privileged school district where parents' (and the school's) economic power provides a much-needed safety net for such program revision to occur. As previous studies (i.e., Gunderson, 2007; Li, 2002, 2006, 2008; Toohey and Derwing, 2008) indicate, ELLs without such financial support (often in the form of out of school tutoring) tend to lag behind their high SES peers. Therefore, to level the playing field for these learners, schools for these students have more imperative to reshape their programs and relationships with parents. However, to what extent such changed relations can occur in these schools affected by long-standing inequalities of social, economic, and political power must be further explored. Nevertheless, the example in this paper shows the possibility and hope, regardless of a school's SES status, lie in the continued professional development of teachers in best practices for educating diverse students and the schools' positive attitudes and dispositions toward minority parents and their cultural and linguistic capital.

Finally, it must be noted that school reform and program transformation, such as the case described in this paper, is always unfinished work. To further refine this program, for example, John, as well as the school staff, could collect relevant data on the graduation rates and other markers of success for students who were in the EAP program, for example, their reading scores or other indicators of increasing English language proficiency such as teacher benchmarking and assessments. To show their progress over time, it would also be important to follow these students as they graduate high school and begin to enter post-secondary studies. These data would then be important for continued, systematic program redesign at both the K-12 school and in higher education.

As well, one area of future work can focus on how to include/strengthen the teaching of students' first language, alongside the effort to enhance their second language, English or French, in K-12 schools after immigration. A body of prior research (i.e., Cummins, 1981; Pavlov, 2015; Roessingh, 2008), as well as that indicated in this case study, has shown the correlation between ELLs' first language and culture on their reading performance in English. However, this linguistic potential is either discontinued or left to the choices and support of parents of ELLs at home or in weekend language schools, which is often ineffective (Li & Wen, 2015). Therefore, while schools look for ways to better support ELLs, making the improving of students' first language proficiency an integral part of program design might be a more effective way to accelerate their academic integration.

References

- Au, K. (2007). Culturally responsive instruction: Application to multiethnic classrooms. *Pedagogies*, 2, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15544800701343562>
- Beck, I. L., McKeown, M., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Choosing words to teach*. In Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction (15-30). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Choy, W. (1995). *The jade peony*. Maderia Park, BC: Douglas and MacIntyre Ltd.
- Cooke, R. (2017, Feb. 20). ESL teachers feel incapable of providing for immigrant, refugee students. *CBC News*. Available at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/inside-the-classroom-esl-teachers-refugees-1.3954861>
- Corno, L. (1989). What it means to be literate about classrooms. In D. Bloome (Ed.), *Classroom and literacy* (pp. 29-52). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Crossman, K. (2014). *Intensive English for academic purposes: A curriculum designed and developed for local English language learners entering university* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Calgary, Calgary, AB. Retrieved from <https://prism.ucalgary.ca/handle/11023/1707>
- Cummins, J. (1981). The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In California State Department of Education (Ed.), *Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical framework* (pp. 3-49). Los Angeles, CA: Evaluation, Dissemination and Assessment Center, California State University, Los Angeles. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED249773.pdf>
- Cummins, J. (1986). Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(1), 18-36. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.56.1.b327234461607787>
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children caught in the crossfire*. Toronto, ON: Multilingual Matters.
- Deschambault, D. (2015). *Economizing education: Fee-paying ESL students in a public high school*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia, BC.
- Duffy, A. (2003). Class struggles: Public education and the new Canadian. *The Atkinson Fellowship in Public Policy*, 1-20.
- Fullan, M., & Hargreaves, A. (1991). *What's worth fighting for in your school?* Toronto: Ontario Public School Teachers' Federation.
- Fullan, M. & Hargreaves, A. (2016). *Bringing the profession back in: Call to action*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.
- Fullan, M., Rincón-Gallardo, S., & Hargreaves, A. (2015). Professional capital as accountability. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 23(15), 1-18.

- Garnett, B. (2010). Toward understanding the academic trajectories of ESL youth. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 66, 677-710. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.66.5.677>
- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Gibbons, P. (2009). *English learners academic literacy and thinking: Learning in the challenge zone*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Gibbons, P. (2015). *Scaffolding language, scaffolding learning: Teaching second language learners in the mainstream classroom*, 2nd Ed. Portsmouth N.H.: Heinemann.
- Gunderson, L. (2007). *English-only instruction and immigrant students in secondary schools: A critical examination*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Gunderson, L., & D'Silva, R. A. (2016). Disaggregating secondary-level Chinese immigrants' academic, English, and school success. In W. Ma and G. Li (Eds.), *Chinese-heritage students in North American schools: Understanding hearts and minds beyond test scores*. New York: Routledge.
- Guo, Y., & Maitra, S. (2017). *Parent and community experience and engagement with EAL policies*. Available at: <https://policywise.com/wp-content/uploads/resources/2017/04/2017-04APR-19-Scientific-Report-14SM-Guo.pdf>
- Habacón, A. E. (2009). Multiculturalism 2.0: More than Ethnic. TEDx Vancouver. Retrieved November, 2nd, 2015 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTy22qmK2WE>
- Hakuta, K., Butler, Y., Witt, D. (2000). *How long does it take English learners to attain proficiency?* LA: University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute.
- Han, H., & Cheng, L. (2011). Tracking the success of ESL students within the context of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test. *Canadian and International Education Journal*, 40(1), 76-96.
- Hittel, I. (2007). Issues of integration and ESL education: The Sudanese youth of Calgary. *Unpublished master's thesis*, Athabasca University, Alberta.
- Hyslop, K. (2011, Mar. 29). English as second language programs swamped: Teachers' group. The Tye. Available at: <https://thetyee.ca/News/2011/03/29/ESLTeachersSwamped/>
- Kanno, Y., & Applebaum, S. D. (1995). ESL students speak up: The stories of how we are doing. *TESL Canada Journal*, 12(2), 32-49. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v12i2.651>
- Li, G. (2002). *"East is East, West is West"? Home literacy, culture, and schooling*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Li, G. (2006). *Culturally contested pedagogy: Battles of literacy and schooling between mainstream teachers and Asian immigrant parents*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Li, G. (2008). *Culturally contested literacies: America's "rainbow underclass" and urban schools*. New York: Routledge.
- Li, G. (2013). Promoting teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students as change agents: A cultural approach to professional learning. *Theory Into Practice*, 52(2), 136-143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2013.770331>
- Li, G. (2018). Divergent paths, same destiny: A Bourdieusian perspective on refugee families' transitional experiences with urban schooling. *European Journal of Education*, 0(0), 1-12. <http://https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12300>
- Li, G., & Wang, L. (Eds., 2008). *Model minority myths revisited: An interdisciplinary approach to demystifying Asian American education experiences*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

- Li, G., & Wen, K. (2015). East Asian heritage language education in the United States: Practices, potholes, and possibilities. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 9(4), 274-290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2015.1086623>
- Ma, W., & Li, G. (Eds., 2016): *Chinese-heritage students in North American schools: Understanding the hearts and minds beyond test scores*. New York: Routledge
- Miles, J. (2014). *Lost in translation? The impact of early inclusion on transitional high school experiences and distal academic outcomes of ELLs* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Calgary, Calgary, AB. Retrieved from <https://prism.ucalgary.ca/handle/11023/1729>
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849209543534>
- Ngo, H. V. (2007). Toward quality ESL education. *TESL Canada Journal*, 24(2), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v24i2.136>
- Pavlov, V. (2015). *Challenges faced by English language learners on the Alberta English Language Arts 30-1 reading diploma examination* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Calgary, Calgary, AB. Retrieved from <https://prism.ucalgary.ca/handle/11023/2660>
- Priestley, M., Biesta, G.J.J. & Robinson, S. (2015). Teacher agency: what is it and why does it matter? In R. Kneyber & J. Evers (eds.), *Flip the system: Changing education from the bottom up*. London: Routledge.
- Roessingh, H. (2004). Effective high school ESL programs: A synthesis and meta-analysis. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 60 (5), 611-636. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.60.5.611>
- Roessingh, H. (2006). The teacher is the key: Building trust in ESL high school programs. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 62(4), 563-590. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.62.4.563>
- Roessingh, H. (2008). Variability in ESL outcomes: The influence of AOA and LOR on achievement in high school. *TESL Canada Journal*, 26(1), 87-107. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v26i1.392>
- Roessingh, H., & Douglas, S. (2011). English language learners' transitional needs from high school to university: An exploratory study. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-011-0202-8>
- Roessingh, H., & Field, D. (2000). Time, timing, timetabling: Critical elements of successful graduation of high school ESL learners. *TESL Canada Journal*, 18(1), 17-31. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v18i1.897>
- The Canadian Magazine of Immigration. (2016). Chinese immigrants to Canada. Retrieved on September 8, 2016, from <http://canadaimmigrants.com/chinese-immigrants-to-canada/>
- Thomas, W., & Collier, V. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long term academic achievement*. Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence. Final Reports. Paper 1_1_final. Retrieved from http://repositories.cdlib.org/crede/finalrpts/1_1_final
- Toohy, K., & Derwing, T.M. (2008). Hidden losses: How demographics can encourage incorrect assumptions about ESL high school students' success. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 54, 178-193.

- Skelton, C. (2014, July 8). ESL students in the majority at more than 60 schools in Metro Vancouver. *Vancouver Sun*. Retrieved on September 20, 2016, from www.vancouversun.com/health/students+majority+more...schools.../story.html
- Watt, D., & Roessingh, H. (2001). The dynamics of ESL drop-out: Plus ça change.... *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 58(2), 203-222. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.58.2.203>
- Webster, N. L., & Valeo, A. (2011). Teacher preparedness for a changing demographic of language learners. *TESL Canada Journal*, 28(2), 105-128. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v28i2.1075>
- Wild, J., Helmer, S., Tanaka P., & Dean, S. (2009). *A "crisis in ESL education" in BC schools*. Retrieved September 20, 2016, from http://boards.amssa.org/ancie/members/viewPost/post_id:71
- Wyatt-Beynon, J., Ilieva, R., Toohey, K., & Laroque, L. (2001). A secondary school career education program for ESL students. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 31, 399-420. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0362-6784.00205>
- Zwiers, J. (2014). *Building academic language (2nd edition)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



The *BC TEAL Journal* is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).
Copyright rests with the authors.