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Revisiting English as a Second Language and the Place of French in Canada within the Context of Globalization and Plurilingualism

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Rosa Bruno-Jofré, *editor*

This issue is devoted to English Language Learners (ELL) and the place of French within the framework of demographic changes and the globalization process, with its ideologies and practices influencing the views of language. We have invited authors from different Canadian provinces in an attempt to uncover specific regional needs, to identify policy shifts, and to study new ways to deal with teaching and learning English as a second language in our schools. The themes are steeped in particular times and spaces. Thus, Liying Cheng introduces the reader to her own research on how English Language Learners experience the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, a piece extremely relevant to teachers and administrators.

Xuemei Li examines changing patterns of immigration in Newfoundland, where the government develops initiatives to retain immigrants. Her research points out the complexity of English as a Second Language and its multiple connections to the socioeconomic background of the students, language proficiency of the families, and the need to prepare teachers so they are able to understand a multicultural, plurilingual class. In turn, Sylvie Roy and Monique Bournot-Trites remind us how language moved away from its attachment to notions of identity, toward an attachment to notions of capital and skills. They analyze the neglect of French in provinces like Alberta, and make a case for the teaching of French grounded in both its place in Canadian history and its usefulness. June Starkey and

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Un bateau à voile, by Peter Winkworth

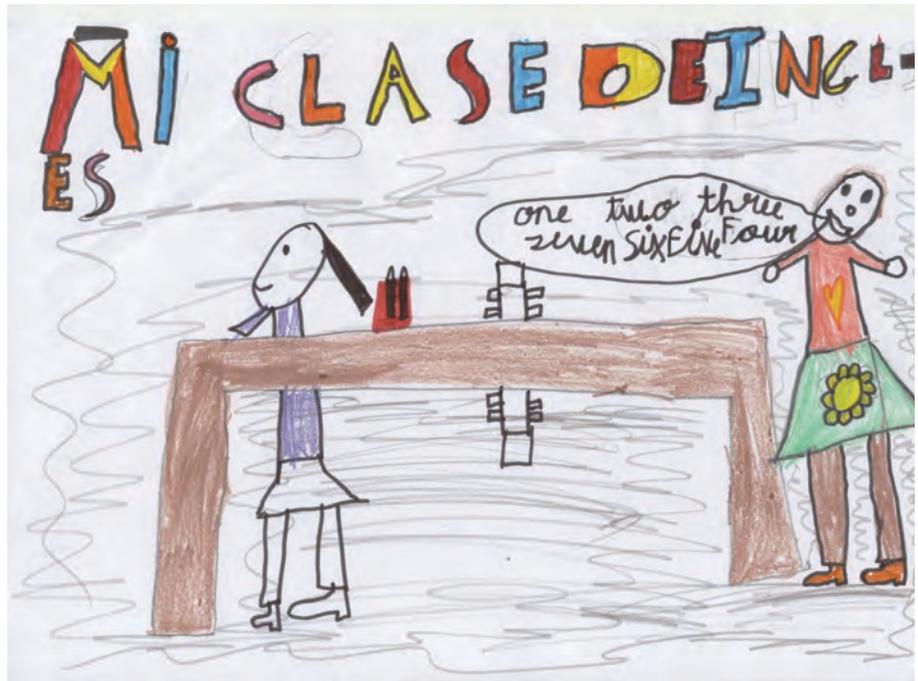
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Eunice Eunhee Jang bring to the readers an account of the development and validation of a new language assessment framework, Steps to English Proficiency (STEPS), developed by the Ministry of Education of Ontario with input from teachers, which is expected to help teachers to understand ELL language development and improve assessment practices. Yan Guo discusses policy inconsistencies that end up limiting rather than enhancing the success of English as a Second Language students, for example funding caps in Alberta and British Columbia, redirection of ESL funding, and poor teacher preparation among other issues.

Two teachers relate their experiences. Jan Coates, a teacher in Nova Scotia and celebrated writer of books for children learning English as a Second Language, describes with sensitive touches her experience as a classroom teacher and her current work as writer. Rosa González, an elementary teacher working in bilingual education in the Madrid region in Spain and currently advisor for the Regional Government of Madrid, shares the pedagogical creativity of teachers having limited access to materials. The classroom experience is conveyed in the article through the expressive drawings made by the children who represented the various activities such as singing, dancing, drawing, and creating displays.

This issue is particularly meaningful for me. English is not my native language. I am by and large self-taught, and fully understand the power of the political, cultural, and linguistic capital one carries when negotiating social situations within the contours of daily life.



Courtesy of Rosa González

The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test and English Language Learners

LIYING CHENG, *Faculty of Education, Queen's University*

Over the past twenty years, there has been an increasing proportion of immigrants and international students entering educational systems throughout Canada. These English Language Learners (ELLs), with little or no experience or training in English, are estimated to form 20–50% of the general student population in urban K-12 systems across Canada (Roessingh & Kover, 2002). The Ontario curriculum defines ELLs as “students in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario’s schools, and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English. These students may be Canadian born or recently arrived from other countries. They come from diverse backgrounds and school experiences, and have a wide variety of strengths and needs” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 8). A detailed breakdown of ELLs is included in Table One. These students need to learn the language of instruction *in English* language schools at the same time as they are working towards meeting the *curriculum* expectations.

Ontario secondary schools have seen the greatest increase of ELLs, yet ELL teachers and support programs in Ontario schools have declined by 30% over the past five years. Meanwhile, large-scale achievement testing such as the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) has increasingly been used to measure student competency and ensure system accountability (Firestone, Mayrowetz, & Fairman, 1998; Ryan, 2002). The confluence of the increased number of ELLs and the expanding testing framework has created a new and largely unanticipated educational problem—alarmingly high failure rates for these students (Horn, 2003; Watt & Roessingh, 2001). In addition, these large-scale tests are constructed and normed for first language (L1) English speakers. They may have lower reliability and validity for second language (L2) students like ELLs and should be interpreted differently (Abedi, Leon, & Mirocha, 2003; Solano-Flores & Trumbull, 2003).

It was within the above context that we conducted a large-scale study¹ to explore the impact of the OSSLT on ELLs. This study employed a mixed-methods explanatory design with two phases. The first phase focused on the impact of the OSSLT on test performance and the relationship between test performance and students’ outside school reading and writing activities, computer use, as well as their L1 use at home. The second phase focused on probing students’ interpretations of the OSSLT test constructs in relation to their literacy development. Students’ feelings, perceptions of the OSSLT, and alignments to classroom literacy activities were also explored. In addition, the progress of a number of ELLs was observed and tracked in relation to the OSSLT.

The major results of the first phase study are as follows. ELLs’ OSSLT test performance, when compared with the general student population, was about 15–20% lower in all test formats, e.g., multiple choice, constructed responses, and constructed responses with

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Immigrants playing leap frog on the *SS Empress of Britain*, ca. 1910

Credit: Canada. Dept. of Mines and Resources / Library and Archives Canada / C-009661

NOTES

¹This study was supported by a standard research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada.

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explanations, and in test constructs, e.g., reading types, skills, and strategies; and writing tasks (Cheng, Klinger, & Zheng, 2007; Zheng, Cheng, & Klinger, 2007). In terms of test item difficulty, ELLs and the general student population were, however, similar, e.g., both ELLs and non-ELLs found reading information type of materials most difficult. However, with regard to the differentiability of the two groups, narrative (text type), indirect understanding (reading skill), and vocabulary (reading strategy) were specific to ELLs and had the largest performance gap compared with non-ELLs. This result has implications for literacy instruction in supporting these students' literacy achievement in schools. ELL teachers can target the above areas in their instruction as doing so can help to narrow down the performance gap and help ELLs to enhance the literacy development faster.

The investigation of the relationship between test performance and students' outside school activities revealed that the more reading and writing activities students did outside school, the more frequent use of computers for school work, the better these students' OSSLT test performance were (Cheng, Klinger, & Zheng, 2009). We compared the performance between ELLs—pass and fail groups, and non-ELLs—pass and fail groups. The biggest gap and difference among the groups existed with ELLs as English as a second language students and non-ELLs as English as a first language students. This finding reinforces the Ontario definition of ELLs and the double-edged challenges facing these students, i.e., they need not only to learn the language of instruction in English but also to work towards meeting the curriculum expectations in English. Unexpectedly, but echoed with previous research (Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995; Cummins, 1982; 1983), our results showed that the group who spoke their first language at home had the highest OSSLT performance whereas the group who spoke only English at home had the lowest performance (Klinger, Cheng & Zheng, under review). This group of Canadian-born ELLs is the most vulnerable group in succeeding in the OSSLT. This finding has policy implications for the use of students' L1 to support their learning in and outside school, and also instructional implications for focusing on the literacy (reading and writing) development of this group of ELLs in schools.

The major results from phase two study revealed the unique reading and writing processes these ELLs experienced while taking the OSSLT (Cheng, Fox, & Zheng, 2007; Fox & Cheng, 2007) and in and outside schools (Doe, et al., in press; Zheng et al., 2011). In Cheng, Fox, & Zheng (2007) and Fox & Cheng (2007) studies, we sat down with the students (both ELLs and non-ELLs), immediately after their taking the OSSLT, and listened to their accounts as to how they tackled each testing format and each reading and writing tasks. We tested the hypothesis whether these first and second language students were taking (experiencing) the same test, and concluded that we need to do further analyses of "how test-takers interpret test constructs and the interaction between these interpretations, test design, and accounts of classroom practice" (Fox & Cheng, 2007, p. 9). Results from surveying students who took the test and who had not taken the test at the time of our study (Doe, et al., 2011; Zheng et al., 2011) revealed further relationship of test performance and literacy activities in schools as well as the interaction of affective factors such as motivation and test anxiety with their test performance. These findings have provided information on features of literacy learning and for identifying those students most at risk of failure. In addition, the tracking study of a number of ELLs over

three years (Han & Cheng, 2011) helped to portray how each ELL dealt with their learning English and reaching curriculum expectations while fulfilling the requirements of the OSSLT.

Students are direct participants in the testing process. Given the impact of large-scale high-stakes testing on students and the diverse backgrounds as well as the particular needs of ELLs, the findings have important implications for test validation and test accommodation for ELLs, and for school boards, policy and government agencies that are instrumental in the education of this growing student population, and for ensuring that this increasingly large group of immigrant and international students have the opportunity to learn (Gee, 2003) in Ontario.



Prairie classroom at Bruderheim, Alberta, 1915 (courtesy Glenbow Archives).

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Table One: Definition of ELLs in Ontario

Canadian-born ELLs	Newcomers from other countries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal students • Students whose families have "maintained a distinct cultural and linguistic tradition that is not English" • Children from immigrant communities in which "languages other than English are primarily spoken" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children involved in "voluntary, planned immigration" • Children who have left their homeland "under conditions of extreme urgency" • Fee-paying international/visa students

Immigrant Integration and ESL support in Atlantic Canada: The Case of Newfoundland

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Context

If you hear people talk about MTV being the multicultural hubs of Canada, you know they are talking about Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. Immigrants to Canada have historically clustered in and around these big urban centers. In recent years, however, a noticeable trend has begun to develop. A growing number of immigrants choose to settle down in non-metropolitan areas. Atlantic Canada has seen a significant increase in immigrant population in the past 10 years. The total number of immigrants in these provinces in 2000 was 2424, and the number soared up to 6663 in 2009 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). Retention and integration of immigrants has become part of the Atlantic Population Strategy (ARAIISA Settlement Conference 2006).

Despite the rapid increase in immigrant population, the percentage distribution of immigrants in Atlantic Canada remains apparently low compared to other areas. Let us take a look at the recent statistics. In 2009, 42.4% of the newcomers to Canada lived in Ontario, 19.6 in Quebec, 16.4 in British Columbia, 10.7 in Alberta, 5.4 in Manitoba, and 2.7 in Saskatchewan. That did not leave much for the Atlantic region. The numbers were 0.7% in PEI, 0.8% in New Brunswick, 1.0% in Nova Scotia, and only 0.2% in Newfoundland and Labrador (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010).

In addition to the low distribution percentage, retention of newcomers is a big issue. Take Newfoundland for example. A report by Goss Gilroy Inc. (2005) points out that in the decade before 2005, an average of 464 immigrants came to Newfoundland and Labrador each year; however, only 36% of them stayed—a lower retention rate than in any other province.² One has to ask why. The report attributes the low profile of immigration to “limited sustained—and funded—effort to engage the community at large in these matters” (p. ii).

What are the sustained efforts made by the government, communities, and educational sectors to integrate newcomers into the local society? What is the current status quo of immigrant support in communities and of ESL teaching in schools in Newfoundland? What are the areas for improvement to attract more newcomers and to make them call Newfoundland home?



Immigrants waiting to go ashore

Credit: William James Topley / Library and Archives Canada / PA-010235

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²Prepared for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Coordinating Committee on Newcomer Integration.

Immigrant Support in Newfoundland

As the capital city, St John's takes in the majority of the immigrants in Newfoundland and Labrador and houses most of the services available. Up to 1990, there were 4 language programs that catered to immigrants and refugees in St John's (Bassler, 1990, p. 101). These programs served the different needs of specific communities at the time, but they were far from sufficient to help retain the immigrants who landed in St John's. In recent years, more services and programs have been established, including the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism (OIM), the Association for New Canadians (ANC), the Coalition on Richer Diversity (CORD), and the Refugee and Immigrant Advisory Council (RIAC). The purposes of these and other government and non-government organizations are to implement the Provincial Immigration Strategy, build cross-cultural awareness in immigrants and local residents, and provide language instruction and settlement support for immigrants. The government aims at retaining 70% of the immigrants in the near future. How far is Newfoundland toward this goal with the existing support programs?

The government of Newfoundland and Labrador, in response to the population decrease caused by migration outflows, launched the Provincial Nominee Program to recruit immigrants with specialized skills that will benefit the Province in fulfilling specific economic and industrial development goals. From April 1, 2007 to April 1, 2010, the province nominated 1,279 individuals from 76 different countries. The Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism conducted a survey in November and December 2010 to determine the retention rate of nominees. The result indicated that a total of 179 out of 221 (81%) of the nominee respondents were still in the province (Power, 2011). However, these numbers can be misleading because the nominees were the individuals who came with good educational backgrounds and language skills, as well as promising employment opportunities. What about those without such blessings and in need of more support, such as refugees and families of immigrants?

The Association for New Canadians in St John's not only provides Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs, but also offers a variety of settlement services to connect immigrants to local communities, and to support immigrants in many other ways—childcare, job-hunting, and cultural integration. However, the adequacy of such programs in meeting immigrants' needs is yet to be determined. As indicated in the Goss Gilroy Inc. (2005) report, "the services (offered by ANC) cannot help all immigrants and refugees overcome the personal or systemic barriers they face to integration into the community and economy" (p. iv). What is more problematic is the fact that hardly any documents can be found on support for immigrants outside of the St John's area. Substantial research is needed to look into immigrant lives and their connections with the local, immigrant services, and ESL support in non-urban Newfoundland.

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ESL Teaching at Schools

In the education sector, apart from Memorial University's ESL department offered to international students and ANC's ESL programs offered to adult immigrants, the Eastern District School Board offers ESL programs for international and immigrant students in primary and secondary schools.

The K-12 ESL student population in the province is concentrated primarily in the Eastern School District, according to the provincial immigration strategy 2007 document entitled *Diversity—“Opportunity and Growth.”* As of June 2006, there were 193 ESL students from Colombia (42), Sudan (29), Liberia (15), China (11), Libya (9), Egypt (7), Russia (7), Turkmenistan (6), and other places. Among them 42 were studying in the only high school offering ESL courses in St John's—Holy Heart of Mary (OIM, 2007, p. 10). In 2010, the ESL students' number went up to 277 and around 60 of them were in Holy Heart.

Let's take a closer look at the numbers of students and their home countries and see what researchers have said about cross-cultural migration and students' success in education.

Among the factors influencing academic performance, language proficiency and family influence are most frequently discussed. A higher level of English proficiency is a significant factor in academic performance (Chow, 2000; Mullins, 2010). Family support is another crucial factor in students' achievement. East Asian students work harder to live up to parental expectations, and newcomers from China, Taiwan, and Korea out-perform students from other places and are the most likely to attend university (with a rate of 70%) while their Caribbean and African classmates tend to drop out of high school (Chow, 2000; Crystal, et al., 1994; Mullins, 2010; Wong, 1990).

Moreover, the socio-economic status of the family is strongly correlated to ESL students' grades. Students from refugee families that lack financial resources are more vulnerable to dropout (Chow, 2000; Duffy, 2004). Immigrant students with traumatic experiences may face additional language challenges and mental health issues that need to be addressed (Beiser, Dion, Gotowiec, Hyman, & Vu, 1995; Cole, 1998; Stermac, Brazeau, & Martin, 2008). War-zone refugees, particularly ones from some African countries, experience difficulties in school as a result of cultural clashes and social struggles (Berthold, 2000; De Gourville, 2002; Hersi, 2005).

Considering the above research findings, we have to assume that most of the immigrant students in Newfoundland are faced with big academic challenges.

The Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador published a handbook in 2002 “to guide administrators and classroom teachers in the reception and orientation of ESL students and families into schools and communities” (OIM, 2007, p. 10). The high school curriculum was revised and a new English Second Language Literature course (ESL 3206) was implemented in 2006. Meanwhile, “stakeholders have identified the need to

increase access to ESL and to better prepare classroom teachers to address other cultural issues faced by students from other countries” (p. 10).

However, challenges remain in spite of the above efforts. On the one hand, classroom teachers, who are not generally trained to teach multicultural classrooms, are under pressure to help their newcomer students cope with the new learning context when they themselves feel helpless of what to do. On the other hand, students sitting in such classrooms are placed at an immense disadvantage when they do not share common past or cultural practices with local classmates and teachers, not to mention the fact that they have to deal with a new language. In particular, refugee children who have a range of special needs challenge the capacity of the school system.

Limited ESL support and services available at schools in smaller cities hinder immigrant students’ learning (Karanja, 2007). There is urgency for the provincial government to update its education policy and for the education sector to enhance support for immigrant students at schools. Bridge programs need to be established to allow students and parents to interact with schools and local communities more closely than a few meetings or gatherings in the year, and at the same time to assist school staff, teachers, and community service providers in understanding and appreciating cultural differences and diversity. Sound research involving the stakeholders—immigrant students, their parents, classmates, teachers, school administration, community supporting staff, and government agencies is called upon to look into such issues.



CHELO SEBASTIAN, HAMILTON ON

Shelter from the Storm by Chelo Sebastian

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French in Canada: More than an additional language

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In order to understand language debates and ideologies (how a particular idea is normalized and everyone thinks that it is the 'normal' way or the only way to do something), it is primordial that we look at the historico-social fabric of one particular society (Blommear, 1999, 2010). Several authors gave an overview of how French and English became the two official languages in Canada (Hayday, 2005; Heller, 1999; Wernicke-Heinrich & Bournot-Trites, accepted). However, globalization gives rise to a new era in terms of language practices and ideologies. We need to understand the consequences of these changes on teaching and learning French as a second language in Canada. This paper starts with a brief summary of the history of the two official languages, English and French, in Canada. Then, it describes how plurilingualism is seen as a useful skill for the global economy and how this view affects the way we promote and offer languages in the school system. Finally, we will demonstrate that French is still the language to be taught in all provinces despite the fact that some provinces have a growing population of people speaking other languages.



The October Crisis, Québec, 1970

1.1 The Royal Commission and Official Languages Act

The Royal Commission (set up 1963–1969) on bilingualism and biculturalism was mandated to propose changes needed in answer to the demands for equality from French-Canadians. The Commission recommended measures of equality for English and French people. This is in response to the Royal Commission that the Official Languages Act was initiated in 1969 (revised in 1985) to, for example:³ ensure that French and English were maintained as the official languages of Canada, equal in status and in rights and privileges such as their use in government institutions. In addition, the Minister of Canadian Heritage took steps to promote the advancement towards the equal status and usage of French and English in Canadian society through transfers of monies to English and French minorities in Canada, and to provinces for classes or courses given in the minority official language so all Canadians would have the opportunity to learn both official languages.

NOTES

³(<http://lois-laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/>. Retrieved on November 29, 2011)

1.2 Canadian Charter of Right and Freedom: Article 23

The article 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms also allowed the Francophone minorities in Canada and Anglophone minority in Quebec the right to their homogeneous schools where numbers warranted. As Thériault (2005) mentioned, the Article 23 of the Canadian Charter recognizes the right of linguistic minorities of the official languages, in term of education. However, this right is recognized in terms of belonging to one of the official languages of Canada and not because of minority status. This explains why other minority language groups do not have such a right.

1.3 The Action Plan of Official Languages

The most recent initiative *The Action Plan of Official Languages*, announced in 2003 as part of the federal government's plan to modernize its policies meant to "provide new momentum for Canada's linguistic duality" (Government of Canada, 2003, p. 1). The plan comprises three main emphases: education, community development, and the public service, with the greatest government financial support apportioned to education (Hudon, 2011). One important purpose of new action plan, which came with financial support for French or English as minority languages or second-language education was to increase the proportion of secondary school graduate students having a functional knowledge of their other official language to a level of 50% (p. 27)

All of these policies have resulted in a favorable lean towards institutionalized bilingualism in Canada, which has also helped to establish or improve different language programs such as French immersion programs in Canada, francophone minority schools and Core French or Intensive French in English speaking schools. The promotion of French and English was not only for Francophones or Anglophones but for all Canadians

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to understand the value of learning French or English to be part of the Canadian society and the global world. In all provinces, parents have a choice among different programs for their children to learn French at school. Those programs differ in their entrance point and their intensity, however, curriculum subjects are taught in French to non-francophone students only in French immersion programs.

2.0 The new economy and language skills

With the globalized world, languages are seen as skills to be acquired. As mentioned by Heller and Labrie (2003), Francophones and Anglophones in Canada are now participating in universal and globalized activities where languages are attached to the notions of capital rather than identity. Knowledge of languages is seen as a way to gain power and move through social classes. For example, in British Columbia, knowing mandarin language is more helpful to work in the Asia-pacific business than knowing French. Although French is related to the history and identity of Canada, learning other languages for some members of the society may be more helpful to obtain a job and move up in society, although French is also valuable when wanting to work for the federal government.

Because of this new globalized context, the place, the role and the choice of language offering is changing. In Alberta, for example, the Ministry of education decided to develop and prepare several languages curricula in order to allow the population to study languages such as: Cree, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Punjabi, Spanish and Ukrainian (Alberta Learning, 2003). Several school boards in Alberta decided to go ahead with the initiative. Students from grade 4 to 9 had the opportunities of choosing among various possible languages to learn at school. However, during 2011, one of the largest school board in Alberta decided to cancel the teaching of languages in schools, at the discretion of the principals. Students can still learn French through French immersion or Intensive French but core French is put under the new rule with all other languages in the province. Ten thousand students in Calgary alone don't have a second language in their own schools, not even French (Calgary Herald, Oct., 2011). Meanwhile, the importance and the cognitive benefits of having more than one language have been demonstrated by researchers such as Bialystok (2007).

3.0 Why is French important in Canada?

French is part of the Canadian heritage. Most of the population, immigrants or not, understand that. In her research (Roy & Galiev, 2011) reported that immigrants parents were usually very surprised to find out that although Canada was a bilingual country, French was not easily available in all schools in Alberta. One major difficulty is that the law on bilingualism is a federal law while education is under the jurisdiction of the provinces. The federal government gives incentives, in the form of financial transfers, to

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the provinces in order to encourage French language education; however, each province decides which languages will be taught in its schools based partly on the wishes of its inhabitants such as parents who wish to have heritage language taught in schools (i.e. Mandarin in BC). Meanwhile, Francophone and Francophile people are attached to French because it is part of their Canadian identity and it is an important element of their social network. Negating French is like amputating them of an important part of their being. Tensions arise from this situation.

Yet, there are many reasons why provinces should keep French as a mandatory language to be learned in schools. French is still a very useful language in Canada and around the world and there are many jobs in Canada requiring French. In accordance with the Canadian census of 2006, the number of Canadians speaking French was approximately 6.7 million. This constituted 21.5% of the country's population which was 32 million at that time. And worldwide, there are more than 300 million people who speak French. Furthermore, there are logistical reasons for giving French a priority in all provinces at the moment. Teacher education programs are established for teachers of French in most universities and very few teachers of other languages are coming out of those programs. There is an infrastructure for French: teacher organizations, parent support, and advocacy groups such as Canadian Parents for French. Classroom resources are almost inexistent for languages other than French or English, but many Canadian publishers create French material which is readily available in the language classrooms. In addition, federal funding helps keep the material up to date and renewed and enhances the programs across Canada.

In conclusion, French is the language that can be taught with the highest number of qualified teachers, the most material, resources, and infrastructure compared to other languages. Moreover, it is, after all, one of the two official languages of Canada. Bilingualism contributes to the unity of the country and French is still an important part of the identity of its people. It would be very dangerous for language learning in general to cut French language programs when we cannot afford to teach other languages. The result could be monolingualism, the opposite of what everyone really wants in Canada.



Regatta I by Chelo Sebastian

CHELO SEBASTIAN, HAMILTON ON

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Assessing English Language Learners in Content Learning Contexts

JUNE STARKEY and EUNICE EUNHEE JANG, PhD,
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Recent development and validation of a new language assessment framework called Steps to English Proficiency (STEP) have offered exciting opportunities for researchers and teachers to understand the nature of ELLs' language development and improve classroom assessment practice ...

Increasing global migration presents opportunities and challenges to Canadian teachers. It has become every teacher's responsibility to support English Language Learners' (ELLs) English proficiency development while learning curriculum. Assessment for learning is integral to differentiated teaching as it can provide diagnostic information about how to tailor instruction to meet individual students' needs. However, theories of how ELLs develop English proficiency are under-developed. There is a great need to pay close attention to how ELLs develop social and academic English proficiency in school contexts and how their social, emotional, and behavioural growths influence language development.

Recent development and validation of a new language assessment framework called Steps to English Proficiency (STEP) have offered exciting opportunities for researchers and teachers to understand the nature of ELLs' language development and improve classroom assessment practice (Jang, Wagner, & Stille, 2010). Steps to English Proficiency (STEP), developed by the Ontario Ministry of Education in collaboration with teachers and simultaneously validated by a group of OISE researchers, was formally introduced to Ontario schools in 2011.

STEP is intended to be used by teachers to assess and track students' English language proficiency development in three main language skills including oral communication, reading/responding, and writing. It consists of sets of language descriptors that capture distinct language behaviour across six proficiency 'step' levels (1 through 6) for four grade clusters, from Grades 1 through 12 (Primary grades 1–3, Junior grades 4–6, Intermediate grades 7–8 and Secondary grades 9–12). The STEP descriptor scales describe specific and independent linguistic behaviours that are designed to capture distinct levels of student performance (Alderson, 1991; North & Schneider, 1998; Turner & Upshur, 2002).

Although descriptor scales have become increasingly popular in the last twenty years for use by teachers of English second language, there are some challenges to evaluating their validity. Stakeholders do not always agree about what constitutes language learning in the classroom, and the establishment of appropriate evaluation criteria is therefore not obvious (Davison & Leung, 2009). What does a student need to be able to do to be deemed at a certain level? How do we know that a student has progressed to the next level? In short, assessing language use in classrooms is at once easy and difficult: although students may use the target language in class, not knowing what to look and listen for may result in missed opportunities for teachers to see and/or hear what progress is being made, and specific feedback to students to help them progress may therefore also be missed.



CHELO SEBASTIAN, HAMILTON ON

Water Passage by Chelo Sebastian

Our multi-year validation research activities over the past four years involved a large number of ESL and content teachers, school board educators, and policy makers as well as ELLs across Grades 1 to 12. To be more specific, the initial validation phase in 2008 focused on the impact of STEP on classroom teaching, the interpretability of the STEP descriptors, and fairness of STEP-based assessment. The results from this phase were used to refine STEP to improve the clarity and relevance of its descriptors and align them more closely with the Ontario curriculum. Revised STEP descriptors were further evaluated by over 150 teachers across Ontario schools using rating scales in May, 2010. In September 2010, the Ontario Ministry of Education invited 17 boards of Education from across the province to participate in piloting the STEP assessment framework with students in classrooms. We are currently collaborating with 40 teachers from three large ELLs-concentrated school boards in evaluating the scalability and stability of the six-step STEP scales, linguistic and cultural sensitivity of the STEP descriptors. We are also interested in discovering how ELLs' non-cognitive characteristics and background factors impact their English proficiency development.

Our validation research suggests that the STEP assessment framework stands to make significant contributions to improving teachers' assessment of ELLs' English proficiency development (Cummins et al., 2009). In particular, teachers appreciate its potential to provide useful information about specific areas of strength and further growth. Teachers noted that STEP became a framework of reference that facilitated communications among ESL teachers, mainstream classroom teachers and school educators. They also noted increased workload, especially at schools with high ELLs populations, and expressed a need to tightly integrate STEP assessment into existing curriculum frameworks including the new assessment policy, Success for all.

Findings from more recent field studies point to the importance of three specific themes: first, the non-cognitive learner characteristics, such as students' goal orientations, literacy engagement level, as well as classroom learning environments, greatly influence their English proficiency development; second, teachers' instructional strategies and assessment competence are key to successful implementation of STEP assessment; third, classroom tasks used for STEP assessment need to be engaging and relevant to ELLs' personal experience.

Insofar as STEP draws teachers' attention to multiple opportunities to plan and execute learning tasks that provide a context for language behaviour that can be observed by real teachers in real classrooms, and insofar as teachers use the framework to inform their planning and practice (Earl & Katz, 2006; Littlewood, 2008), the STEP assessment framework represents an important step forward for developing and tracking students' communicative competence, as well as fostering teachers' assessment competence.

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Teachers have been an integral part of both the development and validation of the STEP assessment framework in Ontario. Creating optimal learning environments for school-aged ELLs is a challenging task for many teachers not only because they often lack training in ESL education but also because of the complexity of ELLs' language development that involves wide-ranging variables. STEP has provided Ontario educators and researchers with an excellent opportunity not only to understand the complexity of the phenomenon but also to support teachers' professional development. We look forward to continuing critical dialogue with policy makers, ESL teachers, mainstream content teacher, and school board educators to understand and respect the common vision of fostering students' language development and providing instructional support.



Courtesy of Rosa González

Current Issues in ESL Education

DR. YAN GUO, *Faculty of Education, University of Calgary*

Immigration is now the main source of Canada's population growth and the long-term prospect is continued growth (Statistics Canada, 2008). Almost 6,293,000 people, that is, about one out of every five people in Canada, speak languages other than English or French as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2008). This has very serious implications for official languages policy and education.

The number of ESL students in schools is growing rapidly. In Alberta, for example, there were 14,673 ESL students enrolled in provincial schools in 1989 and 71,541 in 2011 (Alberta Education, 2011). In BC, 34,176 ESL students in 1990 increased to 64,450 in 2010/11 (BC Ministry of Education, 2011). Yet, the educational success of ESL students in Canada is not assured. In Calgary, overall, 74 % of ESL students drop out of high school whereas those who entered Grade 9 with minimal English experience, dropped out at a rate of more than 90 % (Watt & Roessingh, 2001). Consequently, there is increasing awareness, concern, and even alarm among Canadian researchers about the failure of the school system to adequately respond and support the needs of ESL students (Ashworth, 2000; Derwing et al, 1999; Kouritzin & Mathews, 2002; Ngo, 2007; Toohey & Derwing, 2006).

Suggesting federal and provincial policies are flawed, many Canadian researchers, teachers and journalists, insist that a number of inconsistencies which limit rather than enhance ESL student success, in AB, BC, MB and ON: (1) funding caps; (2) the redirection of ESL funding to other expenses, such as utilities and maintenance; (3) a deficiency model which underlies the systemic discrimination of ESL students in schools and the flagrant disregard for their first languages and cultures; (4) lack of teacher preparation (Ashworth, 2000; Burnaby, 2008; Guo, 2011; Kouritzin & Mathews, 2002); and (5) the prevalence of ad-hoc, fragmented ESL programming (Beynon et al., 2005; Cummins, 2003; Guo, 2007; Hébert, Guo & Pellerin, 2008). These critiques are not unknown in other Canadian provinces.

Funding Caps

The funding cap for additional support for ESL is currently set at a maximum of five years in BC and seven years in Alberta. This cap is the "most recent example of a systemic, structural barrier to equitable treatment" (McCarthy & Fox, 2001, p. 6). ESL learners represent a wide range of needs such as refugee students who take longer than seven years to acquire academic English. Yet there exists no additional support for English language learners, such as there is for Learning Assistance or Gifted Education or French Immersion (Wild et al., 2007).

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Redirection of ESL Funding to Other Expenses:

Currently school districts receive \$1100.00 per Ministry-designated ESL student on top of the basic-per-student amount in British Columbia. Unfortunately, funding for ESL services is not targeted which means that school districts can easily redirect ESL funding to other programs (Wild et al., 2007). For example, in Toronto, some schools spent ESL funding on utilities and maintenance (Toronto Star, 2007, May 3). Most importantly, ESL service is not among government priorities. Effective September 1, 2011, enhanced ESL funding in Alberta has been discontinued (Alberta Education, 2011). As a result, there is not enough support for many ESL students.

Systemic Discrimination

Concerns over marginalization and racism are evident in teacher respondents in the BCTF's survey:

ESL is the subject of systemic discrimination in schools. Such discrimination is epitomized by practices such as room allocation (when ESL takes what is left after other needs are met) and by district and government in terms of funding. Such discrimination essentially means that, in view of the respondents, ESL/ESD provision has a lower status than most other teaching areas in schools, among district administrators and as reflected in government priorities. (Naylor, 1994, p. 2)

Parents and students in other studies also reported concerns of discrimination and racism (Gunderson, 2000; Guo, 2011). For example, a Muslim parent reported her son was called Osama bin Laden by his peers in his school (Guo, 2011). In Gunderson's (2000) study, about half of the respondents reported instances of racism.

Lack of Teacher Preparation

Given the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity of the Canadian population, existing teacher education programs cannot prepare sufficient numbers of teacher specialists for the ESL school population. This strongly suggests that all teachers need to be prepared for this population. Most teacher preparation programs, however, ignore the needs of ESL students and most classroom teachers have not received preparation to help ESL learners achieve their best. A recent report on ESL education in Ontario states:

The state of ESL in large, multi-ethnic school boards is abysmal, and, in essence, a betrayal of the public trust. The reality is that ESL students are denied access to supports necessary for their academic success. (Meyer, 2003, p.3)

Given the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity of the Canadian population, existing teacher education programs cannot prepare sufficient numbers of teacher specialists for the ESL school population.

This violates such students' equality rights as per the Canadian Charter. Furthermore, the number of urban elementary schools with ESL teachers has declined by 15 percent since 1998, despite an average 13.5 percent increase in the number of immigrants to urban Ontario in the same period. Although 81 percent of urban elementary schools report having ESL students, only 55 percent have ESL teachers (Blackett & Kidder, 2005). Approximately 47 percent of Toronto District School Board secondary students and 41 percent of elementary students have a language other than English as their first language. Nonetheless, fewer than 5 percent of the 1,300 graduate teachers of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education chose to take the ESL elective in any given year. Teaching English as a Second Language is not part of basic teacher training (Blackett & Kidder, 2005).

The policy recommendations are to remove the funding cap for ESL students and make sure the funding for ESL is accountable to providing ESL services. It is important to integrate ESL students' first languages and cultures in the curriculum and to offer antiracism education in the school system. In teacher education, it is high time to make an ESL course mandatory for all teacher candidates.



CHELO SEBASTIAN, HAMILTON ON

Along the Coast by Chelo Sebastian

A Teacher's Perspective on Writing for ESL Learners

JAN COATES, *author and teacher*

A few years ago, a Korean ESL school, Jeong Sang Language School (JLS), with offices in British Columbia, contacted me to ask if I would be interested in writing illustrated chapter books which would form the foundation of their ESL schools' curriculum, both in Canada and Korea. I was excited to have an opportunity to bring two of my life experiences (teaching and writing) together.



Courtesy of Rosa González

The wonderful thing about teaching English to second-language learners in Canada is that the students are truly immersed and eager to learn in order to interact with their English-speaking classmates.

I had taught ESL here in Nova Scotia, and I knew that experience would be an asset in writing for ESL learners. My observations about ESL teaching are specific to my local school; therefore, my perspective would be vastly different from that of teachers in major centres or in other countries, but many of the challenges faced by children as they attempt to acquire language skills are fairly typical everywhere.

When I was first hired to teach ESL, the Principal's sparse description of what I would be expected to do was, "help the students adjust to life in Canada, and teach them some English." An annual ESL workshop, put on by the school board, was a good opportunity to share resources and discover which methods had worked for other teachers, but it was through working with my students that I learned most of what I know, both about being an ESL teacher and an ESL learner.

The wonderful thing about teaching English to second-language learners in Canada is that the students are truly immersed and eager to learn in order to interact with their English-speaking classmates. My first group of students ranged in age from 5 to 14, and all of them had only a rudimentary knowledge of English. The Province of Nova Scotia provides a binder with a basic ESL assessment tool, *English as a Second Language (ESL): Oral Language Proficiency and Literacy Assessment*, which tests students' knowledge of

numbers, letters, classroom objects, body parts, clothing, food and family members. Through using that assessment tool, I immediately discovered that all my students were officially beginners, orally, and pre-beginners in terms of writing. Two of my students had emigrated from the Ukraine, and in addition to learning vocabulary, they also had to learn our alphabet as they had grown up speaking Russian and Ukrainian, which use the Cyrillic alphabet.

For the first few weeks, we worked on basic survival vocabulary; “I feel sick”, “Where is the washroom?”, “I don’t understand.” The school librarian gave me two picture dictionaries which became my primary tools for most of that first year. The illustrations made explaining both objects and actions easier, although we often still resorted to using pantomime and creating our own images.

Graded (American) National Reading Vocabulary lists became the core of my ESL curriculum. My students learned to use the new vocabulary words in sentences, both spoken and written, and, although spelling lists are verboten in today’s schools, because my students hadn’t been immersed in English from birth like their classmates, I insisted that spelling be an integral part of their ESL experience. Gradually, we moved on to verb tenses, which is an area of difficulty for ESL learners because so many English verbs are highly irregular.

Because writing is as essential a skill as speaking, each term we did a writing project; students loved playing with words in a poetry unit, especially writing rap poems, and took great pride in illustrating and polishing the final product.

Becoming part of the school community is often another of the many challenges facing ESL students, particularly before they’re able to communicate with other students. Inviting an English speaking student to join us for a session proved helpful, both as a means of encouraging friendships and giving Canadian born students an opportunity to learn about and appreciate the ESL student’s country of origin and hear a bit of Spanish, Russian or Dutch. Often, the parents of ESL students are also ESL learners, which not only makes communication between school and home difficult, but can also present a real barrier to community integration.

I spent a lot of time creating material and searching for resources on the internet. The website, <http://bogglesworldesl.com>, proved to be invaluable in providing endless material, worksheets and ideas, often on seasonal themes. For reinforcement activities, sites such as <http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com>, which allows users to create crossword puzzles and word search puzzles, were ideal.

Finding age appropriate, yet interesting, reading material was also difficult; hi-lo books, high interest, low reading level books for reluctant readers, are perfect, but not always available. As a writer with an opportunity to make a contribution to ESL learning, my primary goal is to create interesting stories with universal themes, while at the same time facilitating language acquisition.

I’ve now written eleven JLS books, ranging from 500 to 5000 words. Each of the seven

Finding age appropriate, yet interesting, reading material was also difficult; hi-lo books, high interest, low reading level books for reluctant readers, are perfect, but not always available.

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Resources of Interest

To contact the author, Jan Coates, whose recent book, *Hare in an Elephant's Trunk*, was shortlisted for the 2011 Governor General's Award in Children's Literature, please email coatesfamily@ns.sympatico.ca

Books for children and young adults: www.jan.coates.ca

ESL materials: <http://bogglesworldesl.com>

Puzzles and word searches: <http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com>

ESL Books by Jan Coates available:

The Impossible Dive: <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/vocab-ghost-the-impossible/id416954221?mt=8>

The Queen and Mr. Cunningham: <http://itunes.apple.com/qa/app/the-queen-and-mr-cunningham/id438170159?mt=8>

(JLS books are not generally available on the trade market, other than to JLS students)

different JLS levels has very specific writing guidelines. The plots must be simple, yet not so simple as to bore readers because the students must remain engaged in order to learn. For ESL story plots, I look for concepts relevant to children everywhere, and, for the most part, the children in the stories learn to solve their problems on their own, a basic tenet of children's literature.

In order to facilitate language acquisition, the vocabulary must be both age appropriate and at a readability level suitable for ESL learners. Books for the beginner levels are written primarily in the present tense, with the past, future and conditional gradually being included as the levels become increasingly difficult. The complexity of the sentences also increases from short and simple to more complicated sentences incorporating conjunctions and two or three clauses. In the higher level books, fewer illustrations are included; this encourages authors to use more descriptive writing, which in turn helps expand the reader's vocabulary.

My JLS books invariably include universal (or nearly universal) values such as kindness, honesty, integrity and determination. In *The Impossible Dive*, Chris struggles to overcome his fear of diving. What he learns about himself as he works to solve his problem is more important than the specific skill he is attempting to master.

Most of the editing focuses on simplifying the material to make it readily accessible to ESL learners at the target level. Sometimes, of course, cultural context must be taken into consideration, and the JLS editor very graciously helps me understand when pertinent changes are necessary. Generally speaking, helping children make sense of their world is often more about relationships and understanding themselves than it is about cultural norms and mores.

In each of my books, as in my work in the classroom, my overriding interest is in helping children become comfortable with the English language. Teaching and learning through story is a wonderful concept, and no doubt more appealing to learners than learning by memorization and rote!

A Letter to Teacher Candidates from A Spanish ESL Teacher

ROSA GONZÁLEZ, *teacher and education advisor, Madrid*

Since 1999, I have been working in Bilingual Education in Spain and specifically in the Madrid region, where I live. I am currently an Advisor for the Regional Government of Madrid, and so am able to foster Bilingual Education in state schools by sharing my experience and by training other pre-service and in-service teachers. Bilingual Education is a challenging field. It encompasses both Teaching English as a Second Language and content-based teaching through English for non-native speakers.

It takes a special kind of person to be a good teacher. Teaching requires a lot of personal commitment, sympathy, empathy and patience. It means putting yourself in the learner's shoes, analyzing how children want to be treated and taught, and avoiding making the same mistakes that you yourself suffered and criticized. You cannot pretend you enjoy working with children if you don't.

Teaching requires you to set goals. Look at your target and find your way there: what do I need to take children there? *How* do I do it? Focus your attention on the materials and resources you are going to use; careful planning of content and an adequate sequence of tasks will ensure that every step leads to the next one without leaving gaps in between. Our strength as Primary teachers is not only in what we teach, but in how we teach it. The smoother the teaching process, the better the learning outcome. I consider important to mention that teachers, especially the recently qualified ones, worry too much about having and preparing more and more resources. Sometimes we overload our children forgetting how much they appreciate repetition and the positive aspects of recycling and reusing in education. For this reason: keep it simple, choose your materials and exploit them in different ways, getting the most out of them through a variety of activities before

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Courtesy of Rosa González

Resources

Rosa González
(mrosa.gonzalez@madrid.org)

Samples of teaching materials:
www.educa.madrid.org (Portal Educativo > AICOLE)

Information about the programme:
www.madrid.org
(Temas > Educación > Bilingüismo)

Information on Language Assistants
www.educa.madrid.org/portal/web/auxiliares

Singing along to establish the class routines and including music and games in the content-based sessions, not only fosters children's listening skills and pronunciation but also helps them to acquire the knowledge we are presenting.

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moving to new ones. There are many resources on the internet but children, especially the younger children, need and prefer materials they can touch and feel. A simple experiment with real food in the classroom has twice the value of a Power Point presentation on the same topic.

How is it possible to attend to diversity when materials are limited, the group is large and the teacher is on his/her own? Maybe with a magic wand? Young learners love an attractive wrapping too, where knowledge seems "cool" and linked to art, music, movement and everything relevant to their experience, to their world. Singing along to establish the class routines and including music and games in the content-based sessions, not only fosters children's listening skills and pronunciation but also helps them to acquire the knowledge we are presenting.

Everything I have just mentioned makes even more sense and is more necessary when learning takes place in a language other than the child's mother tongue. Care in the planning and supervision of all the details of the teaching/learning process is even more crucial. It is the teacher's duty to ensure that content is broken down into small doses, that the content is in tune with the child's language level, and that it is made comprehensible. Lessons have to include the right level of challenge in order to help the children progress. Of course, a teacher always finds support in resources and textbooks, but materials inevitably need adapting to meet the group's needs.

In the bilingual classroom, the learning framework and atmosphere, which is full of linguistic and socio-cultural references to the language of communication, is doubly rich. Having the children actively involved in creating culturally relevant resources for an exhibition will increase interest and expand their understanding. In addition to the obvious advantages of being able to write and speak in English, bilingual education in Madrid has been proven to contribute to the general development of the child. That in itself is a reason for making this educational option a reality in more countries, to promote the linguistic and cultural enrichment of children and young people in a globalised world.

Our bilingual programme is expanding and improving. In Madrid, the 2011-12 school year will start with 276 Primary and 64 Secondary Schools offering bilingual education in Spanish and English to about 100,000 six to fourteen year-old students. That is a true challenge for the regional institution, for teachers, for students and also for the Language Assistants who help us. It is a challenge that we take on enthusiastically and full of energy.

I would like to close these lines with Henry Brooks Adams' words:

*"A teacher affects eternity, [s]he can never tell
where [her] his influence stops."*



"Sun Voyager" by Jón Gunnar Árnason, Reykjavik, Iceland

PHOTO: SANDRA MCCANCE