

ESL: Harmful or Helpful?

Research Question

How does school as an institution influence the identity formation of new immigrants or non-English speaking Canadians? Do outreach programs such as ESL create more alienation than assistance?

Abstract

- The purpose of this research is to investigate if the Ontario regulated ESL/ELL programs assist non-English speaking students in their engagement and identity formation, or if they create further alienation. It is my wish to understand if the separated nature of these programs affect socialization and relationship building with peers.

Methods:

- In order to investigate the research question I performed three semi-structured interviews individually with each participant that ranged from 30-45 min.
- These interviews were conducted in Toronto, Ontario with three adult women, two who has previously engages in ESL and one with a teacher in the Toronto Catholic board

Investigating Youth Identity Formation and Socialization



What is the ESL/ELD Program?

- In Ontario, the ESL programs are geared to encourage the students to be assessed in a modified manner to understand their placement level.
- There is also encouragement for the student to use their native tongue as much as necessary
- The ESL program also emphasizes a case to case basis, no two ESL children will need the same modifications, expecting every teacher to be flexible in applying the program for every student

Findings:

- Based on the information gleaned from the research and interviews, it is evident that the ESL program is not perfect and it can have negative effects on identity formation, just not in the ways that were initially anticipated.
- Age/school year matters in the experience
- The interviewees had conflicting experiences with ESL – both came from Euro-centric languages (Spanish and Portuguese)
- Although ESL programs are supposed to aid students' interactions, for the interviewee that had a negative experience, and made her more nervous and reserved to speak out

Conclusion:

- The ESL program in Ontario is not perfect and clearly rooted in Euro-centric historical contexts, but has some positive elements
- The program does offer flexibility for assessment and transition time, whereas other provinces (such as Nova Scotia only offer 1 to 2 terms of transition)
- However, because of this flexibility, there is also very little regulation and is up to the teachers to administer, leading to differing experiences of students