

Exploring Oral History Methodology as a Culturally Responsive Way to Support the Writing Development of Secondary English Language Learners

*M. Kristiina Montero, Wilfrid Laurier University
Maria A. Rossi, Upper Grand District School Board¹*

Oral history methods have been used extensively in classroom contexts since the late 1960s to promote the study of social studies and history at middle, secondary, and post-secondary levels. Oral history methodology, focusing on English language learners' personal stories, has received little attention in research or practice. Through an instrumental case study we explored areas of writing development that could be addressed by drawing on oral history methods with secondary English language learners. Sixteen students from 13 different countries participated in topical oral history interviews about their lived immigration and schooling experiences. Students edited and revised their transcripts to produce written narratives for publication in a class book. We found that students more readily focused on revising the content and form of their narratives when treating the transcripts as an initial draft of their writing; the transcript alleviated the cognitive constraints of producing an initial rough draft. In their revisions, students conducted additional research to clarify content and attended specifically to the form of the narrative to ensure that their ideas were clearly communicated. Based on our research findings, we argue that drawing on oral history methods contributes to a culturally responsive pedagogical practice for working with English language learners that validates the students' lived histories by legitimizing their stories as a content to be studied in the ESL classroom.

¹ M. Kristiina Montero, PhD., is Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Canada. Her research focuses on storied understandings of experiences as accessed through oral history research methodologies and other narrative approaches. She is particularly interested in the language and literacy experiences of students of limited prior schooling. Maria A. Rossi, B.A., B.Ed., is an Ontario certified secondary school teacher in the Upper Grand School District in Ontario, Canada. She has been teaching for nearly 15 years and has dedicated the better part of her career to working with English language learners at a variety of levels.

The use of oral history methods in the classroom have largely been explored and promoted as a way to examine social studies and history at all levels—middle, secondary, and post-secondary.² In these learning contexts, students take on the role of oral historian and study a local and/or global topic by interviewing members of the local community to obtain a local perspective on the larger topic being examined. The potential for using oral history methods with younger students (middle, secondary, and university undergraduates) lies in its ability to increase students' motivation to learn by "injecting the community into the learning process."³ Teachers' first attempts to involve students in oral history work were done primarily through collaborations between teachers and local grassroots oral history projects. The most famous of such endeavours was the *Foxfire Project*, started by Eliot Wigginton in 1966 as an integrated, student-directed English language arts and social studies project that had students document the culture of southern Appalachia in the United States using oral history methods.⁴

What made the Foxfire Project unique at the time was the publication of the students' collected oral histories in *The Foxfire Magazine*. The dissemination of an authentic product resulting from the work involved in an oral history project is critical to using oral history methods in instructional contexts. In order for such projects to be successful, students need to feel that they are doing real work and that this work is important.⁵ The student oral historian needs to believe that her or his work is authentic, that it moves beyond an academic exercise and is significant not only to the historical memory of the local community, but has the potential to extend to national and international communities as well.

Web technology can and does facilitate the publication of grassroots oral history endeavours. It has already been shown to be a valuable mechanism to

¹ For examples see, Larry E. Hudson and Ellen Durrigan Santora, "Oral History: An Inclusive Highway to the Past," *History Teacher* 36, no. 2 (2003): 206-220; John Forrest and Elisabeth Jackson, "Get Real: Empowering the Student through Oral History," *Oral History Review* 18, no. 1 (1990): 29-44; John A. Neuenschwander, *Oral History as a Teaching Approach* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1976); Michael H. Ebner, "Students as Oral Historians," *History Teacher* 9, no. 2 (1976) 196-201; Irma M. Olmedo, "Junior Historians: Doing Oral History with ESL and Bilingual Students," *TESOL Journal* 2, no. 4 (1993): 7-10; James Hoopes, *Oral History: An Introduction for Students* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Timothy P. Fong and Ava F. Kahn, "An Educational Exchange: Teaching Oral History on the Post-secondary Level," *Oral History Review* 25, no. 1/2 (1998): 9-34; Shelley Stagg Peterson, "Teaching Content with the Help of Writing Across the Curriculum," *Middle School Journal* 39, no. 2 (2007): 26-33; Living Legacies Historical Foundation, "Tell Me Your Stories: An Oral History Curriculum that Involves Students from Middle School through College with their Family and Community," Living Legacies Historical Foundation, <http://www.tellmeyourstories.org>.

³ Neuenschwander, *Oral History as a Teaching Approach*, quoted material on p. 3.

⁴ The Foxfire Fund Inc., "Foxfire 1966-2011," Foxfire Fund, Inc., <http://www.foxfire.org>.

⁵ Than Stitton, George L. Mehaffy, and Orzo L. Davis Jr., *Oral History: A Guide for Teachers (and Others)* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983).

disseminate information on oral history methodology to professional as well as amateur oral historians.⁶ Web technology can provide a relatively cost-effective way to disseminate both completed and/or on-going oral history projects conducted by international and national organisations as well as projects undertaken by local historical societies and/or schools. Ethical concerns, such as issues of confidentiality and privacy of information, must be attended to when publishing oral history documents online; however, once these issues are addressed, publishing on the Web validates the students, their participants, and the communities in which their work was conducted. A case in point might be the Foxfire Project when the world came to learn of the rich cultures of Appalachia first in print, and now online.⁷

Using Oral History Methods as a Culturally Responsive Practice

Using English language learners' (ELLs) personal stories, obtained through oral history and/or life history methods, in second language learning contexts has received relatively little attention in research or practice.⁸ Considering the social responsibilities and possibilities of oral history methodology, its use can benefit individuals who are traditionally and historically marginalised within and/or disenfranchised from dominant-culture and society because of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, and/or religion. One of the purposes of oral history is "to offer a voice to the unheard and unseen."⁹ Considering oral history methods in second language acquisition research has the potential to include marginalised voices in a larger conversation about ELLs' specific needs in second language learning contexts and to ground instruction in their personal testimonials.¹⁰

Oral history methods can also engage students and teachers in culturally responsive pedagogy, a theoretical framework congruent with many overarching principles of oral history. According to Gay, a leader in multicultural educational theory and practice, culturally responsive pedagogy

lifts the veil of presumed absolute authority from conceptions of scholarly truth typically taught in schools. It helps students realize that no single version of "truth" is total and permanent. Nor should it

⁶ Mary A. Larson, "Potential, Potential, Potential: The Marriage of Oral History and the World Wide Web," *Journal of American History* 88, no. 2 (2001): 596-603.

⁷ The Foxfire Fund Inc., <http://www.foxfire.org>.

⁸ Sandra G. Kouritzin, "Bringing Life to Research: Life History Research and ESL," *TESL Canada Journal* 17, no. 2 (2000): 1-35; Pat Rigg, "Whole Language in TESOL," *TESOL Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1991): 521-42; Bonnie J. Nicholas, Marian J. Rossiter, and Marilyn L. Abbott, "The Power of Story in the ESL Classroom," *The Canadian Modern Language Review* 67, no. 2 (2011): 247-68.

⁹ Kenneth Howarth, *Oral History: A Handbook* (Phoenix Mill, UK: Sutton, 1998), v.

¹⁰ Kouritzin, "Bringing Life to Research."

be allowed to exist uncontested. These learning engagements encourage and enable students to find their own voice, to contextualize issues in multiple cultural perspectives, to engage in more ways of knowing and thinking, and to become more active participants in shaping their own learning.¹¹

Culturally responsive pedagogy functions from a multicompetent¹² perspective that rejects a deficit view of students' knowledge, or lack thereof. In practice, culturally responsive pedagogy is validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory.¹³ This pedagogy validates students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles to make learning encounters more relevant and effective. Using oral history methodology to support ELLs' language development in general and writing development specifically, actively incorporates the students' voices into their English language learning process thereby validating the students as learners, but also as valued members of the classroom and school communities.

Using Oral History Methods to Alleviate Cognitive Constraints of Writing on English Language Learners

Language Experience Approach (LEA)¹⁴ is both a philosophy and a method of teaching reading¹⁵ largely built on the principle that reading begins with a child's own language. When transcribed, the child's language can be used effectively for reading instruction purposes. LEA is generally operationalised with Van Allen's oft-quoted conceptualization of the literacy approach: What I can read, I can talk about.

¹¹ Geneva Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010), 38.

¹² Multicompetent and multicompetence are terms coined by Vivian Cook in 1991 (citation follows) to address what he perceived to be the field of formal linguistics' inability to address the language competence of users of more than one language. For further reading about multicompetence, see the following articles: Vivian J. Cook, "The Poverty-of-the Stimulus Argument and Multicompetence," *Second Language Research* 7, no. 2 (1991): 103-117; Vivian J. Cook, "Going Beyond the Native Speaker in Language Teaching," *TESOL Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1999): 185-209; Joan Kelly Hall, An Cheng, and Matthew T. Carlson, "Reconceptualizing Multicompetence as a Theory of Language Knowledge," *Applied Linguistics* 27, no. 2 (2006): 220-40.

¹³ Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*.

¹⁴ Russell G. Stauffer, *The Language-Experience Approach to the Teaching of Reading* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); Roach Van Allen, *Language Experiences in Communication* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1976).

¹⁵ Steven A. Stahl and Patricia A. Miller, "Whole Language and Language Experience Approaches for Beginning Reading: A Quantitative Research Synthesis," *Review of Educational Research* 59, no. 1 (1989): 87-116.

What I can say, I can write (or someone can write about). What I can write, I can read. I can read what others write for me to read.¹⁶ Oral language and real-life experiences have been used as a basis for teaching literacy skills and practices to children¹⁷ and adults,¹⁸ including second language learners.¹⁹ However, LEA, as traditionally conceived,²⁰ emphasises reading instruction (e.g., word recognition, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension) over writing. The conceptual framework of the approach, however, can be applied in writing instruction, particularly among struggling writers, including English language learners.

Not all ELLs are struggling writers. Regardless of this important fact, many ELLs score poorly on writing segments of standardised tests,²¹ which suggests that more attention needs to be given to their writing development. Generally speaking, little attention has been given to adolescent ELLs' writing development.²² Considering struggling writers in general, research shows that many have difficulty writing down their thoughts using the registers of formal written language or understanding the speech-to-print connection.²³ Transcribing oral language to printed

¹⁶ Van Allen, *Language Experiences in Communication*; Roach Van Allen, "Using Language Experiences in Beginning Reading: How a Language Experience Program Works," in *Practical Classroom Applications of Language Experience: Looking Back, Looking Forward*, ed. Olga G. Nelson and Wayne M. Linek (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1999): 41-47.

¹⁷ For examples see, Mary Anne Hall, *The Language Experience Approach for Teaching Reading: A Research Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1977); Van Allen, "Using Language Experiences in Beginning Reading."

¹⁸ For examples see, Joann Crandall and Joy Kreeft Peyton, *Approaches to Adult ESL Literacy Instruction* (Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1993); Nicholas, Rossiter, and Abbott, "The Power of Story in the ESL Classroom."

¹⁹ For examples see, Denise D. Nessel and Carol N. Dixon, *Language Experience Approach with English Language Learners: Strategies for Engaging Students and Developing Literacy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2008); Carol N. Dixon and Denise D. Nessel, *Language Experience Approach to Reading (and Writing)* (Hayward, CA: Alemany Press, 1983); Jana Echevarría, MaryEllen Vogt, and Deborah J. Short, *Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model*, 3rd ed. (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 2008); Joel E. Dworin, "The Family Stories Project: Using Funds of Knowledge for Writing," *Reading Teacher* 59, no. 6 (2006): 510-20; Claudia Sanchez, "Learning about Students' Culture and Language through Family Stories Elicited by Dichos," *Early Childhood Education Journal* 37, no. 2 (2009): 161-69; Nicholas, Rossiter, and Abbott, "The Power of Story in the ESL Classroom."

²⁰ Stauffer, *The Language-Experience Approach*; Van Allen, *Language Experiences in Communication*; Hall, *The Language Experience Approach for Teaching Reading*.

²¹ Nancy Cloud, Fred Genesee, and Else Hamayan, *Literacy Instruction for English Language Learners: A Teacher's Guide to Research-based Practices* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2009).

²² Carolyn Panofsky et al., *Approaches to Writing Instruction for Adolescent English Language Learners* (Providence, RI: Education Alliance at Brown University, 2005).

²³ Steve Graham and Karen R. Harris, "Prevention and Intervention for Struggling Writers" in *Interventions for Academic and Behavior Problems II: Preventative and Remedial Approaches*, ed. Mark R. Shinn, Hill M. Walker, and Gary Stoner (Washington, DC: National Association of School Psychologists, 2002).

text, as done in the Language Experience Approach, has been shown useful to help struggling writers better understand the speech-to-print connection, understand the complexities of language used in formal writing, and contribute to establishing and/or strengthening their identities as writers.²⁴

Transcribing students' oral language to printed text may also help to alleviate some of the cognitive processing demands associated with slow transcription skills and lack of application of purposeful before-, during-, and after-writing strategies. These include concept maps, brainstorming, producing drafts, editing, revising, and publishing. Writing involves many complex cognitive processes; consequently, teachers may need to minimize concurrent demands on their students' cognitive resources in order to facilitate the development of writing maturity. Stress on higher-level processing mechanisms is reduced when writers automatise low-level skills associated with handwriting or keyboarding, and spelling; develop skills to maximize transient memory resource efficiency; and use strategic steps to reduce the number of processes to be juggled during composition.²⁵ In their efforts to support all writers, teachers should address these key areas within their literacy programs. In addition to these effective literacy practices, using transcribed versions of oral text can explicitly teach second language writers about the organization/internal logic and cohesion required in a written document, an area identified as lacking in ESL pedagogy.²⁶

Project Overview and Context of the Study

With the increased acceptance of globally displaced children and youth to Canada through the Government Assisted Refugee Program, the face of the "traditional" English language learner is rapidly changing in the K-12 setting. Increasingly more congregated ESL classrooms include students who have suffered through wars and social trauma, have lived a portion of their lives in refugee camps, or have lived in some other form of exile while waiting to resettle in a country such as Canada. Many of these students have not had the opportunity to attend school on a regular basis, if at all. Consequently, these students have particular language, literacy and academic needs that many secondary school ESL teachers are underprepared to address.²⁷

²⁴ Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, "Writing Instruction for Struggling Adolescent Readers: A Gradual Release Model," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 46, no. 5 (2003): 396-405.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Beth Hartman and Elaine Tarone, "Preparation for College Writing: Teachers Talk about Writing Instruction for Southeast Asian American Students in Secondary School," in *Generation 1.5 Meets College Composition*, ed. Linda Harklau, Kay M. Losey, and Meryl Siegel (Mahwah, NJ: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, 1999).

²⁷ Martha H. Bigelow, *Mogadishu on the Mississippi* (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2010); Jan Stewart, *Supporting Refugee Children: Strategies for Educators* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2010); M. Kristiina Montero et al., "Local literacies, Global Visions: Documenting the

Therefore, along with the change in demographics, comes a need for teachers to adapt their pedagogy to address the specific learning needs of students with limited and/or interrupted prior schooling.

The purpose of this study was to explore areas of writing development that could be addressed by drawing on oral history methods in an instructional context with secondary school English language learners, many of whom had a history of limited and/or interrupted education. Additionally, we wanted to explore how engaging students in a focused interview about their lived experiences could serve as a culturally responsive pedagogical tool that would authentically access students' funds of knowledge²⁸ and make this knowledge more visible in the mainstream school context. Many ESL and general content area teachers are less familiar with the diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, and ethnic traditions of their English language learners, particularly of those who are from lesser known countries and who come with varying degrees of mother tongue literacy and prior schooling. By encouraging students to talk, write about, and publish their life stories others might gain insight into these students' lives and gain knowledge to validate their prior sources of knowledge.

An instrumental case study²⁹ done in the spirit of classroom action research³⁰ was conducted in a level four (out of five) ESL classroom in Ontario, Canada. An instrumental case study is appropriate for the purposes defined in this research because, by definition, an instrumental case study is undertaken to provide insight into a specific issue. In this case, the study's purpose was to provide insight into how using age-appropriate, culturally relevant materials could *extend* the oral, and more specifically, the written language proficiencies of English language learners. The work was done as action research because Rossi, the ESL classroom teacher, identified her desire to improve her teaching practice as well as her students' writing development. Rossi described her students as having good basic communicative interpersonal language skills, but needing to significantly improve their writing skills in a school setting because they were just "two classes away from entering mainstream curricular classes." The students needed to demonstrate their ability to

Learning Histories of Students of Interrupted Formal Education Using Oral History Methodology" (paper presented at the 58th National Reading Conference, Albuquerque, NM, December 2009).

²⁸ "Funds of knowledge" is a term used to refer to the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well being." It is used in instructional contexts to capitalise on household and other community resources.

Luis C. Moll et al., "Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms," *Theory Into Practice* 31, no. 2 (1992): 132-41, quoted material on p. 133.

²⁹ Robert E. Stake, "Qualitative Case Studies," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005): 443-66.

³⁰ Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart, "Participatory Action Research," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000): 567-605.

M. Kristiina Montero and Maria A. Rossi, "Exploring Oral History Methodology as a Culturally Responsive Way to Support the Writing Development of Secondary English Language Learners," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 32 (2012), Special Issue "Making Educational Oral Histories in the 21st Century"

7

succeed in courses taught by content specialists with little training and/or experience in second language acquisition pedagogy.

Within the context of Rossi's multi-aged, level four (out of five) open enrollment ESL course, Montero worked with sixteen students over a period of four months. The students varied in age from fourteen to twenty-one and hailed from thirteen different countries, including Afghanistan, China, Ethiopia, India, Malaysia, Mexico, The Netherlands, Pakistan, The Republic of Congo, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Vietnam. Of the sixteen students, eleven had a history of interrupted and/or limited prior schooling. The Ministry of Education³¹ second language curricular document for secondary-level English describes the ESL, level four open course in which these students were enrolled as follows:

This course prepares students to use English with increasing fluency and accuracy in classroom and social situations and to participate in Canadian society as informed citizens. Students will develop the oral-presentation, reading, and writing skills required for success in all school subjects. They will extend listening and speaking skills through participation in discussions and seminars; study and interpret a variety of grade-level texts; write narratives, articles, and summaries in English; and respond critically to a variety of print and media texts.

Specifically related to the curriculum, we focused our attention on having students engage in the writing process by using pre-writing strategies, producing drafts, revising, editing, and publishing. The aim was to develop skills needed to organize ideas clearly and accurately for academic purposes as supported by the content of their oral texts.

Furthermore, we intended to help students see themselves as writers in order to increase their level of engagement with writing³² while also reducing the cognitive load required in creating the first draft of writing. We functioned under the assumption that the students were able to communicate more fluidly orally than in writing, as supported by Cummins' theory of BICS/CALP.³³ Cummins draws a

³¹ Ministry of Education, *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 to 12: English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development* (Toronto, Canada: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2007), <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/esl912currb.pdf>.

³² Cheryl L. Spaulding, "The Motivation to Read and Write," in *Reading/Writing Connections: Learning from Research*, ed. Judith W. Irwin and Mary Anne Doyle (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1992): 177-201.

³³ Jim Cummins, "Linguistic Interdependence and the Educational Development of Bilingual Children," *Review of Educational Research* 49 (1979): 121-29; Jim Cummins, "The Acquisition of English as a Second Language," in *Kids Come in All Languages: Reading Instruction for ESL*

distinction between two kinds of language proficiency—Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS are the language skills needed for day-to-day social conversation purposes, including communication with teachers. CALP refers to the formal language skills required to demonstrate academic competence both orally and in writing at a level commensurate with that of native-speaking peers.

ELLs' school success depends on their being proficient in the language of classroom instruction and textbooks.³⁴ Assuming reasonable literacy abilities in the student's dominant language, the average student will take approximately two to three years to develop BICS and five to seven years to develop CALP. The time to develop BICS and CALP is longer for students with limited and/or interrupted formal education. Many parents/guardians of ELLs and some teachers erroneously believe that students who are able to use English to communicate in simple social settings are adequately prepared to succeed in academic classes without second language and literacy support.³⁵ It is imperative that students, their teachers, and parents/guardians understand the general differences in rhetoric, structure, and vocabulary between the language required for basic interpersonal communication and the language required for academic success. Moreover, the skills required for academic success demand additional time and instructional support.

Using the transcript of the oral text as instructional scaffolding, we asked the students to notice the differences between their oral and written language, thereby explicitly addressing the speech-to-print connection. The transcript allowed students to focus on the editing and revising process and provided them with an opportunity to achieve a published final draft. In a writing-on-demand era where little time is dedicated to seeing a piece of writing through to final copy, students are often misled to believe that writing is finished after the first, or possibly, the second draft. Although seeing a piece of writing through to publication and/or presentation is a necessary component of the writing process, it is often neglected due to perceived time and curricular constraints. Using the transcribed versions of the students' personal stories as an initial draft may open up instructional time so that the teacher can help students see the writing process through to completion.

Students, ed. K. Spangenberg-Urbschat and Robert Pritchard (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 1994): 36-62; Jim Cummins, "Reading and the Bilingual Student: Fact and Friction," in *English Learners: Reading the Highest Level of English Literacy*, ed. Gilbert G. García (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2003): 2-33.

³⁴ Louise C. Wilkinson and Elaine R. Silliman, "Academic Language Proficiency and Literacy Instruction in Urban Settings," in *Improving Literacy Achievement in Urban Schools: Critical Elements in Teacher Preparation*, ed. Louise C. Wilkinson, Lesly Mandel Morrow, and Victoria Chou (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2009): 121-42.

³⁵ Lee Gunderson, "Voices of the Teenage Diasporas," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 43 (2000): 692-706.

M. Kristiina Montero and Maria A. Rossi, "Exploring Oral History Methodology as a Culturally Responsive Way to Support the Writing Development of Secondary English Language Learners," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 32 (2012), Special Issue "Making Educational Oral Histories in the 21st Century"

Validating the students' personal stories in a second language learning context is not necessarily a novel idea. We acknowledge that many practicing ESL teachers draw on students' stories to support their instruction and student learning. What we believe is different about this study is that the students in Rossi's level four ESL class were the subjects of the oral history interview and their transcribed oral text was the content used to develop their written language. The focus of this project is different from the ways oral history methods have been traditionally used to support the teaching of social studies and history curricula, as noted earlier. Rather than use another's story, these students were given the opportunity to use their own stories as a vehicle for second language and literacy learning. To our knowledge, this instrumental case study may be the first to document how ELLs' writing development might benefit from drawing on oral history methods and the principles of the Language Experience Approach.

Data Collection Tools and Methods

Qualitative research methods were employed throughout this instrumental case study, including semi-structured and unstructured interviews, collection of observational data, and student work samples. To set up the oral history project, Montero and Rossi co-constructed instructional activities: dialogic learning opportunities that led to discussion and writing opportunities using poetry, photography, and the students' novel study text. These supported and connected the creation of written narratives based on the students' oral histories (See Figure 1).

To get a better understanding of the students' perceptions of writing in academic and non-academic contexts, we began the project by administering the Garfield Writing Attitude Survey.³⁶ The norm-referenced assessment measures students' attitudes toward writing and is applicable to students from kindergarten through grade twelve. In our analysis of the writing attitude survey, we focused on the areas of writing that generated the most negative responses. We used results from the assessment to plan our oral history project, heeding Kear et al's warning that "collecting data about students' attitudes toward writing is meaningless unless the information is used to plan instruction."³⁷ Four categories emerged as areas in which over 60 percent of the students responded with either levels one or two, indicating an overall negative attitude. All four categories had to do with writing as related to school-based tasks: writing a story instead of doing homework, writing a story instead of watching TV, writing a long story or report in school, or keeping a journal for class. Therefore, our project explicitly aimed to make school-based writing

³⁶ Dennis Kear et al., "Measuring Attitude Toward Writing: A New Tool for Teachers," *Reading Teacher* 54, no. 1 (2000): 10-23.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

activities more relevant to the students' lives both inside and outside of formal schooling.

Using a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A), Montero engaged each student in a topic-specific oral history interview about their immigration and schooling experiences. Interviews lasted anywhere between thirty to ninety minutes. All interviews were conducted in English, with the exception of one interview that was conducted in both English and French. The oral texts were transcribed and copies of individual transcripts were given to each student. The interview transcripts were used as the first draft of the students' writing products. We used Labov and Waletzky's³⁸ structural framework of a complete narrative (abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda) to guide students through reorganizing their oral texts to approximate the structure of Western narratives privileged in mainstream English-language instructional settings. We struggled as to whether or not we would impose this structure, but reconciled that in doing so, we were teaching the students part of the "power code"³⁹ of successful academic writing in mainstream schooling.

At the outset, students were told that the final project was to create an anthology of their writing and prepare a short presentation for interested peers and school faculty. We hoped that publishing their work, albeit informally, would add another layer of motivation to the writing experience. For most students, the prospect of producing a publication served as an external motivator, and for some, the motivation came as hind-sight. For example, after seeing the compilation of narratives one student, Bilal, said, "Had I known we were making such a beautiful book, I would have tried harder." Once the project was completed, we administered an informal post-experience survey to obtain feedback on how the students experienced the oral history project (see Appendix B).

³⁸ William Labov and Joshua Waletzky, "Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience," *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 7 (1997/1967): 3-38.

³⁹ Lisa Delpit, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (New York: The New Press, 1995).

Figure 1. Overview of Project Implementation



Findings

The topical oral histories collected on the students' immigration and schooling experiences deserve analytical space in and of themselves, to explore how the students experience schooling in a Canadian context compared to their schooling experiences in their home countries or while in transit to Canada. However, the purpose of this project was to explore the potential of using oral history methods to support English language learners' writing development. The findings that follow are based on an analysis of observational records and debriefing conversations between Rossi, the classroom teacher and Montero, the university-based researcher, as the students worked through their oral history transcripts to piece together a narrative of their choosing. The focus of our observations was on how the students engaged in editing and revising their transcripts for public consumption and the qualities of text to which they attended.

When the students received their oral history transcripts, which ranged in page length from thirty to sixty pages, students were immediately impressed by the length of the text. Students expressed surprise over the length of the written document such as, "I didn't know that I could write so much," "Wow, I really talked a lot!" "I was surprised to see thirty pages of my words. My transcript was longer than I thought it would be." We asked students to read over their transcripts and pick a "story" that they wanted to edit and revise in preparation for publication in the class book.

When students were asked to focus on refining a topic of their choosing, we found that this opportunity helped students pay attention to the content of their narrative, its organization/internal logic, as well as its form. From the start, it was clear that the students focused on the meaning of their narrative over the form. As they started to engage in revisions of content, they began to realize that in order to communicate their thoughts clearly, they had to adhere to a given form. Lastly, because the oral history narratives highlighted students' backgrounds and prior experiences, reading them allowed teachers to better understand their students while creating a space for teachers to question them. In order to illustrate the aforementioned insights, we will draw on student examples, highlighting particular learning and teaching situations.

Addressing Miscommunications in Oral Interactions

Germini (pseudonym), a seventeen-year-old female of Chauzhou heritage from Vietnam, had difficulty expressing her thoughts orally to an English-speaker due to her pronunciation and syntax, as influenced by her mother tongues, and limited content-specific vocabulary. In the interview, Germini was trying to explain her linguistic and ethnic identity, and became frustrated because the interviewer had

difficulty understanding the content of her speech. Germini was attempting to tell the interviewer about her world, but her lack of content-specific vocabulary impeded her ability to tell her history.

- Germini: Because my mother tongue it's /siaodones/, you know, China they have a lot of language. I think it may be ten language of Chinese like Taiwan is it's one. Hong Kong speak one it's called Cantonese from Hong Kong, and in China they speak Mandarin, so we are /siaodones/ and Taiwan is Hokkien. That one is like mixed the Taiwan it's mixed some with the Mandarin and some of the /siaodonese/.
- Kristiina: So your mother tongue is /sss/ (unable to recall the word uttered)
- Germini: /siaodones/
Kristiina: /siaodones/
Germini: Yeah. You want me to write it?
Kristiina: I would like you to write it. (Germini writes *Chaozhounese* on a piece of paper). Uh huh, okay, I got that all wrong. So this is your mother tongue.
- Germini: Yeah. Because we speak /siadones/ and really the way I live in Vietnam in my neighborhood like Chinese, Vietnamese all – more of them in Chinese and now we also – I also speak a little bit Mandarin and a little bit Cantonese, just a little bit.

Montero knew little about the Chaozhou people, their culture, and language. Germini had difficulty explaining that she was a multigenerational member of the Chaozhou Diaspora living in Vietnam and that her language was a dialect of Cantonese. Montero was not able to contribute much to support Germini's efforts other than to ask clarifying questions. After spending some time researching web-based material, the student found descriptions of her language and ethnic culture. Working together, Germini and the researchers found vocabulary (including spellings used in Standard English) and contextual information that helped Germini better communicate her knowledge of the Chaozhou people and their languages.

As Germini and Montero talked about the connection between her oral and written texts, Germini recognised parts of the text that needed revision to clarify her thoughts and make the text more accessible to the non-expert reader. Germini needed to distinguish her mother tongue from a multitude of Chinese languages and dialects while also identifying her membership in the Chaozhou Diaspora living in Vietnam. She realised that in order to talk about her ethnic and linguistic identity effectively,

she had to differentiate herself from Mandarin and Cantonese language communities that are so often associated with “Chinese language and culture.” Germini realised that she needed to explain her identity by stating what it was in relation to what the general public may know about Chinese cultures. Germini also needed to find the proper spelling of *Hokkien* and *Chaozhou* or *Shantou* in order to provide readers of her text the opportunity to learn more about her cultural, ethnic, and linguistic background.

In the editing process, Germini had to make choices about what to include and exclude from the final written product. For example, Germini chose not to include her thoughts about her lack of Vietnamese national identity. She emphasised that she was not Vietnamese even though she was born in Vietnam: “I think I identify on Chinese because we are Chinese, and I don’t really like Vietnam people.” She chose to exclude this line because it could have been perceived negatively by potential Vietnamese readers, and she did not want to insult and/or defame the Vietnamese community. When students were asked to transform their oral texts into written texts for public consumption, they became more aware of the permanence and power of the written word and edited the text accordingly.

Encouraging Further Exploration of Missing Content

As Montero interviewed another student, Bilal (pseudonym), she asked him what he found difficult about learning in English and he said, “[I am] having trouble with grammar, that’s it...I messed up past and present. I use past and present together. That’s why I’m having trouble, so I need to fix that.” To address his concerns, Montero asked, “Tell me something about your life in Pakistan that you can tell me in past tense.” He began to talk about his grandmother’s premonition when his mother was pregnant with him. He told skeletal stories, without many supporting details and when probed for more information, he said,

She used to tell me a lot of stories, but I forgot. She used to tell me about a guy, a man that used to be a demon monster and he had a brother that has souls, like if he near to fire his heart just melts. She used to tell me those kinds of stories. A lot of stories, but I forgot them all.

As Bilal presented more skeletal stories that he had in his memory, he suggested, “I’ll ask my mum. She knows about it. She might have good memories.” Montero encouraged him to ask his mother to help him fill in some of the gaps present in his own memory. His written narrative developed two stories that his grandmother would tell him as a child. These stories were framed with an introduction about his

grandmother and a conclusion that expressed how he appreciated her and missed her tremendously since her passing.

The opportunity for students to examine their oral text along with the interviewer's probes gave them the opportunity to think about the missing details they wanted to include in the final product. While some of the missing details were added as a result of probing from the interviewer, some missing information was added because the student did not know how to answer a question during the initial interview and conducted additional research. Interviewing others in order to revise for missing content may lay a foundation for future oral history work in second language learning contexts.

Promoting Language Understanding and Writing Skills through Oral History Projects

Our overarching research goal was to understand the potential of using oral history methods to contribute to students' writing development and/or sense of being a writer. At the end of the semester, once the students had received a copy of the compilation of narratives, we administered an informal written exit survey consisting of eight open-ended questions that students completed anonymously (see appendix B). Throughout the project, students voiced their overall positive opinions about the project, but we wanted to have more insight about their perspectives and for this reason, we solicited an anonymous review of the project. Thirteen of the sixteen students were present on the day we administered the survey.

In response to questions one and two, "What did you learn from the oral history writing project?" and "What did you learn about yourself from the oral history writing project?" six of the thirteen students (or 46 percent) specifically addressed their awareness of the difference between oral and written text: "Talk different than we write"; "I learned that what we say and when it's written it doesn't make any sense sometimes"; "I learn that I don't taught [talk] very convincing [sic] like my words or sentences sometimes doesn't make sense. And my grammar is bad"; and "I learned what I oral say and is written is different"; "I speak differently"; "When I talk is different from what I write."

In response to question five, "What do you think about the writing process of the oral history writing project?" eight of the thirteen students said that being interviewed contributed to their writing through discussion and by alleviating some of the cognitive load of writing, namely organization of the writing and spelling: "We had enough time to think about how to write it"; "It was a good process because while we talk to someone in oral we didn't know our mistakes, but when we did brainstorming, rough, draft, revising, editing, than we publish them, we know that how good we can write"; "I think the oral history help us put our ideas in one paragraph. There was a lot of brainstorming and rough draft, but truly the oral

process helps a lot”; “I felt like an author. It felt like we were writing a real story”; “I think it was a great idea because first I didn’t know that I can write about myself especially the editing part and rough draft was great!”; “I like the interview and how we had the rough draft so we could go farther with that”; “ I think it was a really good writing process to improve our writing”; “I think it was a good idea from our teacher to make us do these types of projects, it helps us with our writing, reading, and also what we have to correct oral history.”

For students to have such realizations are critical because English language learners will develop the basic interpersonal communication skills more rapidly than they will develop the language and literacy skills of vocabulary, syntax, and semantics used in academic writing. The latter are necessary for academic purposes.⁴⁰ Having strong basic interpersonal communication abilities can mislead both students and their teachers about their potential to succeed in more academically challenging instructional contexts. Being able to use the English language for everyday purposes does not mean that the ELL possesses the knowledge and skills required for academic success in school, particularly at higher grade levels where the abstract cognitive academic language does not map readily onto spoken language.

In a landmark study examining what unskilled second language writers do when they compose, Raimes⁴¹ identified characteristics of unskilled writers. Of importance to this research, Raimes noted that when an unskilled writer engaged in editing and revising a piece of writing, more time was spent on editing form rather than content, being more concerned with accuracy, and giving little consideration to the role of the reader in the composition process. In our study, some students initially edited and revised their narratives on form, however, they finished revising their narratives by attending more to content. Form was later amended when students realised that the form helped communicate the content to others. Oral history methods, therefore, have potential to teach struggling second language writers about focusing on content as well as form when negotiating across the speech-to-print divide.

Disrupting Teachers’ Schemas about Students’ Lived Experiences

The literature on culturally relevant pedagogy stresses the need for teachers to promote a pedagogy that validates students’ identities, backgrounds, prior

⁴⁰ For examples see, Jim Cummins, "Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency, Linguistic Interdependence, the Optimum Age Question and Some Other Matters," *Working Papers on Bilingualism* 19 (1979); Cummins, "The Acquisition of English as a Second Language."; Cummins, "Reading and the Bilingual Student: Fact and Friction."

⁴¹ Ann Raimes, "What Unskilled ESL Students Do as They Write: A Classroom Study of Composing," *TESOL Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1985): 229-58.

knowledge, and prior experiences.⁴² The literature also stresses the need for teachers to show that they care about their students,⁴³ which can be demonstrated by a teacher's genuine interest in a student's background and using this knowledge to support instruction. Engaging in culturally relevant teaching practices can be a difficult task for secondary school teachers because of the rotating class system used in secondary schools and the number of students a teacher can see in any given year, in many cases, upwards of 150. Secondary school teachers are typically pressured to deliver their content-area curriculum and constrained by time. They struggle to find opportunities to get to know their students. Using oral history methods as a way to address the ESL curriculum can be a culturally responsive pedagogy if the information gathered through oral history methods is used in ways that inform pedagogy in the students' interests.

As educators interested in working with students from diverse backgrounds, we come to the table with some generalized knowledge of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious identities. However, throughout this project, our generalized schemas about many of the students' backgrounds were disrupted and challenged and as a result, deepened. For example, on paper, Frida (pseudonym) was initially identified as being an ELL from Mexico, which activated a certain schema based on our experiences working with Mexican migrant workers. When we learned that Frida was part of a low-German Mennonite Diaspora in Mexico, our "Mexican" schema was disrupted as we learned more about this religious and ethnic minority group's historical migration from Canada to Mexico and back.

Furthermore, gathering students' topical oral histories and transcribing the oral texts for use in a second language learning context has the potential to inform teachers and the general school community about the ELLs' specific historical contexts. In doing so, the students' stories contribute to school community members' historical consciousness, and the way the past, present and future are linked to create public memory and citizenship.⁴⁴ This particular project gave insight to ways some students have experienced current global events; such understandings are essential for negotiating our multicultural and pluralist society. For example, through our interviews, we gained insight into how some students understood their families' needs to emigrate. For example, Azin (pseudonym) wrote:

I lived in Pakistan with my mom and dad and my three sisters. When my father passed away my mom decide to bring us to Canada because in Pakistan people are old minded and living there was difficult for

⁴² Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Peter Seixas, "What is Historical Consciousness," in *To the Past: History Education, Public Education, and Citizenship in Canada*, ed. Ruth W. Sandwell (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2006): 11-22.

girls without any men and brothers. Boys were always teasing girls. Life was really difficult for girls. My dad had to go with us everywhere. That's why we decided to come to Canada.

We were also privy to personal information of young girls' gendered educational experiences. One student's story particularly stood out to us, probably because of the recent emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and subsequent civil strife. In addition to the world events, our knowledge of Afghani issues was influenced through our readings of popular historical fiction such as Deborah Ellis' *Breadwinner* and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*.⁴⁵ Maarya (pseudonym) was a ninth-grade student with a strong Afghani identity, although she was born in Pakistan. The story she chose to formulate into a written narrative provided us with insight into how a young girl processed and talked about female oppression during her childhood. Maarya presented the following final written narrative:

I was the only girl from my family going to school. I went to school for only a year and half. Everyone would wear a uniform with scarves. I only went to grade one; I didn't learn much—only how to write my name and last name. I didn't have much support from my family. They would get you in school only if you were eight or nine, it doesn't matter what age you go to school, they put you in grade one. I was grade one for a year and a half and then my grandfather (my dad's dad) got sick.... Except my mom, none of the women in my family were educated. The other women in my family could only read the Qur'an. At the time, none of the women were allowed to go to school. My mom's dad had three wives and my mom's mom lived in Kabul and she spoke Farsi, people who lived in Kabul were a lot more modern, so since they lived in Kabul she went to school. She finished grade eight and then the Taliban came to Kabul and they had to move to Pakistan. My mother's mother got cancer and was very sick and she passed away and the father wouldn't let his kids go to school because Afghan people who speak Pashtu didn't want them to go to school. My grandpa wouldn't let his daughters go to school.

Some may call into question the fragility of human memory, particularly if relying on students' recollections as content to be integrated into instruction. As with all text, oral or written, originating from one's memory, the question about the

⁴⁵ Deborah Ellis, *Breadwinner* (Toronto, Canada: House of Anansi Press, 2000). Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003).

fragility of memory is valid, particularly when attempting to access the memories from either the young or old. Moss warned that information obtained from an interview cannot be equated with original events;⁴⁶ instead, the oral history data must be interpreted as a text that explains how the past has been recollected. When an individual remembers an event, the memory is subject to a process of self-selection and auto-interpretation based on that individual's way of seeing the world and their awareness of their subjectivities. The recreated events are not neutral in nature; they are told from the storyteller's perspective, laced with bias. The bias may lead the storyteller to exaggerate a truth, misrepresent past events, or fail to remember altogether. Rather than evaluate the deviation from the original event as "incorrect" or "false," an analysis of the recounted event may lead to a valuable insight and understanding of the events.⁴⁷ Whether or not such information is viewed as valuable depends on the researcher's analytic and interpretive abilities as well as her or his ability to tell a metastory.⁴⁸

Ultimately, the fragility of memory has little consequence for the purposes of this study. While we would like to think that the narratives recounted by the students were attached to original events, it really does not matter if the stories were real, imaginary, or hypothetical. We were interested in having the students transliterate their oral text into a written narrative. If our intention had been to use these narratives as a way to understand how young people understand historical events, for example, Maarya's experiences as a young girl denied access to quality education, we would require to undertake a more critical analysis of the data in relation to historical events and other data. The importance of this exercise was to privilege students' unique voices, regardless of historical accuracy and to gain insights into the way they narrated their lived experiences. Students have much to gain when they are provided with such opportunities.

Educators and students come to the instructional table with different ways of reading and understanding the world. People live out their lives narratively and the stories they tell can be narrated in linguistic and non-linguistic ways or some combination of the two.⁴⁹ Teachers can learn from the stories students tell about their lives, but to do so, teachers must bracket their assumptions in order to see the world

⁴⁶ William Moss, "Oral History: An Appreciation," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (New York: Alta Mira Press (Excerpt reprinted from *American Archivist* 40, October 1977) 1996): 107-20.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*, ed. J. Van Maanen, P.K. Manning, and M.L. Miler, vol. 30, *Qualitative Research Methods Series 30* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1993).

⁴⁹ Tom Barone and Elliot W. Eisner, "Arts-based Educational Research," in *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research*, ed. Judith L. Green, Gregory Camilli, and Patricia B. Elmore (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2006): 95-110; Elliot W. Eisner, "The Promise and Perils of Alternative Forms of Data Representation," *Educational Researcher* 26, no. 6 (1997): 4-10.

through the eyes of their students. One way teachers can take on such a challenge is to authentically integrate students' lived experiences into instructional content and pedagogy. By accessing students' oral narratives and transcribing them, teachers engage in a form of narrative research, which creates a space to listen to student voices and learn from their representations of voice.⁵⁰ Doing so would validate students' lived experiences and provide them with opportunities to own their interpretations of the world in which they live.

Considerations for Future Instructional and Research Opportunities Using Oral History Methods

Using oral history methods as described in this article demands that some logistical issues in general educational practice be first considered. First of all, to the practicing teacher with a limited operating budget, the project as conducted could be seen as cost prohibitive. To conduct this project, we had a budget of 2000 Canadian dollars, which was used to pay for transcription services for sixteen student interviews so that all students could be working on their written narrative at the same time. Because this project was part of the interviewer's research agenda, no funds were necessary for the work of the "oral historian"; however, this is a cost that would need to be considered if such a project were to be conducted in the absence of a university-school partnership. There might be an unrealistic burden of time for the practicing teacher to transcribe the oral texts and while it would be a good exercise for the students to transcribe their own oral texts, we believe that the time it would take to complete such a task might take away from instructional opportunities; however, such an exercise might be possible if the ESL teacher could partner with another teacher whose curricular content might be able to incorporate the transcription portion of this project.

It would be interesting to explore collecting oral histories of English language learners using voice recognition software, such as Dragon Naturally Speaking,⁵¹ thus having the oral interview "instantly" transcribed. While voice recognition software has significantly advanced over the years, we still view it as a personal device because of the need to "train" the software for each speaker. Even if the voice recognition software were trained to map onto the interviewee's speech, the software might interfere with the flow of the conversation, from something occurring rather fluidly and naturally, to one where both the interviewer and interviewee are conscious of the transcription process occurring. Alternatively, the interview might

⁵⁰ M. Kristiina Montero and Rachelle D. Washington, "Narrative Approaches: Exploring the Phenomenon and/or Method," in *Literacy Research Methodologies*, ed. Nell K. Duke and Marla Mallette (New York: Guilford Press, 2011): 331-52.

⁵¹ Dragon Naturally Speaking, 11.5, Nuance Communications, Burlington, MA.

be audio-recorded digitally and then uploaded to the voice recognition program for transcription. Unfortunately, in our experience, the accuracy of transcription still requires the intervention of an editor, most likely the interviewer, to clean up the transcribed text. It might be worthwhile, nevertheless, to further test this software in such an educational application.

In addition, a portion of the research funds were used to produce a high quality colour publication for the students. The publication was created using desktop publishing software (Microsoft Office Publisher) and then printed at the university printing services, which provides services to university faculty and staff at reasonable prices. This said, less expensive publishing options could be considered, such as the creation of a digital book disseminated to the students as a PDF, or posted to the Web. As expressed by one of the students, another cross-curricular area that could be explored is to have the students become more involved in the design and publishing stages of the project.

A second issue to consider is to ensure that computer labs are readily available for students to use in the project for a number of reasons. When we implemented our project, we had limited access to the computer labs at the high school. We had to compete with other teachers for computer lab time and had to reserve the space well in advance, despite the fact that we did not exactly know when we would be able to begin working on editing and revising the written narratives from the oral transcripts. Furthermore, the school district was using an open source version of Word, which was not fluidly compatible with the transcripts originally saved in Microsoft Word. In order to use the Word documents, we had to save them as rich text formats and then open them with the open source software. In doing so, the formatting was thrown off in many instances, and time was wasted on reformatting the document before students were able to work with the text. Word processing technology was important to the editing and revising of the oral history transcripts because the technology supported immediate and on-the-spot revision of the text. Students were able to quickly delete any extraneous information such as the interviewer's questions or repetitive language, easily reorganize the text, and add additional information. As noted earlier, the writing-on-demand era often burdens students' and teachers' efforts to work through the writing process. It is critical that the potential time advantage created by using transcripts of oral language texts as initial drafts not be nullified because of inadequate access to an information and communicative technology environment.

Future Research

This article reported how we conceptualised and used oral history methods to support the writing development of English language learners in culturally responsive ways. This project was about providing ELLs with the tools and resources

with which to engage in an internal discovery of relevant aspects of their lived histories. To extend students' language and literacy development using oral history methods, we believe that a feasible and necessary extension of our work would be to engage the same students in using oral history methods to support external discovery of local and/or personally meaningful history. Perhaps the students could use oral history methods to interview a community member's immigration and schooling history in order to supplement their own learning.

Extending the use of oral history methods in such a manner is congruent with the gradual release of responsibility model of instruction.⁵² Supporting students' writing and research skills through examinations of their personal histories, followed by an examination of somebody else's historical testimony would allow teachers to gradually release the responsibility of learning to the students themselves by providing them with opportunities to implement learned skills and strategies from the guided exercise in autobiographical research. By extending the study to the local community, for example, students might see greater relevance of their stories in relation to the lived histories of others. Furthermore, this approach could have the potential to further explore local, community-specific funds of knowledge as described by Dworin in *The Family Stories Project* and by Sanchez in the *Dichos Project*.⁵³

A stated goal of using oral history methods as a pedagogical tool in social studies and/or history is to engage and motivate students by creating opportunities for students to interact with "living history." Using oral history methods with English language learners in a second language learning context can serve a similar motivational goal, but in this case the students are the "living history" under examination and the area of study is the English language and its use in oral and written communication.

In our work, we wanted students to see the writing process through to the end, feel proud of their written compositions, and come to see themselves as authors/writers. Pride in their final products was manifested in different ways: through the beaming smiles on their faces when they received the printed and bound compilation of stories, the shy smiles after the public performance, or other teachers' reports of students' expressions of excitement. The most compelling illustration of the impact this project had on our students occurred about six months after its completion. One of the student's apartments was involved in a fire and the contents of the home were destroyed. Once the family was reestablished in a new dwelling and the impact of the disaster lessened, the young student approached Rossi to inquire about whether another copy of the book was available. The student said that

⁵² P. David Pearson and Margaret C. Gallagher, "The Instruction of Reading Comprehension," *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 8, no. 3 (1983): 317-44.

⁵³ Dworin, "The Family Stories Project." Sanchez, "Learning about Students' Culture and Language."

all of the material things that she lost were replaced, but the thoughts recorded in the book could not be purchased at a store. The student wanted to have another copy of the book, and, of course, we found another one for her.

In presenting our work, we do not want oral history methods to compete with other methods that contribute to the development of academic writing among English language learners. We do, however, hope that our work will provide insight into the potential of using of oral history methods as a way to validate students' stories in a second language learning context that embraces all of the language arts, reading, writing, listening and speaking, and with a particular emphasis on second language writing development and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Appendix A

Oral History Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your earliest memory in school.
2. Tell me about your favourite teacher in your home country. Tell me about your least favourite teacher in your home country.
3. Tell me about a typical school day for you in your home country.
4. Tell me about what you did when you could no longer go to school. (if applicable)
5. Tell me about a typical school day for you in the Canada.
6. Tell me about how you learned to read and write in your native tongue.
7. Tell me about how school is different in your home country and in the Canada.
8. Tell me about how your family was involved in your education in your home country. In Canada.
9. Tell me about your first impressions about school in the Canada.
10. Tell me about any successes/challenges you had when you first started school in the Canada.
11. Tell me about any successes/challenges you experience now.

Appendix B

Informal post-experience survey

1. What did you learn from the oral history writing project?
2. What did you learn about yourself from the oral history writing project?
3. What did you think about oral history writing project? Likes? Dislikes? Other commentary?
4. What did you think about being interviewed?
5. What do you think about the writing process of the oral history writing project (i.e., brainstorming, rough draft, revising, editing, and publishing)?
6. What are some goals you have for yourself to improve your writing in the English language?
7. If you could do the oral history project over again, would you do anything differently?
8. Other comments.