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**An exploration of language acquisition through peer
scaffolding and sociocultural interactions in a
New Zealand primary school**

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This thesis is dedicated to my father, Delfin, and my son, Elliot.

“Thanks, Dad. I miss you every day.”

ABSTRACT

In recent years, New Zealand's continued commitment to accept migrants and refugees from other countries has caused our schools to be impacted by a significant influx of English language learners from many different ethnic backgrounds. As a result, teachers have needed to modify their practices to cater for the needs of increasing numbers of English language learners (ELLs) in mainstream classrooms. This study seeks to identify the influences that sociocultural interactions and peer-scaffolding can have on the language development of young ELLs in primary schools.

Utilising a qualitative case-study design and participant observations as the main data collection instrument, this research investigated classroom and playground peer-interactions involving two junior primary ELLs over the course of two school terms. The classroom teachers and parents of the two case students were also interviewed for background information in order to explore their roles as mediators of language acquisition.

Findings revealed the significance of interactions between ELLs and their peers during both mainstream classroom and playground activities. The complexity of the communicative exchanges and linguistic strategies utilised by the ELLs with their peers highlighted their ability to develop agency within their social networks and to use both linguistic and non-linguistic tools to effectively engage with these. The ELLs' second language development was also facilitated by their parents and classroom teachers through mediated interactions that encouraged sociocultural and language development within the school, home, and wider community.

Throughout the study, a focus on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Lave and Wenger's (1991) community of practice model help to explain the ELLs' strategies in coping with the linguistic challenges and the sometimes complex pre-existing relational structures within the mainstream educational environment.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CoP – Community of Practice

DP – deputy principal

ELL - English language learner

ESOL - English for speakers of other languages

L1 – first language

L2 - second language

LPP – legitimate peripheral participation

NESB - non-English speaking background

SLA – second language acquisition

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development

