

# Navigating Power and Inclusion as a New Canadian

When Sami moved to Canada at 8 years old, he was placed in Grade 3 with kids his age. He was conversational in English but couldn't read or write in English. He and his parents signed up for ELL classes soon after they came to Canada and were put on a one-year waitlist. One day Sami came home from school and mentioned to his parents that he had been pulled from his regular classes to participate in an ELL class. His parents were surprised by this, given that they had not been consulted or consented to this decision. They had questions and concerns to raise with Sami's teacher in this regard. Both of his parents had jobs with long hours that didn't have a lot of flexibility. They also knew that communicating their concerns with the teacher would be hard, given their level of English proficiency. It took Sami's parents a while to meet with the teacher.

In the meantime, each time Sami was pulled into an ELL class, he continued to miss out on classes like social studies and math. He found the ELL lessons repetitive and overly basic and was puzzled that neither the curriculum nor the teacher celebrated his ability to speak three languages. As he fell behind in core subjects, it was viewed as a lack of capability rather than the consequence of missing class time. His isolation from classmates also limited his English immersion, further slowing his progress.

When his parents finally met with the teacher, they felt that assumptions were made about their intelligence and knowledge based on their appearance and language. Rather than trying to understand their concerns, they were lectured on the Canadian system, reinforcing a power imbalance. Sami's parents left feeling misunderstood, and without the language skills to fully express their concerns, felt they had no choice but to accept things as they were.

When Sami's parents told him about the meeting, he felt annoyed and frustrated with them—not only for drawing more attention to him but also for being unable to effectively advocate or find solutions to help with his struggles. Sami and his parents felt that, because they were racialized newcomers with accents, Sami did not have equitable access to opportunities and resources that would allow him to pursue his goals and participate fully with his peers and in his community.



# Sami



**PLACED IN GRADE  
BASED ON AGE**



**LACK OF FUNDING  
ALLOCATED TO ESL  
RESOURCES**



**LANGUAGE  
BARRIERS**

\*Pulled out of class for ESL instruction



**RACISM**



**CULTURALLY  
INSENSITIVE LITERACY  
INSTRUCTION**



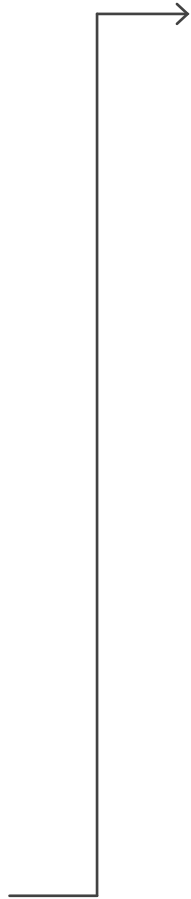
**UNDERSTANDING HOW  
ESL STUDENTS LEARN**



**EUROCENTRIC  
APPROACHES  
TO TEACHING**

\*Missing out on social interaction & curriculum in regular classroom

\*Reinforces othering, disregard for 1st language as foundation for literacy



**COMMUNICATION  
WITH PARENTS**



**MAKING FAMILIES  
FEEL WELCOME**



**STUDENT  
RELATIONSHIPS  
WITH EDUCATORS**



**INCREASES  
FEELINGS OF  
ISOLATION**



**LACK OF SELF  
EFFICACY**

\*Unchecked power & racism trigger systemic barriers that hinder realization of potential