The (Mis) Education of Immigrant Children in Today's America

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Abstract

In today's America, not every child starts on a level playing field, and very few children move ahead based solely on hard work or talent. Generational poverty and a lack of cultural capital hold many students back, robbing them of the opportunity to move up professionally and socially. Children of immigrants are especially at-risk because, in addition to facing poverty, race, geographical location or economic disadvantages, they are also confronted with failure due to their limited or non-existent English proficiency. This study focuses on the degree to which teachers in a mid-sized urban school district take into consideration the individual needs of immigrant children in the process of their education. The study also examines the preparation teachers have had to equip them with knowledge of best practices in teaching immigrant children, and the relationship between teachers' practices, beliefs, and their demographic and personal characteristics (age, gender, years of experience, level of education, etc.). Quantitative data was collected via a survey. Interviews with teachers and one central office administrator provided data for the qualitative section of the study. The findings revealed that teachers, in general, appeared to lack knowledge of specific policies for mainstreaming immigrant students into general education classrooms; their use of effective teaching practices for working with immigrant children were limited; and most of the teachers had not participated actively in professional development that focused on teaching immigrant children.

Keywords: immigrant children, education of English Language Learners, non-English speaking students

Introduction

Much is known today about the challenges of learning a second language. Researchers generally agree that three factors are of vital importance for educating

linguistically diverse students. First, academic language learning takes a long time – between 5 and 7 years – and this is a much longer period than some adolescents will spend in school (Collier, 1992; Krashen, 1996). Second, the background knowledge of second language learners (content knowledge and first language literacy) is extremely important (Cummins, 1998; Hurley, 2001; Krashen, 1996; Lucas, 1994). Third, certain approaches have been shown to facilitate learning better than others, yet these modes of instruction may not be widely available to English Language Learners (ELLs) (Echevarria, 2004; Linquanti, 1999).

Those in the educational business frequently talk about immigrant children needing to "acculturate," or "accommodate" to the American public education system. Do educators, however, acknowledge their responsibility to "adapt" and meet the needs of a multicultural student population? Community, language, and cultural groups are not homogenous and unvarying. Effective instructional programs demand enough flexibility to accommodate diversity within all at-risk groups. Stereotyping children leads to rigid programming that offers all students the same remedy, regardless if they need it or not. Effective instruction should presume variability within groups and require assessment of individual needs, as opposed to simple classification by language, family income, race, or geographic location (Tharp, 1982).

This research focuses on the degree to which teachers in a mid-sized urban school district consider the individual needs of second language in their teaching and assessment. The notion of "specialized" or "individualized" instruction motivated this study to look at how students from different language backgrounds are being educated three decades after *Lau v. Nichols* provided the direction for their education rights.

Background of the Problem

Traditionally, America has been a country of immigrants. Even with today's high levels of anti-immigration xenophobia, hostile (and borderline illegal) policies, and much-restricted immigration benefits, USA's public schools' enrollment continues to be transformed by a large number of students who bring with them the richness of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Contrary to the belief that earlier immigrant groups managed without special programs, most immigrant children are more likely to sink than swim in English-only language classrooms (Cummins, 1996). Throughout American education's history, language minority students have been somewhat accommodated at certain times, repressed at others, and most often – ignored. If done correctly, bilingual education might be the only way to make it possible for linguistically diverse children to achieve the same challenging academic standards required of all children enrolled in America's schools (Brisk, 1998).

In general, public school districts seem ambivalent about accepting newly arrived immigrant children. The provisions of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) of

2015, reauthorizing the 50-year-old *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, places considerable pressure on schools to meet federal and state accountability targets measured by standardized tests. Because all children are subject to annual testing, schools are torn between keeping a semblance of equity by enrolling non-English speaking students and the goal to meet academic targets, while balancing shrinking budgets.

ELLs are disproportionately less successful in school than native-born speakers of Standard English. According to the Office of English Language Acquisition statistics, 66% of immigrant students drop out of school without a high school diploma. Nationally, ELLs are three times more likely to be low achievers, and 30% of ELLs are usually retained at least one grade compared to 17% of native speakers.

Lack of financial and human resources prevent school districts to use ELLs' native language for teaching. Even school districts that welcome large bilingual populations follow the English as a Second Language (ESL) model that does not capitalize on the students' first language. However, students who master their first language and then make a transition to English do as well or better academically than most of their English-only counterparts (Cummins, 1998; Lucas, 1994). Because integrating ELLs with native speakers is a federal mandate (Title VI, upheld by the Civil Rights Act of 1964), the non-English speaking students are placed in some classes that include native English speakers. While in some districts there is a constant effort to provide specialized training to mainstream teachers working with language learners, in other districts teachers have little or no formal education in teaching "bilingual" students. Some mainstream teachers do not have a clear understanding of what a bilingual student is, assuming the "bi" means their students are proficient in both English and their native language, and therefore making modest efforts to accommodate them.

Researchers of assessment issues for language learners are concerned with standardized tests because they fail to consider the students' cultural background. This is true not only for ELLs, but also for African-American, Alaska Native, and American Indian students (Ball, 1997; Estrin & Nelson-Barber, 1995). Differences in cultural backgrounds, non-mastery of the English language, and the extent of their prior educational experiences often place ELLs at a disadvantage in mainstream classes.

This research focuses on the degree to which a selected mid-size urban school district considers the individual needs of second language learners in the process of their assessment. Because of the interconnectedness between assessment and instruction, this research also describes instructional practices of ELL teachers in mainstream classrooms in this particular school district. Finally, this study examines the preparation teachers have had to equip them with knowledge of best practices in teaching ELLs in regular classrooms, and the relationship between

teachers' practices/beliefs and their demographic characteristics. The following research questions were addressed in this study:

- What types of assessment practices are used with ELLs in this mid-sized urban school district?
- How are decisions about mainstreaming made in this school district? What role does assessment play in mainstreaming decisions? Do formal ELL assessments alone adequately measure the readiness of students to be mainstreamed?
- How do general education teachers with ELL students in their classrooms indicate they have been prepared to provide instruction to these students?
- To what extent do general education teachers with ELL students in their classrooms use specific teaching practices?
- Is there a correlation between general education teachers' use of specific ELL teaching practices related to their demographic characteristics?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework grounding this research is aligned with the goal to look at best practices in assessing, mainstreaming, and teaching English Language Learners (ELLs). Three key scientific disciplines, along with their respective learning paradigms and theorists, provide a foundation to this study: the field of linguistics – specifically, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development; that of psychology – particularly, Bruner's scaffolding theory; and the field of philosophy – advanced by Dewey's constructivism theory.

The zone of proximal development has been defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). According to this theory, the learning process is supported by three components:

- The presence of someone with a better level of understanding, knowledge, and skills than that of the learner (a more knowledgeable other);
- Social interactions with a skillful instructor who might model behaviors, provide directions to the student, and allow the child to observe and practice new skills (cooperative or collaborative dialogue); and
- Scaffolding – a term introduced by Wood, Bruner, and Ross in 1976 – consisting of activities provided by the teacher to support the student as s/he is guided through the zone of proximal development. Support is withdrawn when not necessary, allowing the student to complete the task again on his/her own.

In his study, *The Process of Education,* Bruner (1961) builds on John Dewey's (1938) theory about the significance of previous experience and prior knowledge in the development of new understandings, emphasizing the role of students as active learners who construct their own knowledge. For Bruner, the role of education is to

facilitate thinking and problem-solving skills in students, with the expectation that those skills will then transfer to a range of new situations.

This theoretical framework supports the complex and challenging process of educating ELLs. The review of the literature on this topic indicates that their learning can be influenced by a multitude of factors, including: student's background knowledge and prior schooling experiences; placement in mainstream, general curriculum classes; parents' level of education; student's linguistic and cognitive development; a positive school and classroom climate; use of student's native language; use of effective instructional strategies; a challenging curriculum; use of alternative assessments; individualized instruction; and increased parental involvement (Braunger & Lewis, 1997; Short, 1994; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Tharp, 1982; Thomas & Collier, 1997).

In an era of educational accountability governed by *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) of 2015, evaluating ELLs' progress moves from the arena of educationally sound practices and becomes an issue of compliance with federal and state mandates. While recognizing the importance of including ELLs in standardized tests, researchers also caution against the use of such assessment instruments as sole indicators of their knowledge and skills (Abedi & Dietel, 2004; Thomas & Collier, 2002). In a study for the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST/UCLA), Abedi and Dietel (2004), found that certain factors could negatively influence the validity and reliability of standardized test results for ELLs:

- Historically low performance and slow improvement for ELLs;
- Instability of the student subgroup; and
- Factors outside the school's control (e.g. educational level of ELLs' parents; socioeconomic status; years and quality of schooling in the native country; subgroup diversity; ELL identification).

Although the ESSA legislation provides certain test accommodations for ELLs, there are some major concerns regarding high-stakes tests' use with ELLs – specifically in terms of validity and feasibility. Each standardized test measures English language proficiency in addition to content area knowledge; therefore, the internal validity of such tests is questionable (Heubert & Hauser, 1999). For a more accurate picture of ELL's skills and knowledge, researchers recommend the use of multiple measures of assessment, including alternative assessments. Stiggins (1987) suggests that an alternative assessment is authentic if it reflected tasks common to everyday activities in a classroom, in addition to reflecting real-life situations. O'Malley and Pierce (1996) add the integration of a language skills component to the definition and specify that alternative assessments could include teachers' observations, self-assessments, as well as performance assessments (such as essays, portfolios, interviews, observations, work samples, and group projects).

In relationship to mainstreaming, ELLs' placement into regular, general curriculum classes is a complex process that needs to consider several factors: adequate timing; placing students in classes where they could engage in authentic English conversations; teachers' preparation in working with ELLs; the level of academic and language development of students; sociocultural factors; and types of mainstreaming models (Faltis & Arias, 1993; Gersten, 1996; Lucas & Wagner, 1999; Thomas and Collier,1997; Valdes, 2001).

The present study builds on prior research to determine general education teachers' perceptions of the use of specific instructional practices and assessment strategies in working with ELL students who are mainstreamed in their classes. Additionally, this study examines the extent of teacher preparation in evidence-based and place-based strategies and interventions for teaching ELLs in regular classrooms, and the relationship between teachers' practices/beliefs and their personal and professional characteristics.

Methodology

Research Design

The research questions could be best answered by engaging in a combination qualitative-quantitative study. Face-to-face interviews with seven teachers and one central office administrator in the targeted school district provided data for the qualitative component of the study.

Following qualitative research with a quantitative measure, corroborating results, brings strength to the findings (Spradley, 1980). This research incorporated a quantitative measure with some elements of a case study. The primary data collection tool for the quantitative component was an original survey developed by the researcher to obtain specific information regarding teachers' perceptions of instruction and assessment for English Language Learners.

Setting for the Study

A mid-sized school district located in an urban area was used as the setting for the study. The school district enrolled 11,039 students in 14 elementary, 4 middle schools, 2 high schools, and 1 alternative education program. Approximately 800 teachers provided instruction for a multicultural student population that included: African American (62.9%), Hispanic (17.5%), Caucasian (14%), Asian/Pacific Islander (4.6); American Indian/Alaska Native (0.4%), and multi-racial (0.6%). The majority of students (74.0%) were considered economically disadvantaged as determined by their qualifying for free or reduced lunch programs. A relatively large percentage of students (19.4%) had disabilities. Overall, proficiency rates were 64% for reading and 49.1% for mathematics – lower than the state's averages for reading (77.3%) and mathematics (63.8%). A total of 969 students in the school

district were identified as ELLs at the time of the study, representing 12 different native languages.

Participants

The participants were 23 teachers and 1 central office administrator working in the targeted school district. The teachers taught in general and ESL classes in the elementary, middle, and high schools.

Instruments

Two types of instruments were used to collect data for the study: an original survey and an interview protocol.

Surveys

The primary data collection instrument was developed to obtain specific information regarding the experiences of teaching ELL students in mainstream general education classes. Twenty-five questions were included on the survey, with a combination of forced choice and short answer response formats. Twenty items rated using a 6-point Likert-type scale were used to determine the frequency with which teachers used specific teaching and assessment practices. The forced choice questions obtained factual information on demographic characteristics of teachers, students, and teachers' participation in professional development (PD) for working with ELL students. The fill-in questions provided a qualitative component, giving teachers opportunities to describe their experiences with ELLs.

The Likert-scaled items were grouped by type. The numeric ratings for the items on each subscale were summed to obtain a total score that was then divided by the number of items on the scale to obtain a mean score, reflecting the original unit of measurement. The use of a mean score allowed interpretation of outcomes in terms of the original Likert-type scale and direct comparison among the subscales.

Interviews

The researcher developed an interview protocol that was used with seven teachers. A separate interview questionnaire was used with the central office administrator to obtain information on school district policies regarding ELL students. The teacher interview included questions about: teachers' educational background and experiences teaching bilingual students; classroom composition; types of support for ELL students; changes in teaching because of the inclusion of ELLs in classrooms; instructional strategies used; grouping students for instruction; ELL student assessment practices; mainstreaming decision making; participation in professional development on teaching ELL students; administration support; and additional comments.

The interview with the central office administrator included questions about the demographics and features of the ELL programs, as well as the alignment of district policies with federal and state mandates.

Data Analysis Procedures

Teacher survey data sets were analyzed using SPSS – Windows, ver. 15.0. The quantitative analysis was divided into two sections. The first section provided a description of the sample and their teaching practices using frequency distributions. The second section used frequency distributions, t-tests for one sample, and correlational analyses to address the research questions. In addition, the interview responses were summarized to provide information for two of the research questions. All decisions on the statistical significance of the inferential statistical analyses were made using an alpha level of .05. Figure 1 presents the analysis used to address each research question.

Figure 1. Statistical Analysis

Research Question	Variables	Analysis
What types of assessment practices are used with ELLs in this mid-sized urban school district?	Interview data Survey items 22, 23, 24	Content analysis was used to determine if patterns emerged from the teachers' comments regarding the types of assessments that were used in their classrooms.
How are decisions about mainstreaming made in this school district? What role does assessment play in mainstreaming decisions? Do formal assessments alone adequately measure the readiness of students to be mainstreamed?	Interview data from the central office administrator	The summary of the interview questions was presented to answer this research question.
How do general education teachers with ELL students in their classrooms	Survey questions 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 21	Frequency distributions were used to provide information on how the general education

Research Question	Variables	Analysis
indicate they have been prepared to provide instruction to these students?		teachers were prepared to teach ELL students in their classrooms.
To what extent do general education teachers with ELL students in their classrooms use specific teaching practices?	Survey question 25	t-tests for one sample were used to determine if teachers used specific instructional and assessment practices in their classrooms. The test statistic for this analysis was the midpoint of the 6-point scale (3.5). Scores that were significantly below 3.5 indicated that teachers were using the teaching practice, while scores that were significantly above 3.5 indicated the particular test statistic was not being used.
Are general education teachers with ELL students in their classrooms use of specific teaching practices related to their personal demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, years teaching classes that include English Language Learners, and educational preparation for teaching ELLs)?	Survey question 25 – Teaching practices Age Gender Years teaching ELLs Educational preparation for teaching ELLs	Correlational analysis using point-biserial and Spearman rank order correlations were used to examine the relationships between teaching practices used by general education teachers with ELL students and their demographic characteristics.

Results and Interpretation

Description of the Participants

A total of 23 teachers participated in the study, from elementary to high school grade levels. The teachers had ELLs in their mainstream general education classrooms. The age and gender of the teachers were summarized using frequency distributions (Table 1).

Table 1, Frequency Distributions, Age and Gender of the Participants

Age and Gender	Frequency	Percent
Age		
22 to 30	5	21.7
31 to 40	5	21.7
41 to 50	10	43.6
51 to 60	3	13.0
Total	23	100.0
Gender		
Female	17	73.9
Male	6	26.1
Total	23	100.0

Almost half of the teachers reported they were between 41 and 50 years of age. Five each reported to be from 22 to 30 years of age and between 31 and 40 years of age. Three teachers were over 51 years of age. Approximately three quarters of teachers were female, with the remaining teachers being male.

The teachers were asked to indicate the number of years they had been teaching classes that included ELLs (Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency Distributions, Years Teaching ELL Students

Years Teaching ELL Students	Frequency	Percent
0 to 4 years	8	34.8
5 to 9 years	12	52.3
10 to 14 years	1	4.3
20 to 24 years	1	4.3
25 to 29 years	1	4.3
Total	23	100.0

More than a half of the teachers had been teaching ELL students in their general education classrooms from 5 to 9 years, with approximately one third indicating they had taught ELL students from 0 to 4 years.

The teachers were asked to describe their current teaching assignment. Teaching assignments included art, music, language arts, Spanish, social studies, mathematics, and science.

The teachers were asked how they perceived research in the field of second language acquisition. They were provided with a list of possible responses and asked to indicate all that applied. As a result, the number of responses exceeded the number of teachers in the study (Table 3).

Table 3

Frequency Distributions

Perceptions of Research in the Field of Second Language Acquisition

Perceptions of Research in the Field of Second Language Acquisition	Frequency	Percent
Difficult to understand	4	17.4
Impractical	2	8.7
Too theoretical	4	17.4
Easy to understand	1	4.3
Interesting	10	43.5
Practical	6	26.1

The largest group of teachers reported that research in the field of second language acquisition was interesting, and approximately one quarter considered it practical. In contrast, another quarter considered it to be either difficult to understand or too theoretical. Two teachers considered the research on this topic to be impractical and 1 thought that it was easy to understand.

Research Questions

Research question 1. What types of assessment practices are used with ELLs in this mid-sized urban school district?

The survey qualitative items were examined to determine the assessment practices used with ELLs. The teachers' responses were examined to determine patterns, similarities and differences among the seven teachers who participated in the face-to-face interviews. Information from the open-ended items on the survey was also

presented to further show how teachers use best practices and assessment techniques in their classrooms.

The quantitative analysis revealed that teachers with ESL/bilingual college preparation were more likely to use evidence-based, place-based practices and interventions in providing individualized instruction to ELL students than general education teachers. A closer examination of the qualitative data provided information regarding teachers' perceptions of their teaching and feelings of preparedness. There was considerable agreement between two teachers who had several years of experience with, and training in teaching ELLs. These teachers stated that they "always" include accommodations for ELLs in their lesson plans (Survey Q17) and they use many of the "best practices" in ESL teaching: activating prior knowledge, building background knowledge, checking for understanding, modifying their speech in addressing ELLs, etc. Nevertheless, there were some differences of beliefs among the teachers trained in ESL methods who have had extensive experience teaching ELLs.

First, in response to survey question 18, neither felt that ELLs should be held to the same English language standards as the English-speaking students, but for different reasons. Teacher 1 pointed out that the timeline of *ESSA* is unrealistic, suggesting that although the goal may be realistic, more time would be required than the legislation allows. Teacher 7 qualified her answer saying that children enroll in the American schools often having come from a culture and school that had much different requirements, and therefore, these students have differing degrees of adjustment to make once entering the American classroom. Thus, she felt uncomfortable holding the ELLs to the same language standards as the native speakers of English. This same teacher felt that the same applied to the standard for learning *content* in the American public-school curriculum. Teacher 1, however, felt strongly that the students must be held to the same content standards as their English-speaking peers. Her rationale was that it is the school's "duty to find methods, materials, and teachers who can teach the content of the curriculum, regardless of language" (Survey Q19, #17). For her, there was no excuse for lowering the learning expectations in the content knowledge of the ELLs. Something particularly striking in the responses of the two teachers were their well-defined opinions about teaching ESL and their rationales. In fact, throughout the interviews and consistent with their survey answers, both Teacher 1 and Teacher 7 distinguished themselves from the other teachers in the study. This phenomenon encouraged a closer look at their background and teaching experiences.

There were two areas of contrast when comparing these two teachers' backgrounds with those of the other teachers in the study. First, both teachers had either an ESL endorsement or a bilingual education minor among their credentials. Having read and researched the field, these teachers felt confident and prepared for teaching ELLs.

Another interesting factor setting them apart is that they both learned another language during their lifetime and participated in a study abroad program as part of their college preparation. The question becomes, which is more influential in the preparation of teachers for teaching ELLs? Is it the academic coursework? Is it their life experience and the fact that they have acquired a second language themselves? Their expressions of empathy for the students were markedly more evident in their words and teaching approaches.

Even though some differences were found in the perspectives of the two ESL-endorsed teachers, there was an even more significant contrast between the interview answers of the monolingual teachers and the answers of the bilingual ones. Their comments were in contrast in all areas of inquiry: instructional methods, assessment, expectations, professional development/training attended, and their understanding of how mainstreaming of ELLs takes place.

A look at the backgrounds of three monolingual teachers in the study gives these questions considerable importance. Teachers 2, 3, and 4 do not have the ESL or bilingual endorsements. Although all three had college courses in multicultural education, none learned a second language or participated in a study abroad program. In their interviews, they referred to having had a multicultural education course that never addressed language learning.

More disconcerting was the attitude expressed by some of the monolingual teachers. When asked about how teachers might modify their teaching or assessment of ELLs, Teacher 4 commented, "I don't teach them differently." When asked about actual accommodations, she remarked, "I lessen their work. I give them less content. Now they make good grades." Although Teacher 2 also said, "I teach everyone the same way," when asked specifically about accommodations, she added, "I differentiate when I assess for writing; I evaluate them mostly orally." This seems like an unlikely approach to assessing writing. Another comment made by Teacher 2 was about adapting the instructional materials to the Spanish-speaking students. "The science curriculum in Spanish can be downloaded from the Internet, but I don't do it. That defeats the purpose of having them learn English. This is an English-speaking country." (Interview Q8) The last sentence seems to be making a point that denies the value of native-language instruction that supports the learning of content.

One other teacher (Teacher 3) claimed that she did indeed modify instruction for her ELLs. "I modify things for them. I give them their exam ahead of time; I give them the responses so all they have to do is memorize the answers." (Interview Q3) It is doubtful that this would be viewed as a "best practice" in the instruction of ELLs. Not only is it relegating their learning to the lowest rung on Bloom's Taxonomy (memorization), but it is also not supporting their language learning. In other comments, this teacher indicated that she would welcome training "in understanding what the district wants us to do with these kids. I think we're supposed to teach content." (Interview Q9)

When asked about administrative support, Teacher 3 remarked that she couldn't "think of any [administrative support] other than those people showing up in my classes [the paraprofessional staff]." (Interview Q8)

The qualitative findings have implications for ESL teaching and assessment practices, and validate the preparation offered in the bilingual or ESL endorsement programs.

Research question 2. How are decisions about mainstreaming made in this school district? What role does assessment play in mainstreaming decisions? Do formal ELL assessments alone adequately measure the readiness of students to be mainstreamed?

Upon enrollment, students take a Home Language Survey. Based on answers indicating that the child might speak a language other than English, the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) screener for placement is administered. This test measures English language proficiency (academic and social language) in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and comprehension. For each grade level assessed, proficiency levels include basic, intermediate, and proficient categories.

Following the test, students are placed either in general education or in ESL classes. The District provides native language instruction for absolutely zero-English students. ELLs in ESL classes are taught by ESL or bilingual education teachers. Students remain in the ESL classes until they score above the 40th percentile on the ELPA screener. Once they exit, ELLs placed in mainstream classes are given support commensurable with the District's ability to secure resources, and not their needs. The school district has a few native language tutors, and these are deployed to schools based on their availability, and not as necessary.

According to the Central Office administrator, bilingual children in the District usually achieve at or above grade level in math and science (two subjects less dependent on English), while general education students might not reach that level. The success of the ESL and bilingual programs is due to the motivation and preparation of the District's bilingual teachers, and to programs supporting bilingual families. The District's biggest challenge has been to maintain the gain ELL students made while in the ESL program. When mainstreamed, ELL students fall back within 6 months due to the culture shock; lack of an intense support system (with no bilingual teachers); and reduced communication between mainstream teachers and parents.

From responses provided to interviews and surveys, it appeared that regular education teachers were unfamiliar with the District's process and policies on mainstreaming.

Knowing how and at what point ELLs should be placed in regular, general education classes and how to advance their academic and language gain could contribute to

better academic results and their more rapid cultural and language integration. Teacher training in mainstreaming, along with clear understanding of the District's policies, could lead to better support for transitioning students.

Research question 3. How do general education teachers with ELL students in their classrooms indicate they have been prepared to provide instruction to these students?

The participants were asked to indicate the professional preparation they had to prepare them teach ELL students. Teachers were given a list of options and told to indicate all that applied; therefore, the number of responses exceeded the number of respondents (Table 4).

Table 4, Frequency Distributions, Professional Preparation for Teaching ELL Students

Professional Preparation for Teaching ELL students	Frequency	Percent
Advanced degree in ESL	2	9.1
Major in bilingual education	2	9.1
Minor/Endorsement in ESL	4	18.2
Minor/Endorsement in bilingual education	3	13.6
Coursework in ESL	5	22.7
No formal coursework in ESL	6	27.3
No formal coursework in Bilingual education	7	31.8
Other	1	4.5

Approximately 60% of the total number of teachers reported they had no formal coursework in bilingual or English as a Second Language. The majority of the remaining teachers reported a minor/endorsement in ESL/bilingual education or completion of coursework in ESL. One teacher indicated that she had a major in Spanish.

Teachers provided responses to some questions regarding their educational backgrounds. More than half of the teachers did not speak a language other than English and did not study abroad as part of the college education. Approximately two-thirds of the teachers indicated their college education included multicultural studies.

The teachers were asked to indicate their involvement in professional development (PD) that was focused on teaching ELL students. The responses were summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Frequency Distributions, Professional Development for Teaching ELL Students

Professional Development for Teaching ELL Students	Frequency	Percent
Recency of attendance at professional development on teaching ELL students		
During the past three months	1	4.3
During the past six months	2	8.7
Within the last year	4	17.4
More than a year ago	9	39.2
Never	7	30.4
Total	23	100.0
Number of district-sponsored professional development activities pertaining to language learning or multiculturalism and diversity		
None	9	39.1
1	3	13.1
2	3	13.1
3	5	21.8
4	1	4.3
5	1	4.3
More	1	4.3
Total	23	100.0
Number of articles, journal studies, or books read pertaining to language learning and language acquisition		
0 to 1	5	21.7
2 to 3	5	21.7
4 to 5	5	21.7
6 to 7	3	13.2
More than 7	5	21.7
Total	23	100.0
Number of articles, journal studies, or books read pertaining to best practices in education		
0 to 1	1	4.3
2 to 3	3	13.1
4 to 5	6	26.1
	4	17.4

6 to 7	9	39.1
More than 7	23	100.0
Total		
Recency of observing a bilingual instructor teach ELL students	7	30.4
During the past six months	2	8.7
During the previous school year	5	21.7
Over 2 years ago	9	39.2
Never	23	100.0
Total		
Recency of observing a general education instructor teach classes that included ELL students	3	13.6
During the past six months	3	13.6
During the previous school year	3	13.6
Over 2 years ago	13	59.2
Never	22	100.0
Total		
Missing 1		

The largest group of teachers had attended professional development for teaching ELL students more than a year ago, with approximately one third of the teachers reporting they had never attended professional development for teaching ELL students. Only 4 teachers attended ELL-specific PD within the last year; 1 within the past three months; and 2 within the past six months.

When asked to report the number of district-sponsored professional development activities pertaining to language acquisition or multiculturalism and diversity, almost 40% of the teachers reported none, with 21.8% indicating they had attended three activities pertaining to language learning or multiculturalism and diversity. These two categories represent more than half of the total number of teachers surveyed.

The teachers were asked to report the number of articles, journal studies, or books they had read pertaining to language learning, language acquisition, and best practices in education. Responses were similarly distributed among the choices with respect to language learning and acquisition. More than half of the teachers indicated they read between 6 or more articles on best practices during the past year.

A large group of teachers (39.2%) reported that they had never observed bilingual instructors teaching ELL students, and approximately 30% indicated they observed a bilingual teacher within the past six months. Two teachers had observed a

bilingual instructor within the previous school year. Five teachers reported it had been more than 2 years since they had observed a bilingual instructor who taught ELL students.

The teachers were asked to report the recency of observing a general education instructor teach classes that included ELL students. The majority of the respondents indicated they had never observed a general education instructor teach classes that included ELL students.

Research question 4. To what extent do general education teachers with ELL students in their classrooms use specific teaching practices?

The teachers rated the frequency with which they used specific teaching practices in their classrooms with ELL students using a 6-point Likert-type scale. Lower scores on these teaching practices indicate more frequent usage of the practice. The mean scores for each of these teaching practices were compared to the midpoint (3.5) of the scale using t-tests for one sample (Table 6).

Table 6. t-Tests for One Sample. Teaching Practices

Teaching Practices	Number	Mean	SD	DF	t-Value	Sig
Use lecturing as the primary method of teaching	23	3.39	.84	22	-.62	.541
Activate prior knowledge	23	1.83	.98	22	-8.16	<.001
Build background knowledge	22	1.91	.97	21	-7.68	<.001
Engage students in the teaching of a new lesson	23	1.83	.94	22	-8.57	<.001
Check for understanding	23	1.57	.95	22	-9.82	<.001
Use acting out a problem/concept	23	2.48	.95	22	-5.17	<.001
Use audio-visuals in teaching and assessment	23	2.61	1.12	22	-3.83	.001
Translate information in students' languages	22	3.73	1.61	21	.66	.515
Abbreviate/adapt text	23	3.00	1.41	22	-1.70	.104
Use the services of a paraprofessional that	23	2.83	1.56	22	-2.08	.050

speaks the students' languages						
Allow ELLs to use dictionaries during class time	23	2.87	1.71	22	-1.76	.092
Give ELLs more time to think/respond to a question	23	2.26	1.51	22	-3.93	.001
Modify speech when addressing ELLs	23	2.65	1.37	22	-2.97	.007
Use authentic assessments (portfolios, presentations, projects) with students	23	2.26	1.25	22	-4.75	<.001
Allow students to work in collaborative groups	23	2.04	1.02	22	-6.84	<.001
Use flexible groupings	23	2.26	1.14	22	-5.23	<.001
Use graphic organizers in explaining concepts	23	2.57	1.34	22	-3.34	.003
Allow students to respond to oral or written questions in their native language	23	3.26	1.57	22	-.73	.474
Correct students' use of the English language	23	3.17	1.27	22	-1.24	.230
Have specific language and content objectives for a lesson	22	2.00	1.23	21	-5.70	<.001

Fourteen of the teaching practices differed significantly from the midpoint of 3.50. Each of these differences was in a negative direction, indicating the teachers were using these teaching practices either always or often. As an example, the first statistically significant result was for "activate prior knowledge". The comparison of the mean of 1.83 (sd = .98) for this item differed significantly from the midpoint of 3.50, $t(22) = -8.16$, $p < .001$. The other items that produced statistically significant results included: build background knowledge, engage students in the teaching of a new lesson, check for understanding, use acting out as a problem/concept, use audio-visuals in teaching and assessment, use the services of a paraprofessional who

speaks the students' languages, give ELLs more time to think/respond to a question, modify speech when addressing ELLs, use authentic assessments (portfolios, presentations, projects) with students, allow students to work in collaborative groups, use flexible groupings, use graphic organizers in explaining concepts, and have specific language and content objectives for a lesson.

Research question 5. Is there a correlation between general education teachers' use of specific ELL teaching practices related to their demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, years teaching classes that include ELLs), and educational preparation for teaching ELLs?

Spearman rank-order correlations and point-biserial correlations were used to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between the frequency with which general education teachers with ELL students in their classrooms used teaching practices related to instruction, assessment, accommodations, and monitoring learning and their personal and professional characteristics. The results of the correlation analyses were not statistically significant. These findings indicated that general education teachers' personal characteristics were not associated with the frequency with which they used specific teaching practices related to ELL students' instruction, assessment, accommodations, and monitoring learning.

Implications for Practice

Continuing professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy, language acquisition, and best practices for teaching ELLs would elevate teachers' preparedness and efficacy levels. Building level administrators should be knowledgeable of district policies and procedures regarding placement of ELL students. Investing human and financial resources in the teaching of ELLs and training of their teachers would lead to improved academic results for schools.

Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted in a mid-sized urban school district. The results may have been different if a suburban or rural school district were used. The small number of teachers included in the quantitative portion of the study may have reduced the power of the statistical analyses. Although t-tests for one sample were appropriate for small samples, a larger sample could have been more representative of general education teachers with ELL students in their classrooms. The results of this study provide a basis for continuing research for helping ELL learners become mainstreamed into general education classes.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine the methods used by general education teachers to instruct and assess mainstreamed ELL students. The general education teachers appeared to lack knowledge of specific policies for mainstreaming ELL

students into general education classrooms. Their use of specific teaching practices for working with ELL students also appeared to be somewhat limited, although they used good teaching practices with all students. Most of the teachers had not participated actively in professional development that focused on teaching non-English speaking students. This may have been because of unavailability of district-provided PD on these topics. Training was available for ESL and bilingual teachers. All teachers are held accountable for the progress of their students, but some may be at disadvantage without the tools and skills needed for being effective with language minority children. Additional research is needed using a larger sample to obtain information regarding the teaching and assessment of ELL students who are mainstreamed into general education classrooms. The role of professional development and educational opportunities for teachers to increase their skills and knowledge needs further investigation.

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