

11-15-2008

## Teachers' Perceptions of their Preparation for Teaching Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners in Rural Eastern North Carolina

Debra D. O'Neal  
*East Carolina University*

Marjorie Ringler  
*East Carolina University, RinglerM@ecu.edu*

Diane Rodriguez  
*East Carolina University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/ruraleducator>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

O'Neal, D. D., Ringler, M., & Rodriguez, D. (2008). Teachers' Perceptions of their Preparation for Teaching Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners in Rural Eastern North Carolina. *The Rural Educator*, 30(1), 5-13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v30i1.456>

This Research Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Junction. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Rural Educator by an authorized editor of Scholars Junction. For more information, please contact [scholcomm@msstate.libanswers.com](mailto:scholcomm@msstate.libanswers.com).

# Teachers' Perceptions of their Preparation for Teaching Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners in Rural Eastern North Carolina

Debra D. O'Neal

Marjorie Ringler

Diane Rodriguez

East Carolina University

*The number of English language learners (ELL) students in the US is increasing dramatically. The growth is even more evident in rural areas of the United States such as North Carolina where teachers are facing classrooms with a majority of second language learners. The authors conducted a study interviewing 24 teachers at a rural elementary school in eastern North Carolina. Teachers were interviewed regarding their perceptions of their preparedness to teach English language learners in the mainstream classrooms. Findings revealed that teacher training programs have not prepared these individuals for the student population they face today regardless of the year in which they received their teaching licenses. All teachers showed a strong desire to learn more at this time in their careers, but emphasized their lack of prior training. The study found that even though teachers lacked confidence, they were effectively educating this growing population. The authors discuss the responsibility of Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) to provide formal education in teaching students from diverse language backgrounds.*

## Introduction

The role of teacher preparation programs has traditionally been to prepare future teachers with content knowledge, understanding of cognitive, psychological, and linguistic development, as well as the current and historic pedagogical theories and methodologies. In recent years, multiculturalism and diversity have been added to the curriculum of teacher preparation programs; however, the topics have been treated only as a way through which all students could begin to "see themselves" in the curriculum. These new faces of color showed up in the textbooks, in the storybooks and on the classroom bulletin boards, but have teacher preparation programs missed the mark by not preparing teachers to directly *teach* these students and instead just teach *about* these students? Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to teach English language learners (ELL) in the mainstream rural classrooms that have a large population of ELLs. Additionally, the study attempts to determine teachers' perceptions of the role institutions of higher education could play in addressing teacher quality as it relates to ESL education in the mainstream classroom.

In the past, Garcia (1991) and Milk, Mercado and Sapiens (1992) have argued about *how* to best educate our second language learners. Arguments can be found in the literature for and against bilingual education, English as a second language, immersion, pull-out, and sheltered instruction. California went so far as to ban bilingual education with the passage of Proposition 227 in 1998. This decision was a politically motivated one based on sentiment and not empirical data. Yet with all of the public debate on *how* to best deliver instruction, Garcia (1991) reminds us that the effectiveness of *who* delivers this instruction has often been ignored. According to Cummins (1997), "teacher education

institutions ... have sent new teachers into the classroom with minimal information regarding patterns of language and social development among such pupils and few pedagogical strategies for helping pupils learn (p.110)."

Villegas and Lucas (2002) address this issue by advocating for a "...coherent approach to educating culturally responsive teachers (p. xxi)." Their discussion questions the effectiveness of multicultural and diversity education courses that have been added to the teacher education programs. Are these courses required and are the faculty members teaching them prepared to do so? If they are elective courses, what assurance is there that future teachers are actually taking them? If the material is infused into all of the teacher education courses, what assurance is there that the material is covered comprehensively? In creating their concept of a culturally responsive teacher, Villegas and Lucas describe the ideally prepared teacher as one who would not only understand, value and embrace the students' diversity, but would also activate the students' prior knowledge and would design instruction that would build on students' prior knowledge.

## Trends in ELL population growth in rural U.S.

According to a report from the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA), *The Growing Number of Limited English Proficient Students* (2006), the growth in numbers of limited English proficient students (LEP) continues to rise at a growth rate of a 60.76% nationally from the 1994-95 to the 2004-05 school year. The total 2004-2005 K-12 enrollment was 48,982,898. It is clear that ELL students are going to continue to increase, but have teacher preparation programs changed to prepare future teachers to educate ELLs? In 1997, Jim Cummins raised the issue as to whether the education of linguistically and

culturally diverse students was a mainstream issue. He contended that societal power relations were the force that drove our system. Now, as it is ten years later, and the question remains, have institutes of higher education made any changes, or are these institutions still influenced by societal fears and prejudices that continue to marginalize ELL students by turning out under and ill-prepared teachers?

ELL students in public schools have a wide array of family backgrounds that have unique cultures. They immigrate to this country from many geographical areas of the world. More recent data indicates that 31% of the immigrants are originally from Asia, 24% from Mexico, 12% from Central and South America, 11% from the Caribbean, 10% from Southern and Eastern Europe, and 8% is a combination of all other countries (Coming in Waves, 2006). The reasons for their emigration from other countries are varied as well. Some come to escape poverty and find work, to find political asylum, to find better living conditions, and get better health care. These immigrants often believe in America as a prosperous nation where they can follow a dream and succeed in doing so (Farkas, Duffett, Johnson, Moye & Vine, 2003). Another interesting fact is that 58% of ELL students are born in the United States. Out of these students, 74% are from Hispanic background (Manning & Baruth, 2004). ELL students and their families tend to settle in geographical locations that are rural and thus bring unique educational challenges to these schools such as: poor attendance for seasonal migrant workers, lack of proficiency in the native language, and lack of cultural support in their communities. More recently, due to the high number of ELL students in rural areas, many classrooms are a majority of ELL students and a minority of monolingual (English only) students.

### **Trends in Teacher Education Programs**

Various studies have researched teacher quality and the preparation of public school teachers (Lewis, Parsad, Carey, Bartfai, Farris & Smerdon, 1999). A significant and relevant finding of Lewis, et al. was that while 54% of teachers taught ELLs or culturally diverse students, only 20% felt adequately prepared to teach them. Therefore, there is a need to more specifically address the following critical question: Are teacher education programs doing enough to prepare teachers for the growing linguistically and culturally diverse population? Gandara, Jolly and Maxwell (2005) conducted research in California in which they surveyed the state's teachers on this very subject. The most significant of the nine major findings is: "Greater preparation for teaching English language learners equated to greater teacher confidence in their skills for working with these students successfully (p.12)." Numerous other studies reiterate the need for well qualified and highly prepared teachers (Mueller, Singer & Carranza 2006; Lewis, et al., 1999; and Menken & Antunez, 2001). It is the contention of the

authors, however, that these studies all focus on teachers specifically teaching ESL classes and, therefore, there is a need to investigate preparation of mainstream teachers who have not chosen ESL as their specialty. Given the changing demographics in school population, it is the responsibility of *all* teacher education programs to prepare *all* teachers to effectively educate the growing population of English language learners.

Currently most in-service teachers are receiving their ESL training through one time workshops and professional development offered by their local school districts. But, as Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) point out, the one shot approach gives this topic superficial attention. The most effective method of professional development makes ESL training an on-going process with a commitment from teachers and administrators to transfer the ESL knowledge to the classroom. For pre-service teachers, colleges of education must also make a commitment to better prepare teachers to address the pedagogical needs of ELLs. Because teacher preparation programs have not done so in the past, school districts have had to try to "fix" teachers after they are already in the field. Why are teacher preparation programs not making changes since the changing demographics in schools indicate that no teacher will leave the profession without ever having taught an English language learner? Milk, Mercado and Sapiens (1992) made this very claim in the early 1990s, yet fifteen years later there is still a need for change to pre-service and in-service education.

### **Preparing Teachers for Language and Content Instruction**

In 2002, the No Child Left behind Act was passed with the intent of improving schools and the educational achievement of students. The passage of this act has required schools to be accountable for the progress, or lack thereof, of its students. In addition, teacher quality was made a priority by requiring all teachers of core academic subjects to be "highly qualified" by the end of the 2005-2006 school year. To be "highly qualified" in general means that a teacher must have: a bachelor's degree, full state certification and/or licensure and demonstrated competency in the core area in which he/she teaches (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). An important aspect in the definition of "highly qualified" is to note the omission of the ability to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students. The provision for schools to also meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) does stress, however, the need to show academic growth in student subgroups: one of them being ELLs (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Given the increase in ELL students nationwide, it is a logical assumption that at some point, especially in rural areas of the U.S., that teachers have or will have English language learners in their classes. Clearly all ESL teachers will need to be highly qualified, but once again the question of appropriate methods and models

of instruction, pertains to the mainstream classroom teacher not licensed in ESL. Certainly a self contained ESL classroom will have a highly qualified teacher, but what if it is a sheltered classroom or a content area class? Will the content be taught by a highly qualified teacher and the language by a different teacher? Should all pre-service teachers be trained in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol or SIOP Model (Echevarria, Short & Powers, 2006)? Regardless of the model used, few classroom teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will retire without having ever taught a second language learner, yet few teacher preparation programs seem to be preparing their teachers for this new student population. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to teach English language learners (ELL) in the mainstream rural classrooms that have a large population of ELLs. Additionally, the study attempts to determine teachers' perceptions of the role institutions of higher education could play in preparing mainstream teachers who are highly qualified in their content as well as second language teaching theories, strategies and methodologies for teaching ELLs in the mainstream classroom.

### **Teacher Preparation in Rural Eastern North Carolina**

North Carolina is not alone in its absence of a requirement for all teachers to have knowledge in theories and methods of teaching ELLs. Yet with the local population growth one would expect to see changes in how institutions of higher education prepare teachers to effectively teach ELLs in schools. The nature and magnitude of the need for well prepared teachers in North Carolina can be seen by analyzing statewide statistics. From the 1994-95 academic years to the 2004-05 academic years, the overall student population in the state has increased by only 1.1%. However, the population of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students has increased by 371% (National Clearing house for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA), 2005). The growth trend has not been uniform through North Carolina, the majority of growth of LEP students is found in rural areas of eastern North Carolina. The 2002-2007 statistics provided by the North Carolina Department of Instruction (NCDPI, 2007) show a population of 96,725 English language learners who speak over 200 different languages for the 2006 academic year. Yet in rural areas of North Carolina where this study was conducted, the predominant language is Spanish. The percentage of Spanish speaking students of the total school enrollment was fifty percent, while the percentage of them who were identified as ELL was thirty eight percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). This dramatic increase alone is enough to warrant the need for having a greater number of trained and ESL licensed teachers in the state of North Carolina. Given this large increase and the prediction that it will continue to rise, it appears that all teachers will become teachers of

ELLs, whether they are prepared to do so or not. The traditional pull-out model of instruction is no longer adequate to meet the needs of this growing population. Since the majority of the classrooms will include ELLs, the model of instruction will need to integrate ongoing language learning while delivering the content standards.

### **Duplin County: The Research Population**

Duplin County School District, located in a rural poultry farming community, has grown from 1,134 LEP students in 2002 to 1,630 in 2006 out of a total student population of 9,000 (NCDPI, 2007). The 2006 AYP summary for the county shows only 5 schools (33%) out of 15 have met adequate yearly progress as legislated by NCLB. According to the ABCs End-of-Grade Tests, only 43.1% of LEP students in Duplin County passed both reading and math tests. These poor scores are even more daunting when looking at the qualifications of the faculty. There are 20 certified ESL teachers in the county who work directly in providing language instruction, yet *ALL* teachers have regular contact with these students. The percentage of teachers with over 10 years teaching experience is impressive at 47%; however, the experienced teachers had little or no coursework pertaining to instruction of students with diverse language backgrounds.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study is part of a collaborative research study focusing on an elementary school to determine the students' perceptions of the school's climate (Rodriguez, Ringler, & O'Neal, 2007) Implications for instructional leaders addressing the needs of English language learners in rural schools (Ringler, O'Neal, & Rodriguez, 2007), and teacher preparation and its effect on school climate. For the purpose of this article the focus of the study was the latter: teacher preparation and its effect on the elementary school's climate. The review of the literature shows numerous studies that indicate we are not preparing teachers to deal with a growing linguistically and culturally diverse population. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to teach English language learners in the mainstream rural classrooms that have a large population of ELLs. Additionally, the study attempts to determine teachers' perceptions of the role institutions of higher education could play in addressing teacher quality as it relates to ESL education in the mainstream classroom with large enrollment of ELLs. The researchers in this study identify teacher perceptions of their readiness for this population and the realities of their preparedness. Both a survey and a qualitative interview were conducted with this population of two male and twenty-two female teachers. The survey and interview followed a modified version of the of the questionnaire protocol titled "Measuring success in ESL

programs,” which was originally authored by Carrasquillo & Rodriguez (1998). This questionnaire protocol was modified by the researchers with permission from the original authors to address specifically, the research question: Are institutes of higher education adequately preparing teachers for the current school populations?

### Sample Population

A rural elementary school located in Duplin county North Carolina was selected due to the large number of Spanish speaking students in their schools. In the last few years, the population in Duplin County has increasingly grown as a result of the Spanish speaking families moving to the area to work in the local poultry farms.

Participants from the elementary school selected for this study were subject area teachers grades K-5 that educate and provide services to students identified as English language learners (ELLs). Thirty consent forms were randomly sent to obtain voluntary teacher participation from five teachers at each of the school’s K-5 levels. A total of 24 teachers agreed to participate: an 80% return rate of the surveys

sent. The sample population included 2 males and 22 females (total  $n=24$ ).

### Instruments

Researchers conducted interviews of teachers in focus groups. Teacher focus groups responded to open-ended questions to determine perceived efficacy in and preparedness for teaching ELLs, their sense of responsibility in teaching ELLs, and their willingness to develop more skills to address ELLs learning needs.

### Demographics

The sample population was administered a demographic survey. Table 1 describes the teacher population that participated in this study. There is a total of 26 areas of licensure, two more than the number of participants, due to two teachers who are dually licensed. It is interesting to note that 21 (88%) of the teachers completed their licensure training in North Carolina. The remaining three teachers were trained in Pennsylvania, Iowa, and Ohio. All of the teachers have received professional development in ESL as it is a requirement of this school district.

Table 1

#### *Teacher Self Descriptions*

<u>Demographic</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Percent of sample</u>
Gender	Male	2	08.3
	Female	22	91.7
Degree	Bachelors	20	83.3
	Masters	4	16.7
Years Teaching	0-3	6	25.0
	4-6	3	12.5
	7-10	2	08.3
	10+	13	54.2
Area of Licensure*	Elementary	20	83.3
	Early Childhood	4	16.7
	Middle Grades	2	08.3

\* There are 26 areas of licensure, two more than the number of participants, due to two teachers who are dually licensed.

### Interview Protocol

The faculty interviews were conducted in small groups, usually 2-3 people at one time. The teachers were asked to

come to a private conference room at their convenience during a specific four hour block of time. This was repeated until 21 of the teachers had been interviewed. Due to scheduling conflicts, we were unable to interview all 24 teachers who had completed the questionnaires, even after

three site visits. A series of seven questions were asked by one researcher while a second researcher took notes and audio recorded the sessions. The teachers were informed that this interview would be used for research and publication; moreover, the information would not be used to their personal detriment. In addition, they were told that their answers would be used to further teacher preparation research.

### Results

Since these interviews were conducted orally and recorded, the statistical summary of responses alone is not enough to understand the sentiments of the participants. The

discussion that follows elaborates on the content of the interviews.

In the first question regarding a dedicated course during teacher preparation (Table 2), it was interesting to note that only 14% of the teachers had responded that they had a course dedicated to language acquisition studies, yet 46% of the teachers surveyed had received their licenses in the past ten years. The growth in the ELL population is not a new trend and is one that has been followed for longer than the ten years in which these teachers were licensed. However, the teachers' perceptions were that teaching English Language Learners was not a serious concern when they received their training. This reinforces the claim that the curriculum in teacher education needs to be updated to reflect the needs of the student population.

Table 2

#### *Interview results*

<u>Question</u>	<u>% Yes</u>	<u>% No</u>
<i>In your teacher preparation program, did you receive explicit instruction in language acquisition through a dedicated course?</i>	14	86
<i>In your teacher preparation program, did you receive strands of information regarding English Language Learners woven throughout a variety of courses?</i>	48	52
<i>In your teacher preparation program, were you required to take a course in teaching students of culturally diverse backgrounds?</i>	33	16
<i>If you did not have any formal coursework, would you have enrolled in any had it been available?</i>	57	43
<i>Would you participate in professional development regarding English Language Learners if offered?</i>	100	0
<i>Do you feel responsible to teach the English Language Learners in your classroom?</i>	100	0
<i>Do you feel prepared to teach English Language Learners in your classroom?</i>	25	75

The second question about receiving strands of information regarding English language learners woven throughout a variety of courses, forty eight percent of the respondents stated they had received some “strands of information,” while fifty two percent believe they had not. As the teachers responded to this question, they often hesitated to be specific. They were able to recall “mention” of English language learners in their coursework, but unable to quantify it for us. The overall feeling was that although it was woven through other courses, the information was not quite specific enough to directly instruct them. It is our understanding from this question that it is the weakness of what was infused in their classes that led to a 50/50 split in the answers given.

Question three inquired about the requirement of taking courses for teaching students of culturally diverse backgrounds. Seven teachers had responded that they were required to take a course pertaining to cultural diversity, while fourteen had not.

With over half of the teachers having received teaching licenses over ten years ago, it is not surprising that one third of the teachers answered yes to this question. However, many of the teachers qualified their answers to say that the content of the diversity lessons was geared towards inclusion of African Americans in texts and storybooks. This was often the way multicultural education was portrayed in its infancy. Due to the various interpretations of the questions and the direct responses we received, it is fair to say that most of those who took a course, took something under the auspices of “multicultural education.” The implication from the responses was that this course did not address linguistic and cultural diversity in relationship to teaching and learning.

The fourth question addressed the hypothetical question of whether or not they would have taken a course had one been available. Twelve of those questioned stated that they would have taken a course, while nine believe they would not have. Those who replied that they would take a course also qualified their answers with, “If I knew then, what I know now....” Clearly, the lack of the diverse student population at the time these teachers were in training impacted their responses. Those who replied that they would not have taken a course also qualified it with a similar response. They stated, “No I would not because there was not a foreseen need at the time.” Regardless of the response, it appears that lack of foresight about the changing student population impacted this response.

The fifth question addressed the more concrete issue of whether or not they would participate in professional development regarding English language learners if offered and also how they would prefer that it be delivered. One hundred percent of those questioned responded that they would participate in professional development.

This school is unique in that they have recognized their rapidly growing population of English language learners. There is a district wide requirement that all teachers take ten

hours of professional development (equivalent to one CEU) per academic year. Participants were asked how they would prefer this professional development to be delivered and the response was mixed. There were some who would prefer the professional development to be offered through on-site workshops, those who preferred on-line learning modules or courses and those who wanted a combination of the two. Since this community is very rural and located one hour from the closest university, convenience seemed to be the overriding factor, not lack of desire for the training.

Question six addressed the teachers’ sense of responsibility for teaching the English language learners in their classrooms. All twenty-one of the participants interviewed responded yes to this question. This was an overwhelming response and not what we had expected. As teacher educators, we have often heard from frustrated teachers in the field that the ELLs are the responsibility of the ESL teacher. This teacher population, however, does not carry that mindset. When asked the question, the physical demeanor of the respondents was one of shock that we could even ask such a question as they stated that at least half of their classes were comprised of ELLs. It was evident that this school recognized their responsibility to teach all of the students regardless of language background.

The final and most compelling question asked whether teachers felt prepared to teach the English language learners in their classrooms. Only twenty-five percent of the teachers responded that they felt prepared while seventy-five percent stated they were not. The responses to this question were not as clear-cut as the numbers reflect. Those who replied with a definite “yes” qualified their responses by stating that their preparation is a result of the in-service professional development that their district has provided. Those who said no were not as assured with their responses. Their replies were actually more “wishy-washy” in nature in that they have high levels of frustration, inadequacies about assessment, concerns about the cultural differences, and lack of confidence in their knowledge base. As a group, however, they made it clear that their initial experience with the ELLs was not successful, but over time they have learned what works and what doesn’t. One teacher even responded that she didn’t know what happened, but it was just “magic”.

### **Recommendations**

It is evident based on the results that this particular sample population is underprepared to effectively teach classes with a large number of ELL students. The leadership at the school and the school district may consider the following recommendations for this school and others with similar teacher and student demographics.

#### *Dedicated Coursework*

Elementary and content areas teachers would benefit from a dedicated course that addresses the linguistic needs of a

linguistically diverse student population. Specifically, the study of language acquisition theory is helpful to all teachers to clarify many myths and misconceptions they may have. Teachers will also learn the value of literacy in a home language as well as the value of drawing on students' heritage as a resource and not viewing it as an impediment to learning (Villegas and Lucas, 2002). It would benefit teachers and the school if there were a collaboration with the regional university to dedicate a course and cohort to this group of teachers. Cohorts of this type are already in development at East Carolina University, the largest university in the region whose mission it is to address access to the university for teachers in rural schools.

### *Professional Development*

Much research has been done in the area of content based instruction for English language learners. The compelling research done by Short and Echevarria (1999) has shown that through using the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) student achievement improved in the content areas. This model initially focuses on the ESL teachers as way to improve the instruction in the sheltered ESL classes so that the students gain content and language knowledge simultaneously. With such great success and with the growing trend that all teachers will have ELLs in their classrooms, it is essential that all teachers receive this specialized training which emphasizes differentiation of instruction for all learners. When delivering professional development workshops on the SIOP Model, the response from teachers is that this model does not take away from their instruction, does not add to their instruction, but improves their instruction and the students' comprehension. It is, therefore, a recommendation to include the SIOP model as part of ongoing professional development for in-service teachers.

### *Implications for Higher Education*

IHE's should not only revise their current teacher preparation programs, but should also collaborate with local school districts to develop in-service teachers in becoming better teachers of ELLs. Many teachers attend professional development on a yearly basis as part of their teaching responsibilities, but Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995) emphasize that the one shot approach to professional development does not work. Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2004) reiterate that it is through sustained collaboration and on-going coaching that professional development is most effective. Therefore, professional development should be delivered in collaboration with IHE's in order to learn the latest research and best practices in the field of ESL. Additionally, the professional development should be flexible in terms of format and location. Teachers in this study indicated that they would prefer training to be on their

school site with opportunities to practice and be coached in their classrooms.

English language learners are not going away and are rapidly changing how we teach. No Child Left Behind is holding educators accountable for instructing all of our students, but teacher preparation has not kept up with these trends. This study showed that teachers have not been prepared to teach ELLs in their teacher preparation programs in the past and have received the majority of their information on ELLs through professional development. Teachers in the study strongly emphasized that with the demographic changes in schools they would enroll in an ELL course. Therefore, the changes needed to be made in teacher preparation programs are necessary so that all teachers are prepared to deliver instruction using successful and empirically tested models.

### *Implications for Teachers in Rural Schools*

In this study it was evident that teachers did not perceive themselves to be adequately prepared to teach the large number of ELLs in their classrooms. However, students were achieving academically, were motivated to be in school and to learn, and administrators were pleased with the teachers' work. There is no substitute for students' perceptions that their teachers care and administrators' perceptions that teachers were doing their best to help ELLs learn (Rodriguez, Ringler, O'Neal, 2007). Therefore, teachers may be missing an essential piece in their professional confidence: feedback that what they are doing is working. To help with this, IHEs should offer a cultural diversity course in their preparation programs that address not only learning styles, but also the characteristics of ELLs in rural settings. It is through understanding students' culture and background knowledge that teachers can prepare effective lesson plans reflecting the cultural diversity in the classroom.

In conclusion, the number of (English language learners) ELL students in the US is increasing dramatically. The growth is even more evident in rural areas of the United States such as Eastern North Carolina. Teachers face classrooms where the majority of students are ELLs. Teacher preparation programs have not prepared these individuals for the student population they face today regardless of the year in which they received their teaching licenses. However, teachers have a strong desire to effectively teach all students including ELLs. IHEs have the responsibility to prepare teachers to teach all students and one way to do so is to incorporate into all programs strategies to teach English language learners. As Short & Vogt have stated in a Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol II institute in Denver, Colorado in March, 2007, "Teaching students with ELL strategies is good teaching - PLUS. The "Plus" is adding an awareness of the language and culture dimension to everything we do in the classroom."

Does the discussion go back to the model or method of instruction, language of instruction, or to the teacher preparation programs? It is evident from this small study that those teachers who have been in the field for longer periods of time have not been formally trained to teach English language learners. Those with more recent degrees do not have a much stronger background in teaching ELLs. It appears that the majority of the teacher education is taken through professional development activities. Why are public school districts “fixing the problem” once the teachers are in the field? Why are institutes of higher education not requiring at the minimum one strong course in language and cultural diversity that includes some real guidance for emerging teachers?

The question remains as to what can be done to improve academic achievement for English language learners. Where do teacher education programs begin making the change?

### References

- Coming in Waves. (2006). *American History*, 41(4), 28-29.
- Cummins, J. (1997). Cultural and linguistic diversity in education: A mainstream issue. *Education Review*, 49(2), 105-114.
- Darling-Hammond, L. & McLaughlin, M.W. (1995). Policies that support professional development in an era of reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(8), 597-605.
- Echevarria, J. Short, D. & Powers, K. (2006) School reform and standards-based education: A model for English language learners. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 99 (4), 195-210.
- Echevarria, J., Vogt, M. & Short, D. (2004). *Making content comprehensible for English language learners: The SIOP Model*. Boston. Pearson Education.
- Farkas, S. Duffett, A. & Johnson, J., with Moye, L. & Vine, J. (2003). *Now that I'm here: What America's immigrants have to say about life in the U.S. today*. Retrieved October 16, 2006 from Public Agenda website: <http://www.publicagenda.org/specials/immigration>.
- Gandara, P., Maxwell-Jolly, J. & Driscoll, A. (2005). *Listening to teachers of English language learners: A survey of California Teachers' challenges, experiences, and professional development needs*. Santa Cruz, CA: The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning.
- Garcia, E. E. (1991). Effective instruction for language minority students: The teacher. *Journal of Education*, 173(2), 130-141.
- Lewis, L., Parsad, B., Carey, N., Bartfai, N., Farris, E., & Smerdon, B. (1999). *Teacher quality: A report on the preparation and qualifications of public school teachers*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Manning, M.L. & Baruth, L. (2004). Multicultural education of children adolescents, (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Pearson Education.
- Menken, K., Antunez, B., National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, W., & ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education, W. (2001, June 1). *An Overview of the Preparation and Certification of Teachers Working with Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED455231) Retrieved August 1, 2007, from ERIC database.
- Milk, R., Mercado, C. & Sapiens, A. (1992). *Re-thinking the education of teachers of language minority children: Developing reflective teachers for changing schools. Occasional papers in bilingual education. Focus Number 6*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. (ERIC Retrieval No. ED350877)
- Mueller, T.G., Singer, H.S., & Carranza, F. D. (2006). A national survey of the educational planning and language instruction practices for students with moderate to severe disabilities who are English language learners. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 31(3), 242-254.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2006). *Institute for educational statistics*. Retrieved Aug. 25, 2007, from <http://nces.ed.gov/globallocator/index.asp?search=1&State=NC&city=&zipcode=28508&miles=&itemname=&sortby=name&School=1&PrivSchool=1&College=1&Library=1&CS=2FF3D0AA>
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). (2007). *LEP headcount 2002-2006*. Retrieved Aug. 23, 2007, from [http://community.learnnc.org/dpi/esl/archives/2006/07/nc\\_lep\\_numbers.php](http://community.learnnc.org/dpi/esl/archives/2006/07/nc_lep_numbers.php)
- National Clearing house for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA). (2005). *North Carolina rate of LEP growth 1994/1995-2004/2005*. Graduate School of Education and Human Development, George Washington University. Retrieved February 5, 2007 from: [http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/policy/states/reports/statedata/2004LEP/North\\_Carolina-G-05.pdf](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/policy/states/reports/statedata/2004LEP/North_Carolina-G-05.pdf)
- National Clearing house for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA). (2006). *The Growing number of Limited English proficient students*. Retrieved February 5, 2007: [http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/policy/states/reports/statedata/2004LEP/GrowingLEP\\_0405\\_Nov06.pdf](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/policy/states/reports/statedata/2004LEP/GrowingLEP_0405_Nov06.pdf)
- Ringler, M. C., O'Neal, D., Rodriguez, D. (2007). Factors that influence academic performance of English language learners (ELL) and implications for instructional leaders (Manuscript submitted for publication).
- Rodriguez, D., Ringler, M.C., O'Neal, D. (2007). English Language Learners' perceptions of school. (Manuscript submitted for publication).
- Selwyn, D. (2007). Highly quantified teachers: NCLB and

- teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(2), 124-137.
- Short, D. & Echevarria, J. (1999). *The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol: A tool for teacher-researcher collaboration and professional development*. Berkeley, CA. Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence. Retrieved February 5, 2007, <http://crede.berkeley.edu/resarch/llaa/epr3.shtml>
- Short, D., & Vogt, M. (2007). Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) II Institute presented at a training workshop in Denver, Colorado.
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary. (2003). *No Child Left Behind: A Toolkit for Teachers*. Washington, D.C: GPO.
- Villegas, A., & Lucas, T. (2002). *Educating Culturally Responsive Teachers: A Coherent Approach*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.