# MAINSTREAMED ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN A LOW-INCIDENCE RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT: A CASE STUDY

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my mom Betty Alice Oswald Higgins who always believed that with tenacity and perseverance I could do anything. It is through your shining example that I have accomplished my dream.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Mainstreamed English Language Instruction In A

Low-Incidence Rural School District: A Case Study

M. Rene' Yoesel

## ABSTRACT

Classrooms in the United States are changing as the population of the United States becomes more diverse with growing numbers of English language learners (Banks, 2005; Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel & Herwantoro, 2005; Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009; DeVillar, Faltis, & Cummins, 1994; Diaz, 2001; Dilg, 2003; Hernandez, 2001; Ovando & McLaren, 2000; Sadowski, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Immigrants and their families have traditionally settled in larger urban communities, but recent trends indicate a growing number of English language learners are enrolling in rural mid-west public schools. Many rural districts have very little experience with resources to meet the needs of this new diverse group of students. As a result teachers, especially in rural and low-incidence districts, are experiencing academic and cultural challenges of educating students whose first language is not English (Berube, 2000; Hill & Flynn, 2004).

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary teacher perceptions regarding experience with instructing mainstreamed English language learners in a low-incidence district. This study also explores issues these teachers feel most influence their ability to successfully teach students from diverse cultures and who speak a first language other than English. Research examining teacher perceptions should provide important insight to teachers, administrators and policy makers regarding teacher needs and support in the education of English language learners.

# Chapter One

## Introduction

> According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2004) projections for the year 2050, the non-Hispanic, White population of the United States is likely to increase by 7%. This modest increase is in stark contrast to projected increases among people of Hispanic origin (projected to increase by 188%), the Asian population (projected to increase by 213%), and the Black population (projected to increase by 71%) (Young & Brooks, 2008, p.391).

The demographics of the United States population are changing at an astounding rate (Banks, 2005; Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel & Herwantoro, 2005; Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009; Diaz, 2001; Dilg, 2003; Sadowski, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Almost sixteen million immigrants came to the United States during the 1990's which far exceeded all other decades in U.S. history (Capps et al., 2005). The most recent influx of immigrants to the U.S. is also the most diverse in terms of ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status (Diaz, 2001; Gunderson, 2007; McIntyre, Kyle, Chen, Kraemer & Parr, 2009; Rong & Preissle, 1998).

Consequently, with the growing numbers of English language learners, classrooms in the U.S. are becoming more diverse (Banks, 2005; Capps et al., 2005; Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009; DeVillar, Faltis, & Cummins, 1994; Diaz, 2001; Dilg, 2003; Hernandez, 2001; Ovando & McLaren, 2000; Sadowski, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). English language learners represent the fastest growing segment of the school age population (Hill & Flynn, 2004). According to Batalova, Fix and Murray (2007) the enrollment of English language learners in U.S. public schools grew by 56 percent

between the years of 1995 and 2005; while the total school population grew by 2.6 percent. Batalova, Fix and Murray further state that approximately 48.9 million, pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade students were enrolled in public schools during the 2004-2005 school years and over five million of these students were English language learners; primarily in the elementary grades. Between 1979 and 2007, the number of children between the ages of 5-17 who spoke a language other than English in their home more than doubled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009) (see Table 1).

According to Swanson (2009) Missouri ranked in the bottom twenty states in 2005-06 enrollments of English language learners in terms of number of ELL students enrolled in public school. Even though Missouri has a low amount of ELLs as compared to many other states, the increase in enrollment of 10,238 English language learners in 2000 to 18,745 in 2005 indicates an 83.1% change. Missouri children ages 5-17 who speak a language other than English in their home accounts for 6.6% of the total population of all students this age (Data Center, 2009; NCES, 2009) (see Table 2).

While not all English language learners (ELL) are immigrants, understanding the historic demographic changes helps to conceptualize the current and future challenges for public schools. Given teachers play a vital role in the education of ELLs, the purpose of this study was to examine elementary teacher perceptions regarding their experience in teaching mainstreamed English language learners. Results may serve to inform administrators and policy makers about the needs of teachers who are responsible for educating mainstreamed English language learners.

Table 1

Number and Percentage of Children Ages 5-17 who spoke a language other than English at home. Selected years 1979-2007. (Numbers in Millions).

| Year | Total Population | Number | %age of Total Population |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1979 | 44.7 | 3.8 | 8.5 |
| 1989 | 42.3 | 5.2 | 12.3 |
| 1992 | 47.7 | 6.3 | 13.2 |
| 1995 | 47.5 | 6.7 | 14.1 |
| 1999 | 52.7 | 8.8 | 16.7 |
| 2000 | 52.5 | 9.5 | 18.1 |
| 2001 | 53.0 | 9.8 | 18.5 |
| 2002 | 53.0 | 9.8 | 18.5 |
| 2003 | 53.0 | 9.9 | 18.7 |
| 2004 | 52.9 | 9.9 | 18.8 |
| 2005 | 52.8 | 10.6 | 20.0 |
| 2006 | 53.4 | 10.8 | 20.3 |
| 2007 | 53.2 | 10.8 | 20.4 |
| | Percentage change compared with 1979 | | |
| 2007 | 19.0 | 185.5 | 139.9 |

Source: National Center for Education Statistics; U.S. Department of Education (2009)

Table 2

Missouri children ages 5-17 who spoke a language other than English at home – 2007. (Number in Thousands).

| Total Population | Number | Percentage of the Total Population |
|---|---|---|
| 1,023 | 67 | 6.6 |

Source: National Center for Education Statistics; U.S. Department of Education (2009)

School age English language learners have traditionally settled with their families in large urban areas. This group of learners, however, has recently moved into small rural schools in every state (Berube, 2000). With such a small percentage of ELLs, rural districts face specific challenges not seen in larger urban districts. Teachers in rural schools rarely have experience working with diverse student populations and rural schools often have limited resources (Berube, 2000; Hill & Flynn, 2004). Regardless of the circumstances and distinctions that bring English language learners into the education spotlight, they have legal rights and needs that go beyond traditional forms of educational support (McIntyre et al., 2009; Sadowski, 2004).

## Background to the study

The increasing demographic shift places new expectations on school districts to address the growing numbers of English language learners (Booth, 1998; Garcia, 2001). As the numbers of English language learners increases so do the problems and frustrations they encounter in schools (Gunderson, 2007). ELLs constitute a variety of groups that bring subtle but significant differences to school in regard to their skills and knowledge (Education Alliance, 2009; Freeman & Freeman, 2002). Like all students, ELLs differ in their family dynamics, socioeconomic status, and life experiences, but they also bring to the classroom distinctive beliefs, values, customs and cultures (Berube, 2000; Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009; Education Alliance, 2009; Hill & Flynn, 2004). Approximately one third of small rural schools in the U.S. currently enroll English language learners (Berube, 2000). With demographic estimations projecting an increasing English language learner population, teachers will need preparation and support to best educate this growing number of students (Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009).

When compared to their English speaking peers, English language learners in U.S. schools have not always had equal access to a challenging curriculum (Herman & Abedi, 2004). Gandara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly and Callahan (2003) suggest the educational achievement of ELLs is behind that of English background students. "Data suggest a wide and largely uniform performance gap" between English language learners and English speaking eighth grade students taking the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Batalova, Fix & Murray, 2007, p.14). English background students on average scored above the basic level, while English language learners on average scored below basic. The definition of basic in the core academic areas varies and is based on what students should know and be able to learn. The same achievement gaps were evident in statewide standardized test results (Batalova, Fix & Murray, 2007). English language learners and their families place a great deal of importance on education and are capable of academic success when given the same opportunities and support as English speaking students (Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009; McIntyre, et al., 2009). The multicultural diversity of today's students suggests that schools should focus on the best way to educate their English language learners (Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009; DeVillar, Faltis & Cummins, 1994; Dilg, 2003; McIntyre, et al., 2009; Rong & Preissle, 1998).

Even though the U.S. has been formed by successive waves of immigrants, a preponderance of these newcomers and their families face discrimination and obstacles (Cooper, 1993; Risford & Haywoode, 1979). Spring (2006) suggests that one major obstacle is education and argues that schools are grappling with the changes needed due to the increasing numbers of English language learners. Changing school demographic

patterns become even more difficult for low-incidence schools, many of which are located in rural areas. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2006) define low-incidence as school districts that enroll low numbers of English language learners (less than twenty) from year to year. As rural communities are commonly ethnically homogeneous, the residents and schools of these rural communities have had little exposure or experience with diverse cultures and languages (Hill & Flynn, 2004).

## Statement of the Problem

In just over one generation the population of the United States has changed from predominantly white with European ancestry and native African Americans to a country with large percentages of people with roots in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America (Duignan & Gann, 1998). At the current rate, it is estimated that in just a few years English language learners will increase to twenty-five percent of the total K-12 school population (Committee on Education and Labor, 2007; Fix & Capps, 2005). Enrollment of English language learners in rural areas has more than doubled during the past fifteen years (Whelan, 2007). Rural school districts typically have very little experience, trained teachers, or resources to adequately educate their English language learners (Berube, 2000; Hill & Flynn, 2004; Wrigley, 2000).

Classroom teachers are increasingly sharing the responsibility of teaching English language learners and this challenge is met with trepidation as many feel ill-prepared and not supported by their districts (Flynn & Hill, 2005; Freeman, 2004; Verplaeste, 1998). The majority of teachers instructing English language learners, 67% in urban settings and 82% in rural areas, report they have never participated in professional development specifically related to the instruction of ELLs (Flynn & Hill, 2005). According to

Fillmore and Snow (2000), teachers are not prepared to help those students who speak a language other than English as too few teachers know about the student's cultural background or understand the inherent challenges of English language learners. Noticeably absent in the research are mainstream teacher perspectives on English language learners (Reeves, 2006; Youngs & Youngs, 2001).

## Purpose of the Study

The classroom teacher is a vital component of the academic success of their students and has the potential to open and close doors of opportunity for the children they teach (Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009). The expectations and attitudes of the teacher play a considerable role in the successful education of all students in their classrooms (Diaz, 2001). Students and teachers in U.S. schools, however, have been exposed to years of discrimination and prejudice and the wedges that divide the cultures (Dilg, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary teacher perceptions of their experience instructing mainstreamed English language learners in a low-incidence (less than 20 ELLs) rural Midwestern school district. This study also explores the issues these teachers feel most impact their ability to successfully teach students whose first language is not English. Research examining the experience of teachers responsible for educating English language learners should provide important insight and understanding of best practices for educating mainstreamed English language learners. Additionally, information concerning teacher support and resources regarding the education of mainstreamed English language learners may provide valuable information to administrators and policy makers. With as many as one third of all teachers leaving the field after their first year, teacher attrition becomes extremely important in public schools

(Fulton, Yoon & Lee, 2005). "Administrators have a great deal of influence over school climate and teacher efficacy" (Ferriter & Norton, 2004, p.19). Greiner and Smith (2009) suggest that support from school administrators is a key factor in teacher attrition. Coombe et. al. (2008) suggests "the need for teacher leadership in settings with small populations of ELLs" (p. 203). "If resources on the topic of low-incidence populations are limited, literature specifically addressing leadership in such situations is even scarcer" (Coombe et. al., 2008, p. 204). Therefore support and leadership is significant and better understanding of the needs of teachers instructing mainstreamed English language learners was investigated in this study.

## Significance of the Study

Children from non-English speaking families are the fastest-growing student population in the United States (Diaz, 2001; Gunderson, 2007; Sadowski, 2004). The population of English language learners increased by approximately 105% nationwide between 1995 and 2001 (Kindler, 2002). The numbers of English language learners settling in rural areas is also increasing at a rapid rate (Huang, 1999; O'Neal, Ringler, & Rodriguez, 2008). Too often, rural and smaller school districts are in denial about the need for services for newly enrolled English language learners until the numbers of ELL students becomes impossible to ignore (Huang, 1999). By examining the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding their experience teaching mainstreamed English language learners, this study may provide direction for improved efforts regarding the way schools educate their diverse learners; specifically in rural schools where there is little research and a growing number of English language learners.

## Conceptual Framework

Students of various cultures and languages bring their values, beliefs and perceptions to school (Banks, 2005; Irvine, 2003). Irvine (2003) further suggests that teachers also bring their own personal and cultural characteristics and beliefs to the classroom that impact the way they teach. These include their individual beliefs regarding gender, social class and ethnicity.

Many factors such as social inequities, values, opportunity and poverty can influence the academic performance of English language learners (Lachat, 1999). Diaz (2001) argues that the success of English language learners in U.S. schools depends on the quality of their education and the methods used by the classroom teacher. Teacher effectiveness has been linked to student achievement and attitudes regarding school (Irvine, 2003). Good teachers feel responsible for making sure each of their students is successful in both school and acclimating into the mainstream of society (Sleeter & Grant, 1994).

According to Wong (2004) teachers want to fit in, to be adequately trained, and for their students to achieve. A highly qualified teacher is the single greatest influence for assuring that all students achieve to their full potential (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). The diversity of public schools calls for a change in the way students are educated and the principal is a key variable in determining what happens in schools as well as being a gatekeeper for change (Fullan, 1982). A "principal's actions serve to legitimate whether a change is taken seriously and to support teachers both psychologically and with resources" (Fullan, 1991, p. 76). A lack of administrative support and a lack of involvement in decision making represent significant

barriers to the retention of qualified teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Twenty to thirty percent of public school teachers abandon the profession within the first five years. The rate is even higher for rural school districts (Berry, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). However, as a social influence, leadership filters through organizations rather than existing in a particular person or position (Smylie, Conley, & Marks 2002). Teacher support should be viewed as a continuum and can be derived from a variety of sources (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). Thus this study was framed by the literature regarding English language learners and teacher perceptions of their experiences, needs, and support for teaching in a diverse classroom. Viewing teacher perceptions of administrative assistance through the lens of needs and support embody the conceptual framework for this study.

## Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding their classroom experience in the education of mainstreamed English language learners?
2. What are the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding support and resources needed to effectively instruct mainstreamed English language learners?
3. What are the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding administrative assistance in the education of mainstreamed English language learners?

## Design and Methods

This study recognizes the importance of teacher perceptions regarding the critical elements necessary for educating English language learners and is designed to engage

classroom teachers in a process of investigation regarding their experience and perceived needs. The design of this study was a qualitative single case study and as such attempted to "understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (p. 23), in one rural low-incidence Midwestern elementary school (Bogdan & Biklen). In choosing a single case study Creswell (1998) states:

> I am reminded how the study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the greater the lack of depth in any single case …. What motivates the researcher to consider a large number of cases is the idea of generalizability, a term that holds little meaning for most qualitative researchers (p. 63).

Stake (1995) supports this idea suggesting that a case study is particularization and not generalization. Stake further states that "we take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does" (p.8). The school district chosen for this study is of special interest due to its particularity and uniqueness in terms of location and student demographics.

The participants included K-5 teachers who were selected due to having teaching experience with mainstreamed English language learners in their classroom at River Bluffs Elementary School. River Bluffs is a pseudonym, used to protect the confidentiality of the participants and site. A list of elementary teachers who taught at River Bluffs was obtained from the registrar's office and from this list ten teachers were selected to be interviewed as these were the only teachers with experience in teaching mainstreamed English language learners in this particular elementary school.

*Data Collection*

This study examined the perceptions of elementary teachers who instructed mainstreamed English language learners in a low-incidence district. Individual teachers were interviewed to provide detailed information about their perceptions of experiences, needs and support regarding the instruction of mainstreamed ELLs. A semi-structured interview format was used to allow for exploration of the topic from the teachers own frames of reference. A semi-structured interview design was chosen to address a basic framework yet allow for new questions based on what the teacher said. This researcher's ultimate aim was to capture the teacher's thinking of their perceived needs and types of support for educating mainstreamed English language learners. Follow up conversations and email focused more specifically on the emerging themes. Supporting documents and field notes were collected and reviewed. Supporting documents such as enrollment forms served to inform the study in how English language learners are identified. Board assurances were important in understanding how the district viewed its English language learners. Additional documents such as demographic reports, parent letters and annual board presentations were reviewed and utilized. Field notes regarding descriptions of classrooms and teacher methods were recorded and examined as a means for triangulation of data.

*Data Analysis*

Interviews were transcribed and coded to reveal themes and patterns (Steidman, 1998). Data were analyzed based on the conceptual framework first through the area of support and leadership and next through teacher needs and resources. Subsequent analysis of the themes and patterns allowed for the discovery of relationships and

subcategories. Analysis of the data was an ongoing process throughout the entire study. Data including interview transcriptions, district records, observations, and field notes served to help refine the analysis as it occurred. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study to protect the confidentiality of the site and participants. In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, member checking occurred. Data was checked with internal documents and the teachers interviewed to get feedback and reactions. The information gathered helped establish internal reliability and allowed for additional feedback.

*Limitations*

Limitations help to explain the boundaries of a study. One limitation of the study was the use of elementary teachers in one rural elementary school. According to Thomas & Brubaker (2000), what the portrayal by an outsider doesn't uncover, is the subject's private goals, gratifications, purpose, fears, and methods of interpreting events. This study was a within-site, single case study and as such cannot be generalized.

Another limitation of this study is researcher bias (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Mehra, 2002; Patton, 1997; Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). As a school employee who works with English language learners, this researcher had to acknowledge personal opinions and strive to maintain an objective distance. My assumptions upon the initiation of this study were that teachers were not given a voice, support or professional development in the education of English language learners placed in their classrooms. It was also my assumption that the English language learners in this study were not given equal educational opportunities when compared to their English speaking peers and their parents were not solicited to be involved in school activities and events. A qualitative researcher should be amenable to being "shaped by the research experience" and to

having their "thinking be informed by the data" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.34). Detailed field notes and reflections were recorded and reviewed to help control personal bias (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

## Summary

Increasing multiculturalism in the United States is not only transforming U.S. society but also altering the way students are educated. The education of students who historically have not met with success in U.S. schools becomes significantly important (Diaz, 2001). All students should receive a quality education and not feel isolated from their peers, but it is not feasible to expect classroom teachers to put excellent teaching strategies into practice without ensuring they have conditions that promote success (Capper & Frattura, 2009). Given the number of languages spoken by students and the cultural diversity of today's public schools, education as usual will not be adequate to meet the needs of the current and future school-age population. Issues related to language acquisition, immigration and cultural differences are essential to understanding how education has changed and how educators must rethink their positions to best serve all students effectively (Irvine, 2003; McIntyre et al., 2009; Sadowski, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Sadowski further argues that the challenge to policy makers and educators is unmistakable: "Serving students who are English-language learners is widespread and becoming more so, and serving these students means knowing how to teach them" (p.10). There is little research exploring teacher attitudes towards mainstreamed English language learners and the instructional implications of those attitudes (Youngs & Youngs, 2001). As the numbers of English language learners continues to rise, so does the need for continued research in this area (Mantero & McVicker, 2006; Reeves, 2006).

The current challenges of the demographic shift in education that face the U.S. today can be related to its history of immigration and education (Stewart, 1993). Chapter Two will examine the literature regarding teacher perceptions of mainstreamed English language learners and will investigate some historically based political forces that continue to impact ELL education today. Understanding the rights of English language learners and the laws that mandate equal services is vitally important in the delivery of education and quality programs (Coombe, McCloskey, Stephenson, & Anderson, 2008).

## Definition of Key Terms

Adequate yearly progress (AYP): indicates the percentage of students who must test at a proficient level or above on state tests in order to meet the goal of one hundred percent of students being proficient by 2-13-2014 (Linn, Baker & Bettebenner, 2002).

Assimilation: to encourage immigrants to adopt the national language and to accept and participate in the cultural practices of the new community (Banks, 2004).

Bilingual education: the education of children whose native language is not English. Two languages are used to provide instruction (Brisk, 2006).

English language learner (ELL): students whose native language is not English and who are in the process of learning English, (Berube, 2000; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA), 2006).

Highly qualified: highly qualified is a term given to educators that commonly means certified or licensed and possessing a high level of expertise and competence in a specific subject or area (Hull, 2002).

Low-incidence districts: school districts that enroll small numbers of English language learners (less than twenty) from year to year (Department of Elementary and

Secondary Education, 2006).

Mainstreamed: placement in the least restrictive environment which typically means the general education classroom (Watson, 2007).

MELL (Migrant Education/English Language Learner): In 2002, the Missouri department of education reorganized NCLB (No Child Left Behind), MEP (migrant education program), and ELL (English language learner) to create MELL (Missouri Migrant Education /English language learner, 2008).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): A bipartisan law signed by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002. This landmark in education reform was designed to improve student achievement and close the gaps between groups of students (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2004).

Title I: an educational program to provide services to economically disadvantaged populations (Hull, 2002).

Title III: NCLB combines the thirteen immigrant and bilingual education reforms formerly called Title VII. One major focus is to help schools teach English to those with limited proficiency and help them to meet state standards (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, NCELA, 2006).

# Chapter Two

## Review of Related Literature

### Introduction

> Diversity ought to be celebrated, for history clearly documents the valuable contributions made by every group, and future contributions to society can be maximized through quality education for all children (Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009, p.55).

The number of English language learners is rapidly increasing in the United States (Pappamihiel, 2002; Wright, 2005). Consequently, public school teachers in the United States are finding an increasing number of English language learners joining their classroom. The purpose of this study was to examine elementary teacher perceptions regarding experience with instructing mainstreamed English language learners in a low-incidence district.

Students who enroll in school with limited English proficiency present unique challenges to teachers regarding diversity of beliefs, customs, values, traditions, and cultural worldviews (Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009). However, in addition to these challenges, ELL students offer a valuable resource in culture and diversity that can enhance classroom dynamics (Drucker, 2003). Watts-Taffe and Truscott (2000) contend the majority of English language learners, approximately 85%, are taught in a mainstream classroom with little outside support. By the year 2000, six out of seven English language learners in elementary school grade one through five, lived in linguistically isolated homes and received little language support outside of the classroom (Capps et. al., 2005). The decision to place English language learners in a mainstream classroom requires

teachers be responsible for the education of a student group for which they are not prepared (Capper & Frattura, 2009). According to Watts-Taffe and Truscott (2000), research indicates that these mainstream teachers receive little education or support to work with English language learners. A review of literature investigating the education of English language learners and teacher perceptions of their experience in teaching ELL students is the focus of this chapter. School equity legislation has considerably influenced how schools provide educational services for all students and more specifically English language learners (Capper & Frattura, 2009). As a result, legal actions have led to benchmark court decisions and mandates, "which provide a framework for judging the adequacy and effectiveness of a given district's program" (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2003, p. 8). Therefore, a brief history of the legal foundations regarding English language learners will begin this chapter followed by a description of English language learners, the role of the school and cultural perspectives. Finally the background of teachers, professional development, cultural issues and administrative support is investigated.

## Legal Foundations

Immigration to the U.S. has been instrumental to shifts in the country's political and social landscape for more than one hundred years. The issues, trends and policies regarding immigrant education throughout history are a snapshot of how schools reflect society (Diaz, 2001; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Every public school in the U.S. is required to provide a free and appropriate education to all children and this commitment is relatively new (Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009). Over the years, a number of laws

have been passed to protect the rights of certain populations that otherwise may be denied a free and public education

Often, teachers view legal issues as a barrier to educational change (Capper & Frattura, 2009). In order to better understand the legal changes and requirements, teachers should become familiar with the basic legal principles for the education of English language learners (Banks, 2006; Cartledge, et al. 2009; Coombe et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). This section will provide a brief overview of the legal precedents upon which the foundations of English language learners in U.S. schools are based.

*Federal Legislation*

A mandate to end legal discrimination and provide equal opportunity for minorities was realized in 1964 with the Civil Rights Act which stated that no person be discriminated against based on color, race or national origin (Berube, 2000; Grant, 1992). Title VI of this Act is the catalyst from which the requirement for English language learner programs originates (Coombe et al, 2008). All schools that receive federal funding must provide services and programs to English language learners that are equivalent to those provided to all other students. The Office of Civil Rights clarified this provision, stating that school districts must address the needs of English language learners even if they only have one ELL student enrolled (Berube, 2000). Berube further asserts this mandate is a powerful tool for families in rural schools pressing for equal educational access for their ELL children.

The Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA) stipulates that no state shall prevent an equal education to any person based on his or her color, sex, race, or

national origin (Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, 2009; United States Department of Justice, 2009; Walsh, 2009). One section of the EEOA requires that school districts assist English language learners in overcoming barriers that may keep them from fully participating in educational programs. The EEOA does not mandate a specific language program, but does consider factors such as using sound educational theory and the creation of an assessment system, of both ELL students and the program itself, to determine compliance with the law (United States Department of Justice, 2009a).

The 1968 Bilingual Education Act was directed at children from homes where a language other than English was spoken (Leibowitz, 1980). It allowed districts to access specific government funds in an effort to find appropriate ways to provide instruction in a students' native language and was an attempt to apportion funds to be used for education programs predominantly serving immigrants. The intent was to overcome language obstacles which were inhibiting immigrant children's access to the curriculum (Crawford, 1992; Donegan, 1996; Kritz & Gurak, 2004).

In August, 2000, the President signed Executive Order 13166. This order was aimed specifically at individuals with limited English proficiency and was intended to ensure that Federal agencies examine the services they provide to this group. These agencies must identify any needs and then develop and implement a method to provide those services to English language learners in such a way to ensure meaningful access (United States Department of Justice, 2009b).

The most recent rewriting of the elementary and secondary education act passed with noteworthy bipartisanship in December 2001. This new policy was called No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Hull, 2002; McLeod, D'Amico & Protheroe, 2003; Miller, 2007).

NCLB is designed to ensure that all students are achieving important learning expectations in a safe school setting with qualified teachers. It makes the school district accountable to all children, regardless of race, poverty level or language spoken, and is one of the most all encompassing pieces of federal legislation ever passed (Batalova, Fix & Murray, 2007; Hull, 2002; United States Department of Education, 2005). NCLB mandates that each state develop and implement a standard based accountability system, monitor yearly student progress and make sure that all students meet specific academic standards by 2014. The overarching objective is that all students meet or exceed standards in math and reading. One specific goal of NCLB is to ensure that underprivileged groups, including ethnic and racial minorities and English language learners attain academic proficiency. States have an obligation to assist their English language learning students become proficient in English and maintain high levels of academic achievement equal to their English-speaking peers (United States Department of Education, 2005). NCLB establishes expectations that every student, regardless of their demographic subgroup, will achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Each state is charged with establishing specific educational targets that students should master by the end of the school year. Every year, states will assess and calculate their student's AYP to determine the progress and level of performance (Educational Research Service, 2003; Hull, 2002). According to Rivera and Collum (2006) NCLB allows states to exempt English language learners only during the first year of their enrollment in U.S. public school. School districts also have the flexibility of administering English language learners tests in their native language for up to five years if it more accurately reflects their academic progress (McLeod, D'Amico, & Protheroe, 2003).

NCLB has the promise to enrich the education of English language learners (Capps, et al. 2005; No Child Left Behind, 2002). Title I of this act stresses that schools improve the academic performance of disadvantaged students and seek to ensure that every student has access to a fair and equal education. Title III requires the districts to evaluate and improve their student's English proficiency and specifically address the needs of limited English proficient students (No Child Left Behind, 2002). Parents of English language learners must be afforded the same rights as any other parent. They have the right to be informed of how their child is progressing and how well the school meets standards. Parents of English language learners must be informed about the type of language instruction their child will receive and can choose to refuse ELL and bilingual instruction if they wish. NCLB directs school districts to communicate with parents in the language they speak and offer written materials in their native language to the extent possible (Capps et al., 2005).

*Court Decisions*

A noteworthy unanimous Supreme Court decision was the 1974 Lau v. Nichols case (Berube, 2000; Brisk, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1981). Lau v. Nichols addressed the issue of educational discrimination and was initiated by Chinese students stating there was unequal treatment (Brisk, 2006; Spring, 2001). This court decision made teaching in a language that the student doesn't understand a violation of the right to equal educational opportunity (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006; Diaz, 2001; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009; Walsh, 2009).

The following year, a new standard for identifying and instructing English language learners was established and was called the Lau Remedies. "The Lau remedies

went beyond the Lau ruling by specifying that schools should instruct elementary students through their strongest language until they could participate effectively in English-only classrooms" (Berube, 2000, p.20). Missouri has designed a helpful document for school districts outlining suggestions for the development of an effective English language learner program. This document, Crafting a Lau Plan, describes what school districts should do to ensure best practice is followed in the education of the growing numbers of ELL students (Missouri Migrant Education/English Language Learner, 2009).

Two additional 1981 cases are Castaneda v. Pickard and Plyler v. Doe. In Castaneda the court found there was a need to establish a framework for analyzing a school district's program for English language learners. School districts must pursue an ELL program informed by an educational theory, properly implement and staff the program, and evaluate the progress (Berube, 2000; Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006). The Plyler decision prohibited schools from using any type of identification such as a social security number or citizenship status to establish eligibility for any school activity or program. Students whose families may be undocumented (illegal) could not be excluded from school programs (Berube, 2000; Donegan, 1996; Walsh, 2009).

There are few clear and reliable sources that explain the exact legal reasoning for the creation of ELL programs, but taking a look at how diversity in the U.S. public schools has evolved is important in understanding the needs for successfully educating English language learners (Coombe et al., 2008; Sadowski, 2004). According to Diaz

(2001) the definitive success of immigrant students in this country is directly related to the quality of their educational experience.

*State Requirements*

Even though large concentrations of English language learners live in larger cities, approximately one fourth of reporting districts served fewer than ten English language learners. This study examines a low-incidence rural district in a Midwest state. A rural elementary school in Missouri was chosen as this state ranks in the top ten with a small percentage of K-12 English language learners as compared to the total school enrollment (Rivera & Collum, 2006). Limited English proficiency census data (LEP) posted on the Missouri DESE website indicates one hundred fifty of the reporting school districts educate less than twenty English language learners in their district (DESE, 2010) (See Table 3).

Table 3

Missouri School Districts English language proficiency census data 2007-08

| Total | No ELL's | More than 20 ELL's | Less than 20 ELL's |
|---|---|---|---|
| 552 | 302 | 100 | 150 |

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2010)

The 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act allowed states to administer alternate assessments for students who were unable to take the general large scale assessment (Rivera & Collum, 2006). Every Missouri public school must implement a plan to identify English language students (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006). DESE further states that after English language learners are identified, schools are obligated to actively implement a program geared to their needs.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2006) has selected the LAS Links English language proficiency assessment as a tool to annually assess English language learners as required by NCLB. LAS Links replaces the MAC II assessment and was first administered in the spring of 2009. This assessment measures the progress of the school's English language learners and the results are calculated to see if the district has met the Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO) (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009; Missouri Migrant Education/ English Language Learner, 2009).

School districts should have a home language form used to identify English language learners when they enroll in school as required by the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) standard 6.3.6. Additionally the district should provide a parent/guardian notification letter that serves to inform parents of assessment results and placement services. This letter should include the rights of parents and should be sent within the fist thirty days of the school year (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006; Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009; Missouri Migrant Education/English Language Learner, 2009).

Title III of NCLB was written to ensure that English language students attain

English proficiency and acquire high levels of academic attainment. Using Title III funds, Missouri schools can develop and provide high-quality language instruction programs. Title III also encourages participation by the parents and communities of ELL students (Missouri Migrant Education/English Language Learner, 2009). The next section will investigate the education of English language learners in U.S. schools.

## English Language Learners in U. S. Public Schools

Approximately 48.9 million, pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade, students were enrolled in U.S. public schools during the 2004-2005 school years. Over five million of those students were English language learners and primarily in the elementary grades (Batalova, Fix, & Murray, 2007; Loertscher & Nordby, 2009; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2004).

### *Academic status of English Language Learners in U.S. Public Schools*

A quality education is vital if English language learners are to meet state standards and perform at the same level as their native English speaking counterparts (Goldenberg, 2008; Loertscher & Nordby, 2009). The average academic achievement of ELL students tends to be low compared to their English background counterparts (Goldenberg, 2008; Loertscher & Nordby, 2009; Thompson, 2004). According to Huang (1999) rural immigrants, most of whom are English language learners, typically have lower high school completion rates than their urban counterparts. Abedi and Dietel (2004) assert that state test results have been twenty to thirty percentage points lower for English language learners as compared to English background students. National assessments have consistently noted lower scores in reading and math for English language learners as compared to English speaking students. The 2007 National

Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) evaluation found that 4th grade English language learners scored 36 points below English speaking students and 25 points below in math. The gap was even greater when comparing 8th grade students (Goldenberg, 2008; Loertscher & Nordby, 2007). Not surprisingly, as a group English language learners also have higher dropout rates (Short & Echevarria, 2005). Gandara et al. (2003) state the primary condition of their research to explain this achievement gap is attributed to the low percentages of trained teachers. Garcia and Pearson (1994) suggest ELLs may do poorly in school because their cultural frames of reference are not in alignment with those of the mainstreamed U.S. classroom.

When ELL students have had little or no prior exposure they are often unable to fully benefit from the English language based curriculum and instruction and have been connected to high drop-out probabilities (McCandless, Rossi, & Daugherty, 1996). Smith-Davis (2004) states that it takes English language learners a minimum of five years of English language instruction to be academically successful although they may be conversationally fluent in two years. The substantial numbers of children who are still considered limited English proficient when they get to high school imply that many of these children are not grasping the English language even after a number of years in school. Schools in the U.S. are typically ill equipped to educate the growing numbers of ELL students and bring them to a level of proficiency (Batalova, Fix, & Murray, 2007).

*Instructional Programs for the Education of English Language Learners*

According to Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2006) requirements and practices draft, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is the most practical program for the instruction of English language learners in

Missouri. This is primarily due to the fact that many schools do not have a qualified teacher fluent in multiple languages, many ELL languages may be represented, and there are relatively low numbers of ELL students enrolled in Missouri public school districts. DESE further breaks down ESOL into three different approaches. Structured immersion, typically in elementary school, where the ELL student is placed in a self-contained classroom with a bilingual teacher and the language of the classroom is English. This approach is generally not used for classrooms with less than twenty students or where the ELL students come from several language backgrounds. Content based ESOL is probably the most widely used and is effective for both elementary and secondary classrooms. This approach attempts to deliver the curriculum through English in such a way that the content is comprehensible to English language learners. The third approach, Pull-Out ESOL, is probably the least effective as this method periodically pulls the student out of the classroom for a short amount of time to work one on one with a qualified teacher. Another ELL instructional program described in the requirements and practices draft is Bilingual Education; however in Missouri these only exist in some of the larger city schools (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006).

Learning to read and write in English is one of the most important integration challenges that face English language learners and will be the means to better jobs and participation in community and government (McHugh, Gelatt & Fix, 2007). Stewart (1993) states that English language learners are not being given adequate educational opportunities to succeed at the same levels as their English speaking counterparts. Having an understanding of the impact that rural and smaller schools are experiencing regarding this change in demographics is a good starting point to ensuring that English language

learners receive an equal and appropriate education (Berube, 2000).

*Role of the School in the Education English Language Learners*

Classrooms have a variety of outside influences such as language and culture which affect the performance of both teachers and English language learners (Cummins, 2001). Cummins further contends that when teachers are instructing English language learners from a variety of cultures they need to establish an effective learning environment which incorporates customs and cultures in the daily curriculum. Norton (1997) states the relationship of language and identity is significant and must be considered. Although multicultural education and teaching English language learners is not synonymous, the bridge between the capabilities of the student and the demands of the school and society is important. As multicultural education embodies diversity, choice and equal opportunity, it goes hand in hand with the instruction of English language learners (Grant, 1992).

The role of the school in the instruction of English language learners has been and continues to be an intense issue (Hernandez, 2001, Ovando & McLaren, 2000). School districts have not always made it a priority to educate all students equally (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Trueba (1992) addresses the issue of equality stating multicultural education is a vision of what education should be for all students. Multicultural education is not new and maintains the idea that all students regardless of their class status, gender, culture, race or ethnicity, or language will be given an equal chance to learn in school (Banks, 2004; Banks & Banks, 1993). Diaz (2001) states that a genuine multicultural curriculum goes beyond this definition and actually incorporates the culture and language of English language learners into all subjects and grade levels.

However, Irvine (2003) argues the curriculum for multiculturalism is often nothing more than a few disconnected units of a few specific cultures. Cartledge, Gardner and Ford (2009) assert that incorporating multicultural education into the curriculum is very difficult and requires teachers to become learners of the various cultures in their classroom.

The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) does not advocate a specific educational methodology for English language learners. The school district has flexibility in designing a program as long as ELL students are provided with services until they are proficient enough with the English language to participate in the regular education program. In situations where the number of English language learners is small, the program may even be informal. Although schools must account for all their English language learners, rural and small schools often lack a formal policy regarding ELLs (United States Department of Education, 2009). The research doesn't confirm one best way to teach English language learners, but it does emphasize the importance of classroom teachers (Loertscher & Nordby, 2009; Thompson, 2004).

As student rights have been established through legislation, the responsibility of the school has become clear (Stewart, 1993). Schooling is an important part of the socialization process, which helps young people to develop a sense of who they are and where they fit into society. If the curriculum is based on the culture of the majority and fails to recognize the diversity of the students, ethnic minority children may experience difficulties (Banks, 2004). Language minority students should learn English as quickly as possible, but it is not necessarily the best practice to do this at the cost of losing their native language or culture (Mills, 1994).

*Cultural Perspectives of Mainstreamed English Language Learners*

Equally, if not more important, is the significance of identity and acceptance of one's culture (DeVillar et al., 1994; Hernandez, 2001; Irvine, 2003). Essential to addressing the educational needs of immigrant students is the instructional culture and the overall attitude toward diversity (Diaz, 2001). The community and school in which English language learners reside may not reflect their home environment (Butler & Stevens, 1997). Butler and Stevens further contend that schools and communities typically reflect the cultural norms of the mainstream. According to Young and Brooks (2008), "as the nation's population grows increasingly diverse, schoolteachers and educational administrators are increasingly White" (p.392). English language learners enhance their community and school with their diverse cultures and valued appropriately can serve to break down the barriers of inequality (DeVillar, Faltis & Cummins, 1994; Diaz, 2001).

ELLs in the lower elementary grades are often placed in classrooms with English-only speaking teachers and classmates. Many are scared and suffer from a sense of isolation and separation from their cultural beginnings (Gunderson, 2007). English language learners may encounter hostile climates and cultural segregation by their classmates (Diaz, 2001; Dilg 2003). Consequently, researchers have challenged the idea that U.S. schools are culture neutral and suggest that schools are subjected to the attitudes, values, and belief systems of one race of people (Rust & Freidus, 2001). Cultural differences between students can lead to discrimination and prejudice.

Many English language learners do not immediately feel connected to other students or teachers. These aspects relating to cultural identity cause divisions among

students, teachers and administrators that affect the climate of the classroom and the school (Dilg, 2003). Culture influences learning in a variety of ways. Verbal language can be vastly different among cultures in the way a word is pronounced, the pace and rhythm of speech and inflections of words. Nonverbal language is often misinterpreted by the teacher as eye contact, gestures, and body language can be culturally specific. A student with a cultural background of not looking a person of authority directly in the eye may be perceived as inattentive if the teacher is not aware of the cultural background. All of these dynamics are key concerns in the instruction of English language learners (Irvine, 2003).

For many English language learners, the ability to maintain their cultural identity has facilitated their academic success (Diaz, 2001). It was believed that the cultural differences among immigrant groups would become less divided under the standardizing pressure of public education; however that has not always been the case (Banks, 2005; Diaz 2001; Dilg, 2003). Sleeter and Grant (1994) argue that all too often teachers and schools fail to address the diversity in cultural experiences and predict the issues between teachers and students will continue until this concern is adequately addressed. Teachers of English language learners don't always share their student's frame of reference (Hernandez, 2001). However, Hernandez argues that "teachers are the key to educational excellence and equity" (p.4).

### Teacher Training and Qualifications for Instructing English Language Learners

According to several authors, teachers were consistently recognized as being an explanation for a school's success and providing a quality education (Brophy, 1982; Hernandez, 2001; Reyes, Scribner & Scribner, 1999; Rust & Freidus 2001). Historically,

the majority of English language learners have congregated in larger urban areas, but recently this group of students has flowed into the smaller rural schools in virtually every state (Berube, 2000; Sadowski, 2004). Due to the low-incidence of English language learners in rural areas, few school districts have formal policies, trained teachers or resources for accommodating ELL students (Berube, 2000; Coombe et al, 2008). When English language learners and their families move to rural areas, they often do so in small numbers. Rural schools with low-incidence of ELL students typically have no choice but to place those students in mainstreamed classrooms with teachers that have little or no experience teaching diverse cultures and languages (Flynn & Hill, 2005; Tartir, Schneider, D'Emilio & Ryan, 2007).

All teachers, regardless of the composition and diversity of their class, are involved with language. Language is one of the most important aspects of education and practically all learning occurs through this medium. Students with little to no English language skills are often placed in mainstreamed subject matter classrooms. The teachers in these classrooms are put in the situation of trying to teach content and language to English language learners while still being responsible for teaching the rest of the class (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Low-incidence school districts typically mainstream English language learners due to the lack of a qualified ELL teacher or specifically designed program (Coombe et al., 2008). Research by Youngs and Youngs (2001) regarding the predictors of mainstream teachers' attitudes toward English language learners revealed that mainstreamed teachers were generally impartial or slightly positive in their attitudes toward teaching English language learners. However,

many teachers feel ill prepared and "need specific preparation in working with English language learners" (Short & Echevarria, 2005, p.9).

*Professional Development and Training for Teachers*

"Professional development is acknowledged across the world to be a central component in maintaining and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in schools" (Harris & Muijs, 2005, p.57). Most rural districts do not have the resources to hire an ELL teacher and rarely do they provide adequate professional development for their mainstreamed classroom teachers who have ELL students (Auerbach, 2006; Flynn & Hill, 2005; Hill & Flynn, 2004). A study by Byrnes, Kiger, and Manning (1997) suggests that successful teachers of English language learners need to have assistance, proper training and a positive attitude regarding language diversity. This study also found that teachers lacking sufficient knowledge of how to teach English language learners may even do unintentional harm to ELLs in their classroom. Coombe et al, (2008) describe multicultural English language learner classrooms as highly complex where growth should be a constant.

> This, then, is one of the key reasons for the importance of professional development: to enable a language teaching organization to maintain a state of positive, productive growth and change (Coombe et al, 2008, p.117).

Each day, teachers tackle multifaceted decisions that depend on a variety of knowledge bases which will greatly impact the future of their students and are faced with a variety of cultures, norms and values (Banks & Banks, 1993; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Without the proper training, teachers may not be aware of specific learning differences, cultural and language differences, and approaches to learning

between English language learners and native English speaking students (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Professional development needs to be tailored to the teacher's needs and not a "one size fits all" approach (Smith & Piele, 2006, p.405).

Most teacher preparation programs, designed for grades Kindergarten through 12th, do not include areas necessary for teachers of English language learners to be effective (Mantero & McVicker, 2006). Both teachers and English language learners find the first few months of school to be extremely difficult and the procedures, routine and expectations may be a sharp contrast to what they have been used to (Brisk & Harrington, 2007). DeVillar et al., (1994) argue that there is substantial indirect evidence suggesting that the nation's schools are not prepared to adequately teach the growing diversity of students.

Much university training in the U.S. at the undergraduate level does not prepare teachers for issues in cultural diversity specifically for teachers of English language learners in rural settings (Berube, 2000). Berube further states it is widespread in rural school districts to observe teachers with no training educating the mainstreamed English language learners. Forty-one percent of three million teachers surveyed in 2001 reported teaching English language learners and only slightly more than twelve percent had received eight or more hours of training (Sadowski, 2004). "Many mainstream teachers who are unfamiliar with the process of language acquisition confuse linguistic ability and academic knowledge" (Coombe et al, 2008, p.209). As the demand for improved education for English language learners intensifies, the work of ELL teachers becomes more multifaceted and the nature of materials, curriculum and teacher education is changing to meet the changing times (Coombe et al., 2008).

*Teacher Demographics*

While the diversity of students has changed, the teaching population is very homogeneous (Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009). Cartledge et al. argues that the teaching force has actually decreased in ethnic and racial diversity. The typical public school teacher is female, middle class White with no ethnic culture other than American (Cartledge et al., 2009; Diaz, 2001). "Therefore, the reality is that the primary culture of U.S. schools continues to reflect a Eurocentric, middle class and standard English speaking paradigm" (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p. 14).

Rural schools have very few teachers with an ethnic background and a severe shortage of teachers who are trained or certified to work with English language learners. "Since rural districts comprise anywhere from 10-25% of the local districts in the country, these districts represent a significant number of students" (Purcell, East, & Rude, 2005, p.1). Hawkins (2004) claims there is only one qualified ELL teacher for every one hundred English language learners. Additionally, forty-six percent of U.S. teachers are employed in small towns or rural areas and over forty-six percent of those teachers have an average of sixteen years in education. This is extremely significant as most of these teachers were very likely not trained to deal with the current trends of such a diverse group of students (Berube, 2000).

Low-incidence districts fortunate enough to hire a trained English language teacher specifically to work with the district's English language learners face many challenges as well. The hiring of a specialized teacher for ELL students is often interpreted as a solution to the issue of educating English language learners. Often times this teacher is low in the school hierarchy and not empowered to assist in the program

design or structure. The trained ELL teacher is frequently met with administrators and teachers who are content with the status quo and in denial that English language learners are a permanent and growing group of students. ELL teachers in low-incidence districts are often itinerant and not seen as a valuable resource; consequently they are often times excluded and isolated from the rest of the staff (Coombe et al., 2008).

There is a great deal of literature regarding English language learners in high-incidence settings; however, literature specifically intended to address low- incidence settings is very minimal (Coombe et al., 2008). Coombe further states if resources on the subject of low-incidence schools are limited, literature specifically addressing leadership in such circumstances is even scarcer.

*Teacher Recognition of Cultural and Social Equality*

It is important to know the culture and climate of the classroom, but it can be a challenge for teachers to truly understand the diverse background of students from a different culture (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Equally challenging, teachers don't always realize how much their own identity, set of values and life experiences shape their view of teaching (Irvine, 2003). Prior experience drives the process of most teachers and they educate through the lens of what they know rather than the life experiences of the students they teach. The potential for cultural conflict exists when teachers and students do not share the same beliefs and values (Hernandez, 2001). There are indications that some teachers have negative expectations of their students based on the student's ethnicity and race (Brisk & Harrington, 2007; Diaz, 2001). According to a study by Marx (2000) "a teacher from an all-White suburban or rural school may not know how to adjust her expectations and beliefs when she is placed in a school district

where the cultural, racial, economic, and language contexts of the students are quite different from those she experienced growing up" (p.4). Cummins (2001) states that all students, but even more so English language learners, will be reluctant to invest their uniqueness in the learning process if they feel their teachers do not like them and respect their experiences. Banks (2004) states there is a need for a balanced strategy that will allow for recognition of culture and social equality.

*Needs and Support for Teachers of mainstreamed English language learners*

With the number of English language learners topping five million in U.S. public schools, the needs and support of ELL teachers and students can't be ignored (Coombe et al., 2008). Coombe et al. further argues that:

> Especially affected by these changes are districts in rural areas enrolling small numbers of ELLs, whether from one or from multiple language groups . . . are frequently the least likely to have thoughtfully developed programs for meeting the unique needs of ELLs or to have teachers with professional backgrounds or training in ESL, bilingual, or multicultural education (p.203).

Teachers can't achieve excellence alone and need ongoing support to be successful (Capper & Frattura, 2009). "Culturally proficient educational leaders are effective in cross-cultural situations that affect their students, the communities they serve, and educators and staff members in their schools" (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p.22).

Smith and Piele (2006) assert that time is a vital resource for teachers and needed in order to work on curriculum development and develop professional networks. Collaboration between teachers pools the collected knowledge and improves student learning by improving the quality of teaching (Harris & Muijs, 2005). Harris and Muijs

suggest school improvement studies have reported that leadership is a key factor in school improvement. The skills of a teacher strongly influence student motivation and achievement, however the skills and quality of a leader serves to influence the enthusiasm of the teacher. Coombe et al. (2008) suggest that encouragement is very important for ELL teachers and,

> …encouragement, coupled with appropriate administrative action and self-help, can stave off burnout among language teachers (and people in other helping professions as well). The role of a leader (whether that person is a supervisor, principal, a department chair, a head teacher) in offering support and encouragement can be invaluable (p.31).

Having a plan in place regarding the education of English language learners is beneficial as it provides objectives and strategies and the development of a mission (Coombe et al.; Pearce, Freeman & Robinson, 1997).

*Parent and Community Involvement*

A study by Reyes, Scribner & Scribner (1999) found that elementary teachers in high performing Hispanic schools, considered parent involvement a major reason for their effectiveness in teaching their students. The input from parents regarding their child's learning style and the conditions in which their child learns best is invaluable as an instructional support (Cartledge et al., 2009). However, teachers don't always deal with their own personal beliefs and biases regarding parents (Thompson, 2007). Thompson further states that teachers judge parents harshly because of their own frustration in the classroom setting.

The greatest barrier for ELL parent participation in their child's school is their

own lack of English language skills (Berube, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Smith-Davis, 2004). The ability of family members and parents to communicate with teachers is an important part of the success of ELL students. Many parents have very limited English skills and not only have a difficult time communicating with teachers, but they also have difficulty reading school correspondence sent to them written in English (Berube, 2000). Parents from culturally diverse backgrounds are no different from English speaking parents in that they want teachers to treat them with respect, be honest and supportive, and include them in the decision making process for their children (Cartledge et al, 2009).

Community resources are also important in the education of English language learners. Unfortunately, most rural areas do not represent the current diversity in the country (Berube, 2000). Berube further suggests that rural schools often overlook the rich resources that may be available in their community.

*Administrative Support*

The role of the principal is supportive and motivational. Principals should consider their teaching staff as change agents and take ownership for meaningful professional development (Crow, Hausman, & Scribner, 2002). Beginning teachers frequently have limited experiences with instructing students in diverse school settings therefore administrative leadership and support becomes imperative for their success (Haberman, 1995). "Leadership within a school, preferably by the principal, entails providing support and exerting pressure for programs" (Verdugo & Flores, 2007, p.170). Verdugo and Flores (2007) further argue that a good leader possesses the ability to plan, manage and administer important programs and takes a central role in assuring that the

program is implemented and a priority. Principals also create opportunities for teachers to collaborate and foster social relations among themselves and administrators, which promote learning (Crow, Hausman, & Scribner, 2002). Collaboration between teachers increases student achievement and an efficient transition into the mainstream classroom (Verdugo & Flores, 2007).

### *Summary*

Every year the United States becomes more linguistically and ethnically diverse. Public schools mirror this trend as English language learners represent the fastest growing K-12 student group (Short & Echevarria, 2005). The debate of how to adequately instruct English language learners is not new and is often viewed in emotional tones. New conceptual outlines concerning learning and education along with updated research in what works in classrooms will be a positive influence on narrowing the education gap while preserving indigenous language and cultures (Garcia, 2001).

One of the most important aspects of a successful ELL program is the teachers who are dedicated in the education of this segment of society. Adequately educating English language learners will require planning, teacher training, and sufficient resources. A large number of school districts, specifically low-incidence rural districts, do not have sufficient staff or materials to assist diverse learners to reach their greatest potential. Barriers to communication and culture coupled with shortages of professional development are a prime concern in public schools (Berube, 2000; DeCapua, Smathers & FrankTang, 2007; Smith-Davis, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Although the challenges posed by ELL students are significant, it is less clear what strategies and programs educators can use to improve the educational

> experiences of this population. Much of this ambiguity is due to the lack of research and information, inappropriate educational policies, and the inability of educators to understand ELL students and their backgrounds (Verdugo & Flores, 2007, p.168).

The success of ELL students in the U.S. depends predominantly on the quality of their educational experiences, including school philosophy towards diversity, educational programs offered, quality of the teachers and overall social climate (Diaz, 2001). According to Coombe et al. (2008) "the whole area of low-incidence is an opportunity and a high-need area for future research" (p.204). Viewing the education of elementary mainstreamed English language learners through the eyes of the teacher provides important direction for school improvement efforts and a better understanding of teachers in their role of educating English language learners.

According to Fitzgerald (1995) and Mohr (2004) English language learners have not been adequately supported in mainstreamed classrooms because many teachers lack clarity of what teaching style or program best supports the needs of the ELL student. Changing the teaching style to best fit the needs of the ELL student is important and "the principal is the critical person in making change happen" (Lieberman & Miller, 1981, p.584). Given that administrative support greatly affects the classroom teacher, which in turn affects parents and students, examining teacher experiences regarding needs and resources and viewing them through the lens of administrative support provides a valuable contribution to understanding the education of mainstreamed English language learners (Ferriter & Norton, 2004).

# Chapter Three

## Research Design and Methods

### Introduction

The study of elementary teacher perceptions regarding their experience in the education of mainstreamed English language learners is a pertinent topic due to the rapidly shifting demographics of the U.S. public schools. This demographic shift is changing the picture of the American classroom to a more diverse population with many students identified as English Language Learners (Gunderson, 2007; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). According to Lucas (2000) the shifting minority trend will continue into the next century with a large percentage of the student population being predominantly Asians and Latinos; many struggling with the English language.

The interactions of teachers with their students are vital to the success of the student (Horencyzk & Tatar, 2002). Horencyzk and Tatar contend that teacher methods toward educating ethnically diverse students do not exist in a social vacuum and are significantly affected by the values of the society and the culture of the school in which the teaching takes place. The purpose of this study was to examine elementary teacher perceptions regarding their experience in educating mainstreamed English language learners within a small low-incidence rural Midwestern elementary school. According to Walker, Shafer and Iiams (2004) it is very likely that the attitudes of teachers regarding the education of English language learners in the mainstreamed classroom will worsen in the next several years. Walker, Shafer and Iams further contend that teachers will need to have adequate professional development, especially in rural areas. Thus, the experiences and stories of these teachers become paramount in the understanding of the education of

mainstreamed English language learners. To best study the perceptions of these teachers, a qualitative case study design was selected.

The research questions and rationale for using a qualitative case study design are outlined in this chapter. The setting, participants and types of data gathered are also addressed. Procedures for the collection of data and consequent analysis are discussed. And finally, researcher biases and assumptions are explained.

## Qualitative Case Study

Qualitative research addresses the examination of teacher perceptions in a way that quantitative would not. The phenomenon of this study is the actual experiences of real people in their natural settings and understanding how they make sense of their daily lives (Hatch, 2002). Interviewing elementary teachers in their rural Midwest school is indicative of this definition. Merriam (1998) asserts that "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p.6). Creswell (1998) describes a qualitative study as:

> …an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p.15).

My role as a school counselor at River Bluffs Elementary School allowed me to observe students and teachers in a nonintrusive manner. I had no position power over the teachers and worked with them on a daily basis as equals in the school hierarchy. Having established a trustworthy and confidential relationship with the participants prior to the

study helped this researcher establish a crucial connection which allowed for the gathering of information not likely to be afforded an outsider.

Qualitative researchers seek to understand the procedure by which people develop meaning and to describe those meanings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Qualitative methods are valuable when "the key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives" (Merriam, 1998, p.6). According to Hatch (2002) and Patton (1997), qualitative research focuses on capturing the meaning of the experience in the participants own words. Words are used as information to describe the human experience (Bloland, 1992). Having a positive and trusting relationship with the teachers in this study allowed for a relaxed and open interview process and provided meaningful research.

*Rationale for a Case Study*

Stake (1995) describes a case study in education as pertaining to people and programs. This case study was a detailed examination of a particular school setting and group of elementary teachers instructing English language learners (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Thomas & Brubaker, 2000; Yin, 1989). Case studies are intended to uncover the individualistic characteristics of a person or place with the focus being on some aspect of the organization such as specific groups or individuals or an activity of the organization (Merriam, 1988; Creswell, 1994). Merriam (1998) further suggests that case studies are appropriate if the researcher is interested in the process and understanding of the events. This study was intended to engage classroom teachers in a process of examining their needs, resources and administrative support which also served to form the conceptual framework of the research.

This study was an exploration of the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding their experience in educating mainstreamed English language learners. Case study methods were employed in an effort to address the research questions that formed the underpinnings of this study. The school district chosen for this study is of special interest due to its rural location and low-incidence status. As there are less than twenty English language learners enrolled, the district is not required to hire a certified English language teacher and places English language learners in a mainstreamed classroom.

## Research Questions

Within the context of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding their classroom experiences in the education of mainstreamed English language learners?
2. What are the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding support and resources needed to effectively instruct mainstreamed English language learners?
3. What are the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding administrative assistance in the education of mainstreamed English language learners?

## Description of the Setting

River Bluffs is a small agricultural community located near the confluence of two major rivers. Before the great flood of 1993, the school district consisted of three separate building sites within thirty minutes of each other and serving a community with a one hundred mile radius. River Bluffs school district is located in low lying bottomlands and is in the middle of a flood plain. The raging waters of the 1993 flood immersed one of the school buildings under eight feet of water; it was so severely damaged it was never reopened. Urbanization of nearby townships facilitated the building of a major highway

resulting in the razing of another of this district's school buildings. Currently the district has approximately 1,300 PK-12 students being served on one campus, but due to recent massive growth in the area, the district is looking to expand outside the existing campus. The current school campus is located in the middle of a corn field and one can see combines and tractors harvesting crops throughout the school year. The school community is comprised of a number of small municipalities located as much as twenty miles from each other making the school district even more unique. Only a handful of students live close enough to the school to walk and almost all the district students come to school by bus or driven by family members.

The River Bluffs school district is very unique in that the community is a short thirty minutes from a major Midwest city. Driving through the area, however, one would not feel the impact of city life at all. Tractors and farm implements can be seen traveling from one farm to another, summer fruit and vegetable stands are sprinkled throughout, families carrying picnic baskets and fishing poles can be seen heading to the local city park or nearby river and one almost gets the feeling of being frozen in time. Students live in a variety of types of housing ranging from extravagant mansions on the bluff of an upscale subdivision, the family farm, apartments and trailer courts to Section 8 housing and some living on houseboats with very few amenities. Houses on sticks dot the area near the river as families raise their homes ten plus feet to protect them from continuous flooding water. Few residents in the area during the great flood of '93 were spared as 90% of the district was under water, yet the rich farmland, love of the rivers, and an Accredited with Distinction school district is a constant draw for families. To be Accredited with Distinction River Bluffs school district met at least thirteen out of

fourteen of the state's performance standards in addition to all required MAP standards (DESE, 2010a).

The River Bluffs area has a wealth of history with documented Indian mounds and a host of settlers during the Westward expansion. Until recently, however, the diversity of the community was all but non-existent. Recent years has found students from a variety of cultures speaking several different languages enrolling in the public school. School demographic trend reports indicate that out of a population of roughly 8,400 residents, approximately 350 of those residents are listed as minority with 130 speaking very little or no English. No core data regarding English language learners was provided in the district profile or summary reports located on the district homepage; however, document review indicates River Bluffs is a low-incidence district with an enrollment of less than twenty English language learners.

## Description of the Participants

This study focused on elementary teachers with experience in instructing English language learners in the River Bluffs elementary school. Using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 1998), ten teachers were selected to allow for collection of information that would address the conceptual underpinnings of teaching mainstreamed English language learners. A list of elementary teachers in the River Bluffs elementary school was obtained from the registrar's office. From that list only ten teachers had experience in instructing mainstreamed English language learners in the River Bluffs district. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998) purposeful sampling is a method to be used when specific participants are believed to assist in the development of an emergent theory.

The purpose of this study was to examine and explore teacher perceptions of their experience in the education of mainstreamed ELL students. The teachers selected for this study range from non-tenure to having many years of experience and are in the elementary K-5 building. None of the teachers selected in the purposeful sampling were from a minority or non-English speaking background. School demographic data indicate that none of the twenty-four classroom teachers in this district were from a minority or non-English speaking background. All were Caucasian and only one was male.

Factors considered in the selection of this case were a low-incidence district; one with fewer than twenty English language learners enrolled, and where English language learners were mainstreamed into elementary classrooms. Districts that consistently enroll twenty or more ELL students must provide a plan for hiring a trained and endorsed teacher (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006). This case study examined a school that placed newly enrolled English language learners in mainstreamed classrooms and was not required to have a plan for hiring an ELL teacher.

## Data Collection

"Qualitative data are objects, pictures, or detailed descriptions that cannot be reduced to numbers without distorting the essence of the social meanings they represent" (Hatch, 2002, p. 9). To investigate the experiences of the participants and describe the meaning of the information, data collection took several forms; interviews, document reviews, observations and field notes. An interview is a purposeful conversation facilitated by one in order to get information from the other (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Interviews allow participants to articulate and explain their feelings, share past experiences, and provide triangulation to authenticate additional data sources (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). A semi-structured interview format was used in this study and an interview protocol was employed to ensure consistency in the process (Creswell, 1998). This researcher sought to investigate teacher perceptions of their classroom experience through the lens of needs, resources, and administrative support and utilized the semi-structured interview which allows the participant to talk in the area of interest and gives the researcher an opportunity to understand how the participant views the topic (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Several participants asked that the interview take place off school property.

Participants were assured that their involvement was voluntary and were made aware of the nature of the study. This researcher took steps to ensure confidentiality of the participants and had each sign a written informed consent document prior to participation. The consent form stipulated that participation was entirely voluntary and participants could choose to cease involvement at any time with no fear of penalty.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) suggest that when doing a case study, documents should refer to materials such as videos, films, memos, photographs, letters, diaries, case records and memorabilia that could be used as supplemental information. Documents were assembled as a means of acquiring additional data for the research analysis. External descriptive documents such as the school district mission statement, district English language learner parent letter, board of education assurances, administrative newsletters and English language learner documentation as well as internal documents such as memos, email, minutes of meetings and board presentations was collected for review. Internal documents are very beneficial in determining leadership style and the values of the organization (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Hatch, 2002). Documents can also

provide “rich descriptions of how the people who produced the materials think about their world” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.133).

Field notes were taken during observations and interviews which provided valuable information regarding the setting and the participant’s reactions. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998) field notes consist of two types of resources; descriptive which is a documentation of the setting, people and communications and reflective which is a more subjective documentation of feelings and descriptions. Descriptions of classrooms educating mainstreamed English language learners were recorded and reviewed. According to Hatch (2002) artifacts are material objects that represent the culture at a particular school and serve to provide alternative insights in the way participants think and act. Field notes regarding descriptions of classroom resources and teacher methods were recorded and examined as a means for triangulation of data.

The simple definition of an observation is the collecting of information by watching or listening to people and events and then documenting what has been discovered (Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). Hatch (2002) suggests the goal of an observation is to understand the setting, culture or social phenomenon from the perception of the participants. Field notes were kept for each classroom observation, interview and other research sessions such as team meetings. Observations of social events such as arrival at school, recess and the district ice cream social were documented and examined.

## Data Analysis

The foundation for this case study method and subsequent data analysis was Thomas & Brubaker’s (2000) description of a case study as “a detailed examination of a

single person, group, institution, social movement, or event" (p.102). Analyzing teacher perceptions through the lens of needs, resources and administrative support formed the conceptual underpinnings that guided the study.

This researcher conducted personal interviews which were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Following the transcription of interviews, data were coded to discover emerging themes. The first step in analyzing the data was open coding. Coding is the act of making a note of what is interesting, categorizing the information and organizing data into appropriate files (Steidman, 1998). The purpose of this vast process was "to produce concepts which seem to fit the data" (Strauss, 1987, p.18). The detailed analysis of data minimized the chance that important categories might be overlooked and led to "a conceptually dense theory" (Strauss, p.31). Participants were asked to validate the information transcribed from the interview process and were given an opportunity to expound on the emerging themes. Open coding was followed by axial coding which "consists of intense analysis done around one category at a time" (Strauss, p.32). This process allowed for the discovery of relationships and subcategories. The "cut-up-and-put-in-folders" approach was used to initially identify categories and recognize themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.186). Data analysis began during the collection of data and literature review and was an on-going process.

To protect the confidentiality of the participants and the site, pseudonyms were used throughout the study. Member checking occurred to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. Follow up conversations and email with participants further validated the emerging themes.

## Researcher Bias

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) assert that qualitative researchers attempt to recognize and take into account their own biases as a means of dealing with them.

> Acknowledge that no matter how much you try you cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe and what you value. Being a clean slate is neither possible nor desirable. The goal is to become more reflective and conscious of how who you are may shape and enrich what you do, not to eliminate it (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.34).

Acknowledgment that the researcher brings to the study built in experiences and values is an important piece. The predetermined beliefs brought to the study by this researcher served as motivation for the study. As a school employee with a history of working with English language learners, however, this researcher acknowledged personal opinions and experiences in an effort to ensure an objective view of the study. Personal experience in working with ELL families in this district revealed what appeared to be a disconnect between the families and the school. This researcher is aware of newly enrolled English language learners who were not identified or tested. Personal biases include an opinion that English language learners and their families are not made a priority in low-incidence districts. Field notes and reflections were recorded to help control personal bias (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The triangulation of data served to assist this researcher in addressing biases and predetermined ideas.

## Summary

The focus of this study was an investigation of the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding their experience in the education of mainstreamed English language

learners. The research design and methodological approach was detailed in Chapter Three. Multiple sources of data were collected for this qualitative single case study. A synopsis of the research problem paved the way for the research questions. The research site, participants, data collection and analysis methods were examined. Researcher biases were addressed. A rationale for using the qualitative single case study design method was presented and explained. A discussion of research findings regarding the experience of elementary teachers instructing mainstreamed English language learners in a rural low-incidence district is presented in Chapter 4.

# Chapter Four

## Analysis and Interpretation of Data

### Introduction

> If we had a lot of kids in the district maybe they would see that and put somebody in charge but these kids, I don't know it just seems like there is a lot of ELL kids slipping through the cracks. We don't really have anything cemented in place or really any directives or somebody to go to. It is very hard for teachers (Sarah Collins).

This statement, spoken by one of the ten elementary teachers participating in this study, describes a prevalent sentiment of River Bluff's Elementary teachers regarding instructing mainstreamed English language learners. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding their experience instructing mainstreamed English language learners in a low-incidence rural school district.

Ten elementary teachers with experience in teaching mainstreamed English language learners in the River Bluffs school district were interviewed for this study. These ten teachers were purposefully selected as they were the only elementary teachers with ELL experience at River Bluffs Elementary (Creswell, 1998). All ten teachers were White females, held elementary education certification, and ranged in experience from three years to twenty-seven years total teaching experience with three to twenty-two of those years in the River Bluffs school district. The participants had similar certification with five certified for Early Childhood through 6$^{th}$ grade, three with Kindergarten through 6$^{th}$ grade, one with first through eighth grade and another Pre-Kindergarten through eighth grade certification. Two of the ten teachers stated they taught mainstreamed

English language learners during their first year of teaching at River Bluffs Elementary. One teacher indicated that she held ESL certification; a requirement for college graduation at an out of state university. Another teacher stated that she had previously taught ELL students as a teacher in Australia.

In the first section of this chapter, a profile of each of the ten teacher participants in the study is given. The remainder of the chapter will provide a detailed description of results obtained through teacher interviews, collection of documents, and observations. Teacher interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. A review of the transcripts, field notes, documents and observations led to the identification of developing themes. Open coding was the first step in analyzing the data. The process of reading data line by line, searching for emerging themes minimized the chance that important categories might be unnoticed (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Descriptors regarding perceptions of experience were identified from the perspectives of teachers instructing mainstreamed English language learners. The second step was axial coding which is the process of "intense analysis done around one category at a time" (Strauss, 1987, p.32). Review of the descriptors using Bogdan and Biklens (1998) cut-up-and-put-in-folders method led to the identification of developing themes. The analysis of data resulted in four major themes: (1) climate and culture, (2) instructional (3) conflicts and fears and (4) support. Examples from teacher interview transcriptions are provided and identified by pseudonyms. Data sources from observations and document review will be identified accordingly (i.e. board presentations, memos, email, parent letters, etc.). The chapter concludes with a summary of findings.

## Description of River Bluffs

Community, school, and staff information as described in a beautiful multi-color parent pamphlet located in the elementary office states the 125 square mile district is composed of a cross section of professional and business people and farmers. Due to the location of the school, residents have the advantages of suburban living in a rural setting, free from the disadvantages of urban life. The district is fully accredited and offers a comprehensive program of studies. The pamphlet further describes in detail core curriculum studies, gifted education, remedial reading programs, special education, and technical education to include multiple computer labs, Parents as Teachers, a variety of extracurricular and co-curricular programs, but no mention of English language learners or the welcoming of diverse cultures. However, the final pages include a notice of nondiscrimination and a district statement of philosophy which asserts the River Bluffs "mission is to achieve educational excellence for all students" (River Bluffs parent pamphlet, 2010). The Board Philosophy listed on the district website further states "The mission is multifaceted in that it deals with criteria to be achieved as well as evaluating success based on each child's individual ability". Additional assertions in the pamphlet claim that "every effort is made to provide teachers with materials and assistance to teach well" and "the district provides periodic opportunity for professional growth through in-service education programs."

River Bluffs school district is considered low-incidence as core data information received from the district central office indicates River Bluffs has never had 20 or more English language learners in a given year.

## Teacher Interviews

In a semi-structured interview session, ten elementary teachers were asked questions regarding their teaching background and their experience with instructing English language learners at River Bluffs Elementary School. Field notes indicate that although several teachers asked for the interviews to take place off school grounds all ten participants appeared eager to share their experience. The participants were passionate about the way things were done at this school and helping each of their students achieve success. An analysis of the participant responses in addition to follow up information revealed dominant themes.

## Climate and Culture

The participants in this study discussed several topics under the umbrella of climate and culture. According to Tableman and Herron (2004), climate and culture are useful terms for the intangibles that shape learning and are the foundation for how we do things around here. The following section investigates these intangibles at River Bluffs Elementary school.

### *A Snapshot of River Bluffs*

A stroll down the hallway of River Bluffs Elementary gives one the impression of sensory overload. Every available inch of hallway bulletin board space, classroom doors, trophy cases and decorations hanging from the ceiling welcome students and visitors. Each classroom has a large bulletin board on the hallway wall just outside the classroom door. Many of the bulletin boards praised students with samples of their work, pictures of them receiving an award and even birthday wishes while others addressed issues of celebrities with learning disabilities and samples of art work, however no examples of

student diversity was observed (Field notes & Observations). Bonnie Landreth remarked

> we don't really do much on diversity unless we are studying different countries or something and then maybe it would be picked up through the school … but I don't see any bias, any racial prejudices, actually in anything like ESL or color or religion.

Teachers mentioned several methods they used to address issues of diversity and welcome English language learners. Terri Dalton in describing the first day of her first ELL student stated "I found out the day before that she was coming so we made her a sign and put it on the bulletin board" to welcome her to our classroom. "We put up posters of Mexico the first time I had a Spanish speaking student" (Stacy Brown). Mrs. Brown further stated "we had a class party and celebrated Day of the Dead" in an effort to infuse some diverse culture into our classroom parties.

*A Snapshot of River Bluffs English language learners*

"Culture, which is a character we ordinarily attribute to communities and peoples, is a term not unlike personality, which is a character we attribute to individuals" (Jenks, 2003, p.140). A common theme that emerged as teachers were discussing their mainstreamed English language learners was quiet and shy. Comments made by the teachers included: "She was very quiet you know. She was shy, very shy" (Terri Dalton). Stacy Brown stated, "She was very shy though, but that may have been because she still didn't speak the language very well." Sarah Collins corroborated that sentiment stating "she was a lot quieter … probably because of the, you know language problems and she wasn't comfortable with it." Mrs. Collins described another student as "outgoing and he had lots of friends … but you know in class he was kind of shy." "When she tries to form

her words she has a hard time selecting some of the words and she doesn't use them sometimes in the correct context which makes her kind of shy" (Hannah Kinder). Mrs. Landreth described an English language learner that was "very withdrawn. The one boy never talked and acted very shy." "I didn't get much out of her and she was so quiet, so so quiet" (Faith Alton). Gina Andrews questioned whether her ELL student was quiet due to her culture; "I think that it's cultural that she's quiet but it's frustrating to me because what if it isn't or what if there was a way that I could help her to be more outgoing." She also expressed uncertainty about the correctness of pointing out ethnic diversity. "It's hard because you don't know if you should point out the difference or not because with these kids, they are so little they don't really understand or know they are different in any way" (Gina Andrews).

Interactions with teachers and other students were discussed. When referring to her ELL student Gina Andrews stated,

> She doesn't interact with people. She doesn't talk to anybody, not even friends …. Just the last couple of days or the last couple of weeks I see her laughing with [friends] more and they talk with her. Recently she started to laugh with them but I don't really know if she is talking with them.

Hannah Kinder shared a similar experience stating, "You know I think that eye contact is one thing I've noticed too. [Margie] tends to look down when you talk with her … she is real quiet and she doesn't typically participate unless you specifically call on her." Mrs. Kinder further stated that in terms of making friends Margie is "getting more and more comfortable. At the beginning of the year she was really quiet and now some days with her friends I have to give her a couple of warnings."

Teachers indicated that almost without exception their ELL students were well liked and accepted by other students in their classrooms. Emily Jenkins shared her observations of two English language learners within the social constructs of the school day:

> Both of them had friends, but little kids they don't need to know the language to be friends. I think they could play side by side all day and jabber at each other in completely different languages and I don't think it would be important to them at all.

Patty McGuire validated this concept contending,

> … the kids you know are kids. I think that you could put two kids that don't speak any language together and they would eventually learn to communicate with each other. They were happy, smiling and body language and he did that a lot.

Body language is another important part of communication and Sandy Morris articulated that body language was unmistakable with her students.

> There was definitely a difference in the way that [my ELLs] related to other peers in the group, the one student who spoke English more proficiently could relate to the peers and was active in the group, the one that couldn't was pretty withdrawn, didn't really want to work, even like his body language was usually turned sideways or away from kids when working in the group. He wasn't wanting to answer questions even when prompted, just really wasn't a participant and really kind of isolated himself.

Teachers stated that their mainstreamed English language learners got along well with others, were intelligent and picked up things very quickly. The following section is a

synopsis of three mainstreamed English language learners that stood out during the teacher interview process and follow up conversations (pseudonyms were used). These students were of particular interest as more than one participant worked with these students and viewing this study through the lens of their experiences was informative to the findings.

*Alexi.*

Emily Jenkins mentioned that the step-father of one of her English language learners was just like her own dad. She saw the same types of parenting and expectations she knew as a child. Alexi spoke Russian and his parents put a lot of pressure on him to learn English quickly (his mom spoke Russian and some broken English and his step-dad was English speaking). As Alexi started learning English he forgot how to speak Russian as fluently and his grandmother was very upset when he was unable to talk to her on the phone in fluent Russian. Mrs. Jenkins stated that Alexi's step-dad went to a nearby college to find "somebody that could tutor him in Russian". Alexi was described as "like a sponge and he wanted to know everything."

According to Mrs. McGuire, Alexi's mom was so happy to get out of their little village and make a life in the United States. "I'm a high believer that children that have higher socioeconomic status, opportunities, travel; life experiences … will have some advantages." Alexi's step-dad was very wealthy and "I can remember Spring Breaks they would go to places like Disneyworld." Mrs. McGuire further stated that the farthest anybody else in her class had traveled was to Silver Dollar City in Branson let alone "to travel across the ocean."

Mrs. McGuire shared stories about Alexi and his first school experiences upon

arrival in the United States. He appeared to learn very quickly because "[Alexi's] parents were much more involved and getting him extra help, he was a very very intelligent kid anyway:" Alexi was very inquisitive and "everything was new to him, he would ask me why you do that." When Alexi first started school "his clothing was in a different style … but as he was here for awhile it changed to be more Americanized." Patty McGuire and Emily Jenkins were excited to have Alexi's mom volunteer for classroom parties. They shared that she didn't speak English very well but appeared to want to participate in everything that she could, bringing in "full sized candy bars for the entire class" for a Valentine's party and making a big hit with the other students in the class. Alexi's mom was also very involved in his learning. "I would contact the parents and tell them this is what we are going to be covering." Alexi's mom "would take the textbooks and write in it with pencil in Russian with some of the words so that he could get the gist of it" (Patty McGuire).

According to Mrs. McGuire Alexi came "from a village in Russia where he didn't have running water, didn't have electricity, so everything that he experienced when he came to school was completely new to him." Mrs. McGuire stated that during the first few weeks of school Alexi had an interesting incident at recess.

> In Russia they would pee on bees so when he saw bees on our playground he would pee on them. When he had to go to the bathroom one day when he was outside he went around to the side of the shed. That was what he did in Russia. He had to learn something simple like go inside to the restroom. It was very tough for him you know.

On another occasion,

> when he cut in line at lunch and got mad at the lunchroom monitor and called her a [expletive] and we said well he knew what that concept was. He had no clue that he was using English cuss words and thought he was still speaking in Russian (Patty McGuire).

*Rabi.*

> Mrs. McGuire stated that she had an ELL student in her room that was a loner and he wasn't social with friends and the times that he was he was just mean. He never seemed happy and always had a blank stare on his face. He was like a shadow … he was just there.

Mrs. McGuire further stated that when Rabi did interact with peers "he would use a lot of cuss words" and

> he was the kid who never talked but yet whenever he was saying something mean he was right on cue. The students saw him in a different light than they did [Alexi]. [Alexi] was so much more accepted by them whereas [Rabi] didn't talk much and like I said when he did he was always mean and saying cuss words and things.

Faith Alton had a similar experience with Rabi indicating that "he was very much into the dark and gangster stuff."

> [Rabi] was so different because he didn't talk, didn't want to participate and seemed you know so sad and angry all the time. The same kinds of lessons didn't work for him. His parents didn't volunteer or come to school and you know it just didn't seem as if they gave him much support (Patty McGuire).

Mrs. McGuire further stated that she didn't think Rabi's parents spoke much if any

English and that when she did have the opportunity to meet his parents Rabi's mom didn't speak. "Mom never talked but then that might have been part of their culture".

According to Mrs. McGuire, later in the school year Rabi was diagnosed with a learning disability in addition to being an English language learner. "He has been diagnosed as special ed. … he has language disabilities and not just ELL."

*Maria.*

Maria "was completely one hundred percent Spanish speaking. She would learn little words here and there like bathroom when she needed to use the bathroom but she was mostly quiet the whole entire day" (Faith Alton). Mrs. Alton shared that when she had Maria in class it was her first year of teaching and it was a stressful year even without the responsibility of instructing English language learners. "It was so difficult because that class was also very demanding and I couldn't spend nearly enough time for what [Maria] needed."

Mrs. Alton described a day when Maria got sick and had difficulty getting anyone to understand what was wrong with her. She had been in art class and there happened to be a substitute teacher who didn't know Maria or how to handle the situation. The substitute "called down to the office and said I need a principal right away … she wasn't talking and she was trying to say that she didn't feel good and wanted to go home." Maria was taken to the nurse's office "and she would say mommy mommy mommy … and she was just bawling and crying." The nurse had to get Maria's cousin to interpret and find out what was wrong and "they called her home" (Faith Alton).

Mrs. Alton stated that Maria's permanent records came from Mexico;

I did look at them one time. She came from Mexico and she looked so cute in the

little uniform that she had to wear there. It was just super cute but everything was in Spanish but I could see the letters. You know letters are letters.

*A Snapshot of River Bluffs Parents and Families*

Not one of the ten teachers interviewed indicated that they had been given any direction regarding communication with ELL parents. Only two teachers stated that they had administrative support which came in the form of utilizing the services of the assistant superintendent who spoke Spanish. Mrs. Alton learned the assistant superintendent could translate for parent conferences from one of her colleagues during a grade level meeting. "The information didn't come from a higher up; it was one of my grade level colleagues who helped me." Stacy Brown learned that the assistant superintendent spoke Spanish from the elementary Spanish teacher who also served as an interpreter for conferences if needed. ELL parents spoke very little English during the parent teacher conferences. Sarah Collins had a difficult time understanding the parents but indicated that "at least mom tried to talk to me. Mom did most of the talking and dad I don't believe said anything." Mrs. Collins stated that during a reading recovery meeting later in the year, the parents had requested an interpreter. Some ELL parents attended open house with other family members who spoke English. "Her parents were just really happy to be here in this country and happy to be here at [River Bluffs] but without [cousins mom] we wouldn't have been able to converse at all" (Stacy Brown).

Emily Jenkins had an unusual situation in communicating with one her families. "One of her parents was Portuguese and one was Brazilian and they didn't speak each other's languages so they kind of had their own language at home." Mrs. Jenkins stated that the student spoke "this combo thing and broken English" making it extremely

difficult to communicate with the student and her parents. Communication with parents appeared to be a concern with Mrs. McGuire who had a suggestion on bridging the communication gap stating "anybody that has an ELL student or a student of a different nationality should at least learn their parent's names." Mrs. McGuire stated that during a conference with parents an administrator was reading a form and said "What's a Haibib" and the dad appeared very frustrated trying to explain to the administrator that he was "Haibib."

A common sub-theme that emerged regarding parent communication was that students often served as interpreters for their parents and teacher. Terri Dalton stated that the "parents couldn't speak English so my student did the translating. I remember her mom just shaking her head." Hannah Kinder had a similar experience;

> They came in for conferences but the whole time that they sat here they just kind of nodded their head and I don't think they had any idea what I said. My little girl actually sat in on the conversation and when they walked out in the hallway I heard her talking to them in Spanish and I think she was telling them what I said.

Mrs.Kinder indicated that she was unable to reach the parents by phone during several attempts "because they can't or won't return phone calls. I wonder if they even knew what I was saying."

None of the teachers were ever instructed to send any parent correspondence home in the parent's native language. Gina Andrews "sent letters a couple of times if I needed to get permission. I just sent a letter instead of calling and it came back signed." Mrs. Andrews discussed an ELL student she has this year claiming,

> her parents didn't speak any English so the Spanish teacher did help me out with

> writing it up in Spanish or she would call for me if we had any concerns. But this year at the parent teacher conference I didn't have any assistance. The dad didn't say anything but hello but the mom talked in some English when I did speak with her. Then she said something to my student in Spanish and [the student] went off and did what she told her to do. So I said to the mom do you only speak Spanish at your house and she said oh no we speak English. But the funny thing is that the family spoke only Spanish to each other during the parent teacher conference. The mom smiled a lot and so I think she was trying to compensate if she didn't understand something. She would just smile and nod and talk a little bit.

Faith Alton preferred calling the family of her ELL student stating that she was always able to get someone who spoke English and leave a message with them. Even though the parents of her student did not speak English there were a lot of family members that lived together and some of them spoke a little English "There were so many people that lived in that little trailer."

During a conversation with the Student Information System coordinators regarding core data of the River Bluffs English language learners, it was learned that the parent link component of SIS was accessible in Spanish. The coordinators happened on this component accidently while trying to access ELL information for this study and remarked that they wondered if anybody else knew this was possible. Parent link is a way that parents can access student information such as grades, attendance, discipline, and lunch charges electronically from home (Field notes).

Lack of parent involvement was an emerging sub-theme. Teachers indicated that most of their parents attended either the elementary open house or parent teacher

conference but they rarely participated in other events. Only one teacher indicated that the parents of her ELL student were involved in a variety of school activities. “His parents were very supportive and they were really tough on him” (Patty McGuire). Mrs. McGuire stated that she actually had a talk with the parents to inform them that their son was probably doing too much homework and they appeared thankful for her input. “They just wanted him to do well.” Mrs. McGuire also stated that this mother volunteered for almost all of the classroom parties and always brought wonderful treats for the entire class. The parents made sure this student was involved in the Christmas concert and attended other school activities such as the ice cream social and fall festival. This family appeared to be doing very well financially and traveled a lot. The student “even brought in escargot for the class” one day. Mrs. McGuire noted that “when mom and dad came together mom never talked, but then that might have been part of their culture” as mom was very involved during the class parties. Mrs. McGuire compared this student with another ELL student she had stating “his parents didn’t volunteer or come to school and it just didn’t seem as if they gave him much support.” Lack of parent involvement was a common theme regarding English language learners at River Bluffs Elementary.

*Identification of ELL students*

Email and memorandum from the office of Director of Special Services indicates that as of October 5, 2005, ten students were identified as ESL with the following “Diagnosis / Nationality: LEP-Spanish, LM -Vietnamese, LEP-Spanish, LEP-Russian, LEP-Spanish, LM-Vietnamese, LEP-Arabic, LEP-Arabic, LM-Vietnamese, LEP-Spanish” (see Table 4 for definitions).

Table 4

Definitions of Diagnosis

| | |
|---|---|
| Language Minority (LM) | Language minority is based solely on the student's language background and not on proficiency. |
| Limited English Proficiency (LEP) | LEP refers to an LM student whose proficiency in reading, listening, writing, or speaking English is below that of age and grade-level peers. It is based on the student's English language proficiency. |

Source: River Bluffs Board Policy Book

Updated ESL data from the special services office, as of May 9, 2009, indicated that all but three of these students had moved, however student core files through MOSIS (Missouri Student Information System) in June, 2009, revealed the River Bluffs district had reported 3 immigrant students, 2 ELL students, and no migrant students. According to Stacy Brown, Emily Jenkins, and Hannah Kinder at least one Spanish speaking student was not identified during the 2009 school year. "[Magdalena] went under the radar last year and it wasn't until the end of the school year that we even knew she was supposed to get services so she went all last year without services and now she's gone all this year without services" (Emily Jenkins). Mrs. Jenkins further stated that she has had direct contact with the director of special services and was informed that the student was in fact receiving district provided services; however upon conversing with "the person who was supposed to be providing the services" Mrs. Jenkins learned that a message in English had been left on the parent's answering machine and there may have been some confusion with transportation, but the end result was that Magdalena was not receiving any services.

> Yeah, so that will have been two years that [Magdalena] has gone without services. And I don't know, I mean for special ed. kids if a child is on an IEP you know giving them services is not optional so if a child has been quote unquote labeled as ELL it's optional whether or not we offer them services. We say oh well I called mom and we can't get transportation so you say okay we tried and it's finished. I have no idea what the legalities are but to me that's not tying too darned hard (Emily Jenkins).

Review of the transcribed interviews revealed that there was little collaboration or

communication among Magdalena's teachers. Sarah Collins, Magdalena's first teacher at River Bluffs, stated that she was unaware Magdalena was an English language learner and "it wasn't until she was having a lot of difficulty in reading that I started looking back through the files and went down to look at the permanent records and happened to come across that she was ELL and had been in a previous district." Mrs. Collins was under the impression that the secretary in the special services office went through the files and flagged ELL students. "I don't know whose responsibility it was …. I don't really know who it just seems like there was a breakdown in the communication somewhere … I was shocked!" Mrs. Collins further stated:

> I didn't ultimately feel like it was all my fault that she got missed you know what I mean. Nobody told me anything and I don't think anything got done for her either … I am shocked that nobody followed up and it was just like nobody cared and with all the other special needs kids it, well the ELL kids just fall through the cracks. There just isn't any directives, no help and certainly not enough time. I feel sorry for them.

An interview with Magdalena's current teacher found that she had not received any information regarding ELL identification from the previous year's teacher.

> No, she didn't tell me anything. No, nope, I had to find it out on my own. Actually, one of the reading teachers came by and told me right after Open House that she was ELL because she'd been receiving reading interventions (Hannah Kinder).

Mrs. Kinder confirmed that Magdalena qualified but was not receiving services stating "I don't know, I've talked to [Janie], I've talked to her and I've talked to [Connie], her

reading teacher, [Josie] down in the Annex, and I haven't gotten a straight answer." Mrs. Kinder expressed a frustration about not being notified that this student was ELL or given any direction on what she should do. She stated "I have a boy who speaks fluent German at home with his parents and wonder if he is ELL too." Mrs. Kinder articulated that she knows little about the definitions of language minority or English language learners and doesn't know who is ELL and who isn't.

An April 13, 2010 Memo to building principals and registrars delineates the enrollment guidelines and refers to an enrollment documentation checklist that must be completed by the registrar. Examination of the documentation checklist found that the registrar is to obtain a number of types of identification to include the "student's social security card/number" (River Bluffs enrollment documentation checklist). However, according to D.E.S.E. (2006), school districts may only require two types of information which include proof of residency and proof of vaccinations. Office staff indicated that they no longer ask for social security numbers even though it is listed on the form (Field Notes). Additionally a review of the River Bluffs school district family enrollment form found a section on the back that states "Language spoken in the home_____ *(If other than English, Fill out Student Home Language Survey" (Office document). The office staff/registrar was unable to locate the Student Home Language Survey and this researcher learned through subsequent conversations with the office staff/registrar that the family enrollment form had been revised in May, 2009, and taken virtually verbatim from a neighboring school district. It was the office staff/registrar's contention that the revision committee must have just missed the student home language survey. Reviews of the MSBA Administrative Procedure and Forms book and board policy statements,

located in the central office, indicate that:

> The board directs the administration to develop and implement language instruction programs that: 1. Identify language minority students through the use of a Student Home Language survey (see IGBH-AF1). The building administrator will develop procedures to ensure that all new and currently enrolled students complete the Home Language Survey (River Bluffs Board Policy Manual).

Further investigation of the board policy manual found "FILE: IGBH-AF1 Critical" which was titled "PROGRAMS FOR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT/LANGUAGE MINORITY STUDENTS (Student Home Language Survey)", (Missouri School Boards Association, 2002). The file stated:

> Note to school Staff: This form should be given to all new and enrolling students. Any student who indicates the use of a language other than English should be assessed as to English proficiency. Elaboration on any of the above answers may be useful before administering detailed tests (River Bluffs Board Policy Manual-IBGH, p.2).

Subsequent conversations with the office staff/registrar revealed that they had never seen this document and that the enrollment form used prior to May, 2009, didn't use an English language survey as that form only asked two questions which were: 1) Do you use a language other than English? 2) Is a language other than English used in your home? It was learned from the staff/registrar that if either of those boxes were checked then the form was flagged and sent via inter-office mail to the Annex and further handled in that office. The Annex is a trailer that houses the special services department and district testing facilities (Field Notes). A follow up meeting with the SIS coordinator

revealed that after recent conversations with this researcher and the inability to locate the Student Home language survey, the statement "*(If other than English, Fill out Student Home Language Survey)" was removed from the enrollment form per administrative request.

Not one of the ten participants knew the policy or process regarding how English language learner students were identified. Sarah Collins stated "I don't know should there be a form and a question that's asked directly of the parents?" Faith Alton further added "probably a form and left up to the parent and if the parent can't read English well then who knows." Gina Andrews was alerted to one of her English language learners when the family came to Open House and was unable to speak to her in English. She said that she alerted the office and spoke with the registrar.

> …and so then I said well what do I do because I didn't even know what I should do and [the registrar] said to contact the psych examiner and then they would take it from there. But that was totally initiated on my part so had I not been like with it at the Open House it would have waited until later and I still could have maybe just thought she was shy and I still don't know if that may be what it really is.

All other teacher participants stated that they had no idea of any district policies regarding the identification of the River Bluffs mainstreamed English language learners.

*Placement of ELL students*

Three of the participants stated that they had no idea how ELL students are placed in classrooms and four participants articulated that English language learners, as well as all students, are placed in classrooms depending on which teacher has the lowest number of students. "It is strictly by numbers, whoever has the lowest" (Terri Dalton). "For

kindergarten they base it on the DIAL test" (Gina Andrews). Two teachers shared that they already had the cousins of ELL students in the classroom and that it was their understanding the parents of the new ELL students requested they be placed with their cousin. Stacy Brown contends that the mothers of her two ELL students were sisters and wanted the girls to be in class together. Maria spoke conversational English so the teacher sat them together and subsequently she helped interpret for her cousin. "When she left she was reading on grade level in English, but for the first part of the year it was really hard for her. I don't know how well she would have done without [Maria] interpreting for her" (Stacy Brown). Faith Alton maintains that having cousins together in her classroom may have not have been equally beneficial for both students. Mrs. Alton stated that

> she also had a cousin in the classroom that would talk to her sometimes and I feel bad for that cousin because she was always the crutch; like can you please tell her to do this and a lot of times she wasn't able to get the point across to her either. …. You know English was better for her. She would try but you know it was like she was the lifeline a lot of the time between them and she would say things to me like she doesn't feel very good and I'm so I would never have known if [Jackie] wasn't there to tell me about it …. I felt bad for [Jackie] because she had this huge weight of helping her cousin succeed in school.

The placement policies regarding English language learners in River Bluffs Elementary School, based on the interpretation of the participants in this study, doesn't appear to be alignment with the school district mission statement. The River Bluffs district mission statement as found in the school's comprehensive school improvement

plan is more student centered and declares that the mission is multifaceted and deals with "criteria to be achieved as well as evaluating success based on each child's individual ability" (River Bluff comprehensive school improvement plan).

*Undocumented*

Two teachers mentioned the possibility that their English language learner student and family might be undocumented. Bonnie Landreth was unsure as to the identification and testing process of English language learners and felt that parents might not always be truthful on enrollment forms if they were undocumented. The father and uncle of one of her ELL students "had trouble coming back into the country so sometimes he was gone for a long time until he could get back into the country …. My guess is that they weren't here legally but I never asked and they never said."

Sarah Collins stated "You wonder if they aren't legal and maybe that's why nobody knows they are ELL. Maybe the parents are afraid to say." Mrs. Collins commented on the school district Student Information System (SIS), a computerized student data information system, stating "when you look at some of the kids on SIS since they have to pick a category like ethnicity, it's just interesting some of the things that are marked, like I know one of my families was Hispanic but they didn't list that."

*Migrant or Moving: My ELL student didn't stay long*

Seven of the ten teachers interviewed remarked that their ELL students were transient and were only enrolled at River Bluffs Elementary for a short period of time. Bonnie Landreth stated "she came from a school in Chicago and she was only with me for five, six months." Terri Dalton's ELL student "came in the middle of the year" and Sarah Collins' student "was only in my room for like half the year. I think his parents

were migrant workers. They moved around a lot and he had to leave." Stacy Brown was under the impression that her students were from migrant families as well. "They were migrant workers I think because they ended up back in Mexico." Gina Andrews was unable to determine how much success her student achieved as she was only here for part of the year and the family moved over the Christmas break. Emily Jenkins was only able to work with her ELL student for part of the year as well stating "they moved so she was here almost three quarters I think." Some of the ELL students had close knit families and appeared to have a large number of people living together. There seemed to be an ongoing practice of someone moving in and someone moving out. Faith Alton stated,

> So many of them live together and they are so close together and moving. Moving midyear, you know that's a common thing with my ELL kids. They are here for such a short time and then they move. They may have been migrant workers or something.

River Bluffs Board of Education Document IGBCB addresses programs for migrant students. Document ICBCB states,

> The Board of Education of the [River Bluffs] School District directs the administration to identify migratory children in the district, as required by law, and to develop written administrative procedures for ensuring that migrant students receive services for which they are eligible.

The Annual Homeless, Migrant, and English Language Learners Report and Evaluation documents students in the district that fall into one of these categories. There were no students designated as migratory in the most recent annual report submitted to the River Bluffs Board of Education.

## Instructional

Instructional sub-themes that emerged through the interview process were that of testing, teaching, grading, and services provided to ELL students. Teachers at River Bluffs Elementary expressed uncertainty regarding the best practice for teaching and grading mainstreamed English language learners as well as confusion as to the district goals or policies.

### *Testing*

Board presentation document (2010) maintains that if a language other than English is listed on the enrollment form, the student will be referred to the Special Services office to be tested for English proficiency. When potential English language learners are identified through the enrollment process or teacher referral, the district psychological examiner assesses them for English proficiency using the Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey, which assesses broad English ability. Students score between 1 and 5 with scores 1-3 being eligible for services. This survey requires parent permission to administer (Board presentation document, 2010, p. 3).

This document also emphasized that identification and subsequent testing could come from teacher referral, however many of the teacher participants appeared unclear about the referral and testing process. Teachers commented about ELL testing indicating that they had never been informed about any specific testing and was unsure if any had been done. "You know I don't know about getting [ELL's] tested. I don't know about ELL kids" (Faith Alton). "I don't think there was any testing at all, at least not that anybody told me. I could be wrong about that but nobody told me if they did" (Sarah Collins). Gina Andrews shared that her ELL student was tested and after a lengthy

period of time she had to email the psychological examiner to find out the results and was told her student did not qualify for services. “I kind of wonder what the test was. By observing her in class it would really seem like the test would indicate she needed help” (Gina Andrews). Bonnie Landreth stated,

> They didn’t test her at all. There was no test at all. …. They would probably just take the records from the other school and go from there. Or maybe go by what the parents say when they enroll, but they might not always be truthful especially if they aren’t here legally.

In the spring of every school year, all English language learners receiving services at River Bluffs Elementary,

> are administered the Missouri Assessment of English Language Proficiency. The Language Assessment System Links (LAS Links) is the current assessment used by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This assessment meets the state’s requirements to assess the English proficiency of its limited English proficient students under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The LAS-Links measure English competency levels in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Since the LAS Links is a required state assessment, parental consent is not needed (Board presentation document, 2010, p. 3).

Discrepancies were found in the review of this board presentation document and follow up personnel meetings. A February 16, 2010, presentation to the River Bluffs board of education regarding “Annual Homeless, Migrant, and English Language Learners Report and Evaluation” lists fourteen “Homeless, Migrant, and English Language Learners Team Members”, however a subsequent meeting of five of the listed

team members found that none of them knew about the "team" nor had been solicited for information or participation in any team meetings (Board Presentation Document, p. 1). This document further asserts that "The district has implemented effective instructional programs designed to meet the assessed needs of its students, as well as the practices and procedures needed to support these programs" as listed under MSIP-IV standards and indicators for homeless, migrant, and English language learners section 6.3 (p.1). Further investigation into the instructional programs, practices, procedures and assessed needs of students will be addressed in the next sections.

*Teaching English language learners*

Board document IGBH located in the River Bluffs board of education manual addresses programs for limited English proficient/language minority students. This document states,

> The Board of Education recognized the need to provide equal educational opportunities for all students in the district. Therefore, if the inability to speak and understand the English language excludes a student from effective participation in the educational programs offered by the district, the district shall take appropriate action to rectify the English language deficiency in order to provide the student equal access to its programs. Students in a language minority (LM) or who have limited English proficiency (LEP) will be identified, assessed, and provided appropriate services. No child will be admitted to or excluded from any program based solely on surname or LM status. The Director of Special Services is designated as the coordinator for all LEP/ELL programs and services.

Page two of this document identifies the "building administrator" as being the designated

individual who "will develop procedures to ensure that all new and currently enrolled students complete the Home language survey" (Board Document IGBH). No evidence of any student completing a Home language survey was located.

A review of documents, field notes, and teacher interviews did not reveal any specific programs or services for River Bluff's ELL students with the exception of after school tutoring. "They are not given any extra because they seem to be getting by with what we are doing" (Bonnie Landreth). "All the information I had … came piece mill over the time that I had her … nobody ever came to me and said okay here's the deal … it was that as you get to know the kid and you learn things here and there and then you talk to this person or that person things get done" (Emily Jenkins). "I wasn't given any directive on anything to do with ELL kids" (Sarah Collins).

Teachers expressed a lack of direction or policy to follow and basically just made do with what they had. "I didn't have a clue of how to deal with ELL. I was just told [by an administrator] to label things" (Emily Jenkins). Stacy Brown utilized the services of Angelina, an English speaking cousin of her ELL student stating "she would have failed if [Angelina] wasn't there to interpret for her." Mrs. Brown worked with her student one-on-one as much as possible and implemented the teaching style of modeling indicating "I would say the word and have her repeat it." Patty McGuire stated that both she and the students in her classroom used hand signals to communicate with her ELL student. She felt like she "differentiated" in her teaching style especially in the sense of what she expected him to accomplish. "I differentiated what I expected of him so that maybe he was meeting my minimum expectations of other students and as long as he did I felt like he was at least getting it" (Patty McGuire). Mrs. McGuire further stated

> He was very intelligent but it was just the language barrier and you would sometimes take things for granted. You just took for granted until you really knew what he could and couldn't do so I would try, you know it was almost like we in a way treated him like he had an IEP or was a lower IQ student in a sense. I had to break things down enough that he could get it.

Mrs. McGuire indicated that she checked out books from the library that had a "Russian background" to make her student feel more at home "and involved with the things we did as a class." She used a world map to help the class understand where Russia was located and they made a math problem of figuring out how far away Alexi's village was from River Bluffs elementary school. "It was probably five months before he really felt comfortable engaging in the conversation but that probably would not have happened if he had not been doing hours of work at home" (Patty McGuire). Sandy Morris used props such as a scarf in her teaching style. "If he needed to learn the word scarf, I would wear a scarf and have a card with the word taped to it. It was difficult, it was difficult but you had to try something."

Gina Andrews shared that her ELL student Raquel doesn't talk at all so they established a "good visit goal" for her to participate in class. The school district has a student improvement program which establishes motivational good visits for students in an effort to change negative behaviors to more positive ones. Mrs. Andrews stated "if [Raquel] participates in class she can go for a good visit because she just doesn't talk." The goal established for Raquel is "if she raises her hand or if she plays with her friends at recess and talks and interacts appropriately" she can go to the student improvement room for a good visit to play games and get a sticker. An observation of one of Raquel's

good visits revealed that on Mondays the students in the program get to phone home and tell their parent that they are having a good day. During the call to the parent Raquel did not speak and was told by the student improvement program teacher what to say. Raquel was barely audible but did repeat verbatim what the teacher told her to say into the phone (Field note documentation). Mrs. Andrews also tries to use some Spanish words in her conversations with Raquel and said "she just giggles when I try to speak Spanish." Mrs. Andrews stated

> It was interesting with [Raquel] when we had computers the other day. There were some Tumble books and some were in Spanish and I asked if she would like one in Spanish and she shook her head yes so I turned it on for her. It was obvious she understood Spanish much better but then after awhile she wanted to go back to the English, but I wonder if that was because that's what the other kids were doing.

Hannah Kinder implemented preferential seating and one-on-one assistance. Other teachers stated they accessed the computer, checked out books from the library and borrowed resources from the Spanish teacher (Stacy Brown, Patty McGuire, Faith Alton, Gina Andrews). Faith Alton uses Spanish/English dictionaries for assignments. "I just kind of came up with stuff. I would pick out little words like maybe dog and then try to act like a dog."

*Modifications and Grading*

Not one of the ten teachers interviewed stated that they had any administrative assistance, professional development or in-service in modifying the work of English language learners or subsequent grading of that work. "Nobody told me to modify her

work and I didn't modify it. She was really smart and made C's" (Emily Jenkins). Mrs. Jenkins contemplated how modified work might have made a difference stating "she was probably an A student and would probably have received A's if I had modified her work." Faith Alton wasn't given any direction on how to grade her student; "I didn't give her a report card I just ended up writing down what she could do."

Nobody told Stacy Brown to modify the class work of her ELL student, "I just guessed at what I thought would be best for these students so I modified. I just adjusted like in math if they had to identify the numbers 1-31 I had her do 1-10 then I graded her on the modified work." Sarah Collins tried to help her ELL student by redefining and rereading. "I had to pull her back a lot and redefine things and try to reread a lot to get her to understand directions a bit more." Mrs. Collins stated that she noticed her ELL student was struggling and felt like it was all up to her, "nobody came to help." She didn't modify any of the classroom assignments or tests. "I don't know how fair that was. It's kind of sad you know, I never thought how the language would affect her grades" (Sarah Collins). Hannah Kinder does not currently modify any class work but "did at the beginning of the year before [ELL student] had the grasp of the language that she does now." Mrs. Kinder further stated "Sometimes in her writing the words will be switched a little bit but I don't count off for that. She will put the noun and then the description after the noun so sometimes her writing doesn't make sense but we talk through it together." Sandy Morris also expressed the sentiment of fairness during her instruction of English language learners. "I still expected them to be able to do the same [work] which probably wasn't right because I didn't give them a book in Spanish; I gave them a book in English."

Patty McGuire stated that she modified the grades of one of her ELL students "because he started being serviced by special education." Board presentation document (2010) verifies that the River Bluffs "School District is currently providing special education to one ELL student" (p. 4).

*Tutoring and Services*

English language learners at River Bluffs Elementary vary from speaking very little English to almost fluent speakers of the language. Some of the current students have previously been identified as English language learners but no longer qualify for services and are no longer considered ELL students (Field Notes from meeting with SIS coordinators). According to district core data, three students are receiving services in the area of after school tutoring while others "didn't qualify for help" (Gina Andrews). Mrs. Andrews further stated that "at the beginning of the year the psych examiner came and got both of those students and pulled them out to test them to see how their English was and they neither one qualified for additional help because she said their language was strong enough." Mrs. Andrews expressed confusion at these results indicating that one of her students doesn't speak at all and she has had to access other resources to get her some additional help. Stacy Brown articulated that she also had to look for resources to help her ELL student as well as fight to get her some additional help. She stated that her ELL student received before school tutoring for a brief time but the student moved back to Mexico shortly after the tutoring services began.

> She pulled her in the morning but that did not happen in the beginning. I kind of had to fight for her to get some help … and I just felt that I needed some help and so they found someone because I told the principal that I needed help. It took a

> long time for me to be able to say that I needed help and this child needs some help, it's not fair to her, you know she needs some other, she needs someone else (Stacy Brown).

Emily Jenkins mentioned that her students were "supposed to be getting services" and when questioned regarding what those services entailed Mrs. Jenkins stated "Well I thought they were supposed to get some sort of before or after school tutoring … but I really don't know. I really don't know what kind of services they are supposed to get."

Board presentation document (2010) under section 6 goal 2 states that any student receiving English language learner services will show improvement in English language skills through increased time for ELL instruction delivered before or after school and through exploration of different instructional methodologies within the school day such as "Read 180, Wilson Reading, literacy interventions, etc." (p. 7). Not one of the ten teachers interviewed for this study, nor did any field notes or document review reference any of the "different instructional methodologies" mentioned in the Board presentation document. This same document also states that

> Missouri law allows a district with fewer than 20 ELL students to provide tutoring services by a "regular teacher [or] a foreign language teacher" while the district prepares to have a teacher attend ELL training. When the number of students requiring services is 20 or more, the school district is required to hire a full-time certified or ESOL-endorsed teacher.

Three of the teachers interviewed indicated that they also had experience as a tutor for English language learners in the River Bluffs school district. None indicated that they had to have special certification or training for this position. One teacher stated that

she was approached by an administrator and asked to be an ELL tutor her first year of teaching in the River Bluffs district and didn't feel that she could say no. The other two teachers stated that they saw a posting of the job and applied for financial reasons.

Faith Alton stated that when an administrator learned that she had ESL training in college she was asked to provide tutoring services to some of the River Bluffs students. When the administrator approached her

> … to tutor and I'm naïve I'm like sure because I didn't know what it all entailed. And so she [administrator] came with a stack of names. A stack of all these names of kids that needed help and she said well how many do you want. There was a stack of them and I go well how many should I have, again I didn't know what I should be saying, what I shouldn't be saying and she starting looking through the pile for the priorities and it ended up that I got three kids. But I remember thinking when I was working with them, what happened to those other kids that were in the stack because this is just three and there were many more than three in that stack … so I just took what she suggested and tutored those three (Faith Alton).

It was Mrs. Alton's understanding that all of the students in the stack needed ELL tutoring. She further stated that the three she tutored did not speak the same language.

> One was from Jerusalem I think. He spoke Arabic. The other two were Hispanic and spoke Spanish. It was really hard to teach them all a language lesson as I spoke just a few words in Spanish and I didn't know a lick of Arabic, however he didn't speak Arabic he just kind of sat there; he didn't say anything in any language …. It really drug me down that year because I had the tutoring forty-five

minutes before the bell so I had to come an extra fifteen minutes early just to do what I needed to do to get ready for them much less get ready for the whole entire day.

Mrs. Alton stated that she only tutored for one year "and then I quit. It was just too much. I needed to prepare for the other twenty-three and I didn't feel qualified to do that and the tutoring."

Document review indicated that River Bluffs posted a similar job this school year using an email notification. A district email addressed to "EVERYONE (All employees with an email address)" sent on October 12, 2009, contained an attachment for a staff position of "Teacher for English Language Learners (ELL)." The qualifications noted were "Any Missouri teacher certification" with a job goal to "Provide English language tutoring for students who are English language learners." The terms of employment stated "The ELL teacher will provide English language instruction for up to 5 hours/week before or after school hours, on days when school is in session, at a pay rate of $25.00 per hour" (District email from central office, 2009).

Bonnie Landreth was also a tutor for ELL students. She taught students with three different languages and stated that not only did she not speak any of those languages; she had not received any training for the job. "We didn't have anybody to help us, check up on us or anything" (Bonnie Landreth). Sandy Morris tutored three days a week before school and shared that her students "had to have parent transportation to come in or they could ride our early high school buses. That seems kind of cruel to ask a little kid that doesn't speak English to ride a bus with a bunch of high school kids." Mrs. Morris further stated,

> The reading tutoring that I was giving them in the morning was supplemental in addition to whatever core reading they were getting in their classroom and I know that those two particular students were getting pulled out by our reading team to get additional reading services but as far as I'm aware it was all English based, none of it was tied to Spanish.

Sarah Collins and Patty McGuire stated that their ELL students received Oasis tutoring. "The Oasis tutor is a retired person that comes to help" students that are struggling in reading (Sarah Collins). Mrs. Collins "sensed that she [ELL student] needed some help … she wasn't really one to come seek me out" so Mrs. Collins referred her student for extra reading help from the Oasis tutors. Patty McGuire was very complimentary of her ELL student's Oasis tutor stating "she would do amazing things with him like cook so that he would learn to read directions."

Several of the teachers interviewed also acknowledged that their ELL students had received remedial reading help but they were quick to note that remedial reading was offered to all students with low reading achievement and not just English language learners. The next section will investigate teacher perceptions regarding conflict and fears of teaching English language learners.

## Conflict and Fears

Teachers expressed a feeling of being on their own and a fear of asking for help. "If you don't ask for help, and most people are afraid to ask for help, you won't get any. We are really on our own for a lot of things here" (Bonnie Landreth). Mrs. Landreth continued

> Teachers get written up if they don't know how to do something. Most of the new teachers especially will not ask for help for fear they might get in trouble for not knowing. It's best to just do what you can and stay out of sight.

There appeared to be a presumption of getting in trouble if one asked for help. Patty McGuire stated that when she "first had an ELL student I didn't know any better and was still trying to keep my head above water with my regular teaching job and was too new to understand that I probably needed more help than I was given." Mrs. McGuire stated this was her very first year of teaching and

> for me there was no direction … I was such a new teacher and you know trying to do the best I could to impress my administrators and I either didn't know about the possibility of professional development or maybe was too afraid to ask for it thinking it might look like I wasn't a good teacher.

Emily Jenkins stated that "frankly I know who to go ask but did that help it didn't change a thing." She continued by saying "a lot of teachers are hesitant to ask for help. A lot may not want to rock the boat and push and get myself in trouble." Mrs. Jenkins expressed frustration that she was aware of an identified English language learner who was not getting the services for which she qualified and that informing an administrator didn't manifest in any changes. "It's not my job, I have a job and that's not it. I'm made to feel my information is incorrect when I continue to tell the [administrator] that this student isn't getting services."

Sarah Collins was upset that an ELL student in her classroom did not get identified.

> I don't know whose responsibility it was. I don't really know who it just seems like there was a breakdown in the communication somewhere. I was kind of shocked when I found out she was ELL. I thought oh my have we broken any rules here, have we denied her certain services you know that she was entitled to and it scared me. I was thinking well I wonder if we are breaking the law.

River Bluffs teachers indicated that although they tried to differentiate in their classroom teaching it was important for grade levels to teach the curriculum during the appropriate timeline. Bonnie Landreth shared that she was called in to the principal's office and "written up" when she taught a math unit on gingerbread houses "during the Christmas holiday instead of when it was supposed to be taught." There was a sense of urgency in making sure the curriculum was presented when and as written.

*Legalities*

None of the teachers interviewed indicated that they were made aware of any legal mandates regarding English language learners. Bonnie Landreth said "If there was anything legal I should or should not have been doing it didn't get presented to me at all." "I'm sure there are different laws that we have to follow in terms of what we're providing parents with but I have no idea, I don't know any of that" (Sandy Morris). Stacy Brown indicated that she "didn't translate any documents for the parents" and was fearful that she might have done something wrong. "I don't' know if there are any legal restrictions but I'm thinking there probably are."

Sarah Collins shared her concerns about a student that was identified as ELL and met the criteria for receiving district services but wasn't receiving services stating

> I don't know what I was supposed to do. I was never told we needed to do

> anything special. It seemed like it was a worry when we discovered that [student] hadn't been serviced and it seems like it raised some eyebrows there. I think there was some worry that they had broken the law. And I worry about that. I took personal responsibility for it, but it didn't seem like it should be my fault that it got overlooked because it obviously passed lots of people's eyes. Nobody caught it. It got to be a huge concern even though they didn't do anything about it.

When discussing the same student Emily Jenkins stated,

> I don't know legally what we are supposed to do. I know that if that child had an IEP and she wasn't getting her correct amount of minutes somebody's head would be on a platter, but you know she's not getting her ELL services and the impression I'm getting is that it's not important.

*Overload and Stress*

Observations of grade level meetings and district in-service revealed a number of new initiatives in the River Bluffs school district. These new initiatives appeared to be a cause of overload and stress among the teachers interviewed for this study.

"We have to do this new thing called EATOnline and it just takes so much time that you can't get anything else extra done" (Hannah Kinder). EATOnline stands for Educational Alignment Tool Online and is a software package that enables River Bluffs and Missouri schools to create a curriculum and align it to the Missouri state standards (Central office document). An observation of a curriculum early release meeting found teachers uploading lesson plans with local objectives into computers. The teachers were using one of the elementary computer labs and shared that this would be an ongoing

process for several years. The ensuing teacher conversation was laced with feelings of frustration and exhaustion. They were tired of reinventing the wheel and overwhelmed with so many new initiatives and added job responsibilities (Field notes).

"With Data team and all the individual stuff we have to do, the ELL kids kind of get left behind" (Bonnie Landreth). Data team is a newly organized group of individuals that includes the classroom teacher, an administrator, the district process coordinator and team facilitator. The premise behind this group is for "teachers who have students in red on Aimsweb or those with behavior problems refer them to the data team" in an effort to implement successful strategies based on the specific academic or behavior concerns. Data team is a direct result of the River Bluffs school district's implementation of response to intervention (RTI) in the elementary school (Gina Andrews; Field notes). "I am overwhelmed with AIMSweb testing. When do they want me to teach?" (Sarah Collins). According to documents received from the reading specialist, AIMSweb is an acronym for Academic Im-Provement Monitoring System (web) based. It is a benchmark and progress monitoring system based on continuous student assessment. Teachers enter data into the computer program based on assessments given at various benchmark points during the school year and generate a report. Assessment is given to all elementary students in basic skills areas such as reading fluency, reading comprehension, and written expression. Multiple assessments are given so that teachers can determine how much progress is being made (Document Review, Field Notes). "We have used a kind of care team before called Problem Solving Team,

but the Data team concept just started this year" (Sandy Morris). Patty McGuire stated "like I said, we are missing the boat by not making these [ELL] kids a priority and that is

sad. I think the teachers have too much to do with all the new data driven stuff and extra work, almost like an IEP for every kid but not necessarily for ELL kids."

According to Sarah Collins, "you know things happen and we lack the resources to teach the English language learners. There is so much to do and I think these kids just fall through the cracks. It is just so stressful." Faith Alton articulated that she was,

> always getting more stressed out because I want to do better for [ELL students]. I felt bad because I didn't feel that I could offer [Ell students] enough you know. It was stressful to me because I did want to give those kids more and I didn't know how to.

## Needs and Support

A prevalent theme that emerged from an intensive review of transcripts was that of needs and support.

### *Professional Development, In-Service, and Resources*

There was no professional development or in-service offered or provided to any of the ten participants in this study in regards to the instruction of English language learners. Teachers stated they felt like they were on their own with few resources and little assistance. According to Bonnie Landreth "We have professional development in everything else and some things we get over and over, but nothing for working with ELL kids." Emily Jenkins validated this claim stating "we have professional development in a lot of areas that really don't seem helpful and miss the boat entirely when it comes to ESL kids." According to the ten teachers interviewed there are very few resources available to teachers of mainstreamed English language learners in the River Bluffs

school district. Faith Alton stated that she was given "useless resources" for her ELL tutoring position;

> they did give me some stuff but it was just here's some stuff and it was nothing that was helpful. Nothing that I knew how to use. Maybe it would have been helpful if I had been given some direction but I didn't know how to use it. I could give them [ELL students] the book but then what do I do. There was no instruction manual on how to use the book. It looked like somebody had picked them up at a garage sale. We need a specific program instead of piece together whatever you want kind of thing.

Patty McGuire stated "all the work looking for resources, translating words, had to be done on my own time. The only resources I got was what I bought or looked up on my own."

Emily Jenkins was instructed to label everything in the classroom with its Spanish name. She also alluded to a book the elementary special education department keeps on a teacher resource shelf that contains strategies on how to deal with student problems."The special education director told me to label things in the room and to check the book that you use if you had a behavior problem or something" (Emily Jenkins). Stacy Brown stated "I was lucky to use the Spanish teacher as a resource. I don't know what I would have done though if they [ELL students] hadn't been Spanish speaking. I don't think we have any other teacher resources for other languages."

Sandy Morris felt strongly that ELL is

> a program we're neglecting and it would be good to know if we have any teachers in the building that are ELL trained or that speak a foreign language. If you do

have teachers to go to in the building that would be a support I wouldn't even know who they are.

*Leadership: Who helped me*

When discussing leadership in the education of mainstreamed English language Learners, Patty McGuire stated "no, absolutely nothing" has been provided at River Bluffs. Only two of the ten teachers interviewed knew who was in charge of the district English language learner program and one stated that going to that person "didn't change a thing" (Emily Jenkins). The teachers listed a variety of individuals that they would seek out as the person in charge. "Having a go to person would be good because I wouldn't have the slightest idea who to ask right now. I mean for Spanish I would probably go to the Spanish teacher but for my other student I don't have anybody to go to for [student]" (Gina Andrews). Other teachers stated they might ask somebody in the guidance department, a reading teacher, or possibly one of the principals (Bonnie Landreth, Sandy Morris, & Stacy Brown). Sarah Collins stated that she didn't know who the go to person was so "I just did mine on my own."

*Lack of Communication: We don't know anything*

There was a common sentiment among the participants in this study that over the past few years the elementary school has "changed from a close knit family to it's all about secrets now" (Bonnie Landreth). "I'll be honest with you nobody really tells us anything" (Sarah Collins). Mrs. Landreth explained that the school used to be like a big family but things started to change when the "issue of everything needs to be confidential" referring to a new HIPAA/FERPA directive (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act / Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) was implemented.

This change in culture had a direct impact on the administrative support and communication the teachers received. “We don’t know about when a fellow teacher is sick and we don’t know about what is going on with the kids” (Bonnie Landreth). Mrs. Landreth further stated

> We are not really told anything around here. Everything is a big secret…I’m not even told if any of the kids are remedial reading or have an IEP. I have to go find that out for myself.

Participants indicated that even though they understood the office doesn’t always have advance notice that a student is enrolling it is very problematic for a teacher “like right now it’s 8:25, sometimes they are in our room at 8:26 and we don’t know they’re coming” (Stacy Brown). Emily Jenkins stated

> the teachers need to know before the child shows up at their door, because it takes a lot of preparation you know if you are going to do things very visually and very kinesthetically and you are going to have to have an alternate way to assess what that child knows even if you alter it a little bit that takes a lot of planning so you need to know up front all of those things that you can do.

“Just having an administrator or somebody in charge tell me anything would have been beneficial” (Stacy Brown).

Patty McGuire further elaborated stating;

> I think some of the things get delegated so much that nobody knows who’s supposed to be doing what or what they are doing with it. And it’s one of those things it’s like well we have bigger fish to fry because you know we do have other subgroups of AYP that need to be addressed and documented or noted so they

> figure that's what we need to be focusing on and barely doing anything for these kids that need ELL services because we don't have very many of them and it's like they don't count.

Bonnie Landreth stated,

> I haven't been told anything about the program or placement at all. No, they do not give us any information about ELL students or what to do at all. No help, they just say take it and go with it we think you will do a good job.

Statements made by Sarah Collins and Hannah Kinder indicate that little collaboration or communication from teacher to teacher is occurring regarding English language learners. Mrs. Collins stated that she didn't realize until late in the school year that her student was an English language learner that had not been identified, however according to her interview transcript she did not collaborate with the next year's teacher in regards to her knowledge of this student. Mrs. Kinder stated that she "had to find it out on my own" and suggested that a good thing for the district to do "would be to allow collaborative time for teachers to get together for things like this. It would have been good to have heard it from her last year's teacher."

*Suggestions from the trenches*

Teachers expressed a desire to be provided information regarding what they were legally responsible for in terms of educating English language learners and communication with their parents. Several mentioned a fear that they may have broken the law by not providing parents with correspondence in a language for which they understood. "It would be nice to know exactly what we are responsible for legally because I don't know" (Emily Jenkins). Another suggestion was for the district to provide

a detailed protocol and clear documentation of procedures in educating ELL students. "We need to know what the protocol is if you have a new student who has an ELL background and they need help. There needs to be a step by step protocol so everybody understands what to do" (Emily Jenkins). Stacy Brown stated "we need clear documentation of what procedures we should use when we have a child that does not speak English no matter what the language is." Vertical teaming to open the lines of communication and provide a collaboration of teachers was suggested (Hannah Kinder).

A prevalent theme that emerged was that no in-service or professional development in regards to the education of English language learners was provided to the teachers of River Bluff mainstreamed English language learners. Patty McGuire stated that "at the beginning of the year we do a lot of safety protocols, watch videos and things like that. It would be so easy for the district to add something on ELL students." Even "a webinar or video series that shows students and how to work with their parents" would be helpful (Sandy Morris). The sentiment expressed was that this type of in-service would be beneficial for all teachers and not just those with ELL students in their classroom.

Emily Jenkins stated that "something on Microsoft word where you can type your document the way you want and get it translated for you" would also be beneficial. It was mentioned that the administration should check with the staff to see if anybody speaks a foreign language "because if somebody knew a little Spanish it makes a lot more sense to put them in that room" (Emily Jenkins). Teachers were not queried about their experience in teaching English language learners, if they had any ESL training, or if they spoke a language other than English. Placing an English language learner in a classroom with a

teacher who has background knowledge of their native language and culture would be good practice.

Bonnie Landreth suggested that a "day to look at the permanent records" would be very beneficial to classroom teachers. The teachers interviewed for this study spoke of several new initiatives that were overwhelming and time consuming leaving very little time for record review. Emily Jenkins stated that there were so many needs of both teachers and students that the district "needs somebody to be in charge and be an expert. Somebody that knows what to do in terms of how to provide services."

## Summary

In this chapter the analysis of data was described and reported. The key research question that guided this study was an inquiry into the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding their experience in the education of mainstreamed English language learners.

Ten teachers were purposefully selected to be interviewed as these were the only ten elementary teachers with experience in teaching mainstreamed English language learners in the River Bluffs school district. River Bluffs elementary school was purposefully selected due to its rural location and designation as a low incidence district.

After a thorough review of the transcripts four themes emerged. The four themes were 1) climate and culture, 2) instructional, 3) conflicts and fears, and 4) and support. Teachers indicated that teaching mainstreamed English language learners was a good experience. "It was a lot of extra work but I didn't mind doing it. It was just really good for all of the students to learn about different cultures" (Stacy Brown). Teachers also painted a picture of an English language learner program that was lacking in resources and leadership. Patty McGuire summed up the consensus when she stated

> I just think we are missing the boat with the ELL kids at [River Bluffs] you know because it doesn't seem like we make them a priority. Probably because there aren't very many of them, but that is sad. I think the teachers have too much to do with you know all the new data driven stuff and extra work, almost like an IEP for every kid but not necessarily for ELL kids…we are so big into No Child Left Behind and reading for everybody but not so much for the ELL kids.

The next chapter will discuss findings, conclusions and recommendations. Implications for further study will be discussed.

# Chapter Five

## Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Introduction

The fastest growing faction of society in the United States today is school age English language learners. This population of students continues to increase in schools in every part of the country including states that have previously not enrolled English language learners (Berube, 2000; Hill & Flynn, 2004; Huang 1999; Sadowski, 2004). "As these families move into middle America, some are selecting small rural communities as their home, challenging school districts to develop instructional services for a handful of ELL students" (Hill & Flynn, 2004, p. 1). Rural communities typically have little experience with English language learners and small school districts tend to have less access to programs, resources, and trained ELL teachers (Berube, 2000; Hill & Flynn, 2004). According to Fitzgerald (1995) and Mohr (2004) research suggests that English language learners have not been receiving satisfactory assistance in their mainstreamed classrooms and do not appear to be adequately supported by their classroom teachers. The purpose of this study was to examine elementary teacher perceptions of their experience instructing mainstreamed English language learners in a rural low-incidence school district. As mainstream teachers play a critical role in the education of this diverse group of English language learners, teacher perceptions become paramount in understanding the support and resources necessary to adequately and legally instruct this growing population of students. Viewing the education of ELL's through the eyes of the teacher provides administrators and policymakers valuable information regarding needs, resources and support essential in appropriately educating linguistically diverse students.

## Research Questions

In this section the research questions are answered and findings are discussed. Three primary questions guided the research. Those questions were:

1) What are the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding their classroom experiences in the education of mainstreamed English language learners?

2) What are the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding support and resources needed to effectively instruct mainstreamed English language learners?

3) What are the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding administrative assistance in the education of mainstreamed English language learners?

## Discussion of findings

Ten teachers with experience in instructing mainstreamed English language learners in the River Bluffs school district were interviewed. Transcripts of interviews and field notes of observations and documents were analyzed from which four major themes emerged. The first was that of climate and culture. Teachers shared experiences of teaching English language learners and how things are done in the River Bluffs elementary school. The second theme was instructional issues in regards to testing, modifying coursework, grading and services for mainstreamed ELL students in this district. Third, teachers maintained that they were stressed, overloaded and not informed about legal issues, programs or policies regarding English language learners resulting in conflicts and fears. And the fourth theme to emerge encompassed the need for professional development, in-service, support and leadership. The main findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of teacher perceptions of their experience in

instructing mainstreamed English language learners at a time when the population of English language learners is at a record high.

*Culture and Climate*

Teachers in the River Bluffs elementary school described their English language learners as intelligent and capable but in most cases they felt the students were extremely quiet and shy. There did not appear to be a common consensus however, if this characteristic was primarily due to culture or a lack of knowledge of the English language. According to Gitomer, Andal, and Davison (2005) it is critical to recognize that English language learners are not a homogenous group due to their different family backgrounds and various experience with previous education and language. It is important for teachers to understand the student's world and only when teachers comprehend the importance of culture in the classroom will appropriate learning take place. Kottler, Kottler and Street (2008) argue that "a student's language acquisition and proficiency are thus directly related to the teacher's cultural proficiency, that is, the ability to adapt the classroom and school environments in such a way that individual needs are recognized and responded to effectively" (p. 5). Not all schools adequately acknowledge the sizeable degree of diversity that is present in mainstreamed ELL classrooms because their main goal is the same for all students which is to use English appropriately. The classroom focus is often on teaching rather than on learning and emphasizes teaching the traditional curriculum instead of tailoring instruction to the characteristics and needs of the learners (Nessel & Dixon, 2008). River Bluffs teachers articulated a need to follow the prescribed curriculum on the specified timeline or get in trouble. Today's curriculum is much more defined for grade and content due to the

recent standards movement. “One of the biggest frustrations for veteran teachers is no longer being able to teach whatever they or their students find interesting” (Vojtek & Vojtek, 2009, p. 39). There was little evidence from teacher interviews or observations to indicate a tailoring of curriculum to fit the uniqueness of diverse cultures.

Teachers also noted behavioral characteristics such as lack of eye contact and averted body language. According to Ballantyne, Sanderman, and Levy (2008), some ELL students may view direct eye contact as a sign of disrespect to the teachers while their teachers might interpret this as disobedient or an admission of guilt. Teachers should investigate the cultural practices of their students and adapt instruction accordingly. By doing this, teachers can use artifacts and resources that make learning more relevant for their mainstreamed English language learners. It is important for teachers to become familiar with the background of their ELL students to ensure their success. Teachers who become familiar with the language and culture of their English language learners will create a more conducive learning environment and positively affect their students success (Garcia, 1991; Oliveira & Athanases, 2007).

A common statement among the participants of this study was that they were not informed about student backgrounds and have had English language learner students walk into the classroom without knowing their language or cultural background. One teacher indicated her student was not identified for almost a year while another stated her student does not speak at all, in any language, and is not receiving any special services. Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) standard 6.3.6, asserts that every public school in the state of Missouri must have in place a method to identify ELL students. The best method would be for every new student to complete a Home Language Survey

which ascertains detailed information regarding language use and background. A less effective method would be to include two questions regarding language on the enrollment form (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006). According to a document review at River Bluffs elementary, enrollment forms prior to this school year asked two questions regarding language use. An updated enrollment form was approved for the current school year which asks about the language spoken in the home and states that if a language other than English is listed the completion of a student home language survey will be requested. However, there was no evidence that a home language survey is actually used and office staff who routinely enrolls new students indicated they were not aware of this survey. A review of documents at the end of the school year revealed that the enrollment form had been changed yet again to remove the home language survey stipulation and only asked what language is spoken in the home. While informing teachers of newly enrolled English language learners would be beneficial, the school district must first align its enrollment procedures with appropriate identification measures and articulate its mission statement on the welcoming of English language learners. According to Jenlink (2009) schools must support and foster cultural awareness in all aspects of the school and "leading this endeavor is the principal" (p. 154). Jenlink further states that "through the action of the principal, accepting and understanding children with differences affects the teaching process, the climate of the school, and the future of the students" (p. 154). Board documents found in the River Bluffs central office state that in this district the principal is responsible for enrollment procedures and the Director of Special Education is responsible for the English language learner program (Board documents). It was clear from the teacher interviews that most were not aware of this

information. Only two of the participating teachers knew who was in charge of the district ELL program. Effective communication from administrators is vital for school success (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2009).

Interacting with parents and undocumented or migrant students emerged as sub-themes of culture and climate. Several teachers stated that they had never met the parents of their English language learners while others had limited contact. Only one teacher in the ten that were interviewed stated that the parents were involved in more activities than just parent teacher conferences and open house. Most of the parents spoke very little if any English but were typically present at open house and conferences. At least one parent asked for a translator. Two of the teachers were made aware through the Spanish teacher or grade level mentors that one of the central office administrators spoke Spanish, and along with the district Spanish teacher would be available to translate for Spanish speaking families if needed. In several situations, it was reported that the student translated for the parents and teacher. Very little written communication was sent in the parent's native language and several teachers expressed a concern of not being given any directions from their administrator and feeling like they may have done something wrong. According to Yurichenko (2007) a common characteristic of ELL parents is that they don't speak English and tend to avoid school functions rather than expect or solicit translator services. Parents of English language learners face intimidating obstacles as they try to become involved in their child's school. Obstacles such as poor English speaking skills, different cultural norms and a lack of understanding about the school system keep many ELL parents from getting involved. Research supports the significance of parental investment and participation for improved student achievement and

attendance and for reduced dropout rates regardless of socioeconomic circumstances or ethnicity (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Waterman & Harry, 2008). "The school needs to indicate to parents by words and actions that parents are welcome at the school and that their participation is important" (Becker, 2001, p. 173). ELL students and their families feel immense pressure to assimilate to the American culture and often think they need to give up their own culture. Educators must help students and their families embrace both cultures to strengthen the bridge between home and school (Borba, 2009).

Plyer vs. Doe, 1982, was a landmark case making it illegal to refuse a free public education to undocumented students. The court majority found that laws directed at refusing to educate undocumented children imposed a discriminatory burden on an issue which children have no control; specifically being brought illegally into the United States by their parents. By refusing to allow undocumented children to attend school, districts were denying them a critical means for advancement in society; a free and appropriate education (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006, Simiris, 1983; Valencia, 2008). Although the issue of undocumented students was not a major theme in this study it was referenced in the teacher interviews regarding the identification of English language learners. There was a concern that even though undocumented students have a legal right to a free and appropriate education, undocumented parents might not want to draw attention to their family by listing their child as limited or non- English speaking. Waterman and Harry (2008) argue that in some cases, parents may not complete forms that ask for a social security number, such as the free and reduced lunch application. The River Bluffs school district requires any parent or family member that wishes to participate in class parties and field trips or to volunteer at school, acquire an

official background check and have it on file in the district office (School documents). The district webpage gives instructions on the procedure for the background check, fingerprinting and the costs involved. Undocumented parents may choose not to get involved in school activities for this reason.

Teachers in this study indicated that their ELL students did not stay in the River Bluffs school system for an extended period of time and often times transferred to another school before the end of the year. Although teachers mentioned these students may be children of migrant workers, district core data indicated no migrant students were currently enrolled in the River Bluffs school district (Core Data Report, Field Notes). Legislation defines a migrant student as one whose parents are migratory workers and who have had to change schools due to the migrant job relocation. Migrant students have profound needs in regards to educational disruption and social isolation (Kirby, Naftel, Berends, & McCombs, 2002). Even though the River Bluffs core data didn't indicate that any migrant students were enrolled, ELL students that move often may also need support for educational disruption and social isolation.

*Instructional*

Board documents assert that if a language other than English is recorded on the district enrollment form, the student will be referred for English proficiency testing. The district uses the Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey as a screening tool to determine if the student qualifies to receive tutoring services. As the River Bluffs school district is a low-incidence school, the district is not required to hire a trained teacher nor provide any ELL programs with the exception of tutoring. River Bluffs offers tutoring after school for one hour for three days per week for those students who qualify for ELL services (Board

presentation document, Field notes). Teachers state that some ELL students have been receiving tutoring while others were pulled from the classroom for RTI (Response to Intervention) reading groups or Title I reading groups. The Response to Intervention reading groups were designed for all students scoring in the red on AIMSweb benchmark probes and not just for ELL students (Field notes). A 2010 Board presentation document asserts that testing may also be the result of teacher referral however none of the ten teacher participants interviewed appeared to be knowledgeable regarding the referral or testing process. Teachers remarked that not only were they not informed about the testing process, they weren't sure testing was ever done. In one specific case, it was revealed that an English language learner was not properly identified, not tested and not offered services.

Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to notify parents if their child meets the criteria to be placed in a specialized language-instruction program (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009). Document review revealed that River Bluffs school district mails a letter of eligibility for ELL services to the parents of students who qualify based on the results of the Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey. This letter is sent in English regardless of the home language of the family (Field notes, Document Review). Using the family's home language whenever possible is an effective tool for parent involvement. "Although parents should be encouraged to learn English, a recommended strategy is to use the parent's language in school for meetings or other parent-related activities" (Carrasquilla, Kucer, & Abrams, 2004, p. 143). Families of English language learners bring a wealth of language and cultural experiences to the

school and should be viewed as a valuable resource (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006).

Public schools in the United States are responsible for providing a language program that improves the academic achievement and English proficiency of English language learners regardless if they are receiving state or federal funds. There is currently no mandated curriculum and local districts are given considerable latitude in developing their own programs (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006). Missouri has relatively low numbers of ELL students and only 150 of the 552 reporting districts indicated they were low-incidence having less than twenty ELL students enrolled (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010). Only those districts enrolling twenty or more ELLs are required to hire a certified teacher. Literature from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and MO-MELL describe ELL programs for high-incidence districts but little direction is given to districts with few ELL students enrolled. For example, DESE (2006) states that when less than twenty English language learners are enrolled, tutoring sessions from a regular teacher could be provided. There is no explanation however why students in a high incidence district are more worthy of a certified teacher/program than students in a low-incidence district. Resource documents from the Missouri Migrant Education/ English language learning organization state that Title I services are not enough help for ELL students and that modifications of the curriculum should be made, but there is little direction in how that should be accomplished (Missouri Migrant Education/English Language Learning MO-MELL, 2009). “The curriculum must be adjusted or modified to enable children to read, write, listen, speak and comprehend the English language and meet the state ELL

standards aligned with the Show-Me Standards" (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2007). Teachers in the River Bluffs elementary school did little to modify and adjust the curriculum for their English language learners. They were given no direction on what or how to adapt the curriculum for the ELL students in their classrooms. The only services mentioned were Title I reading groups, Response To Intervention (RTI) groups, and after school tutoring, which falls far short of the MO-MELL suggested instructional times for Missouri ELL programs in high incidence districts. MO-MELL instructional times and ratios listed on the Missouri Elementary and Secondary Education website (2007) are explained in Table 5.

Table 5

Suggested Instructional Time and Ratio for Missouri ELL Programs

| GRADE LEVEL | STATUS | TIME AND |
|---|---|---|
| K-1 | Newcomer | Minimum 150 min./wk. |
| K-1 | Beginner/Low | Minimum 75 min./wk. |
| K-1 | Advanced | 45 minutes per week |
| 2-3 | Newcomer | Minimum 300 min./wk. |
| 2-3 | Beginner/Low | Minimum 150 min./wk. |
| 2-3 | Advanced | 90 min./wk. |
| 4-8 | Newcomer | Minimum 600 min/wk. |
| 4-8 | Beginner/Low | Minimum 420 min/wk. |
| 4-8 | Advanced | 300 min./wk. |

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2007)

There was no specific grading system in place for the mainstreamed River Bluffs English language learners. Teachers ranged from making no allowances and holding ELL students to the same expectations as their English speaking counterparts to making some random modifications and grading on the results of those modifications. One River Bluffs teacher shared that her ELL student was very likely an A student but since she didn't modify the curriculum or grading system the student received C's. According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2006) teachers should not expect ELL students to have comparable English language test results when compared to their peers. D.E.S.E. suggests using a checklist to cover concepts and skills rather than letter grades until a student can fairly be assigned letter grades. According to Kameenui and Carnine (1998) ELL students presented with a traditional curriculum and no modifications tend to struggle, become overwhelmed and withdraw from classroom participation.

*Conflicts and Fears*

It is common knowledge that teachers are morally, ethically and legally responsible for each of their students, but when it comes to English language learners, many teachers are unsure of the specific legal requirements for which they may be held accountable (Varghese, 2004). Teachers in the River Bluffs elementary school expressed uncertainty and worry about legal issues regarding their ELL students. None of the ten teacher participants had been informed of any legal mandates and several expressed a concern that they may have done something wrong or illegal. Courts have recognized from as far back as the Supreme Court ruling in Lau, that schools have designed ineffective programs for ELL students (Haas, 2005). Schools are mandated to help ELL

students overcome language obstacles that hinder equal participation in school programs (Varghese, 2004). In order for teachers to best educate their mainstreamed English language learners they must be made aware of state and federal laws in addition to district policies and procedures.

Several new educational initiatives appeared to be the basis for River Bluff's teachers' feelings of overwork and stress. Teachers expressed frustration that new programs such as Response to Intervention (RTI), Data Team, AIMSweb, and EATOnline take a great deal of their time and have been made such a priority in the school that little else gets done. The participants in this study harbored feelings of being on their own and a fear of getting in trouble if they asked for help. The ten River Bluffs Elementary teachers interviewed for this study were reminiscent of the Wintervalley High School teachers in a study by Jeffrey Brooks (2006) and the teachers in a motivational study by Vojtek and Vojtek (2009). Just like the teachers at Brooks' Wintervalley High, River Bluffs teachers articulated detachment, organizational shortcomings and frustration as well as a dichotomy between the mission of educating students and the hurdles they have to jump through to do it. As principals play a key role in shaping the overall success of a school, they must take time to build positive relationships with teachers and staff to better understand the roadblocks the teachers and staff may encounter (Fleck, 2005). "Administrators at every level need to examine whether they are depleting their teachers' energies with programs, policies, and procedures that keep everyone on a treadmill but rarely advance the school's mission (McEwan, 2005, p. 106).

*Needs and Support*

Teachers are not prepared for the diversity of their classrooms (Walker, Shafer, Iiams, 2004). "Given that few mainstream teachers are receiving training in instructional strategies for English language learners, it is not surprising that many teachers, particularly those in rural areas, feel inadequate and ill-prepared to meet the needs of their ELL students" (Flynn & Hill, 2005, p. 4). It was the consensus of the mainstreamed English language teachers in this rural district that they were not prepared to teach the ELL students placed in their classrooms. None of the ten teacher participants in the River Bluff's school district had been given in-service or professional development opportunities regarding the instruction of mainstreamed English language learners. Teachers expressed sentiments such as "I didn't have a clue of how to deal with ELL" (Emily Jenkins) and "I wasn't given any directive on anything to do with ELL kids" (Sarah Collins). "Districts must provide high-quality professional development to teachers … professional development must be: designed to improve the instruction and assessment of ELLs" (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2007a).

Memos and teacher correspondence at River Bluffs elementary indicate that the first two days of school are mandatory for teachers to attend various professional development workshops such as HIPAA/FERPA confidentiality issues, Putting Kids First- recognizing sexual abuse, copyright laws and regulations, and Hotlines – mandatory reporting, but nothing in the area of educating diverse learners. A memo from last year's workshops even included a mandatory meeting regarding the use of an EpiPen (epinephrine auto-injector) for a student in the district who was highly allergic to peanut butter. Administrators at River Bluffs Elementary would be wise to use this avenue of

mandatory workshops to implement an in-service regarding the district mission statement, policy and procedures for educating English language learners.

"Teaching students who are learning English as a second language can be a daunting task. The more instructional resources you have at hand, the more likely you are to succeed with diverse learners" (Bender & Shores, 2007). Teachers at River Bluffs Elementary were given few resources. One teacher stated that the resources she was given appeared to have been purchased at a garage sale and were virtually useless to her. Teachers stated that books from the library, computers, and some supplies from the Spanish teacher were the extent of the resources they had available for teaching their English language learners. "If policymakers are serious about ELLs reaching the same level of overall academic proficiency as native English speakers – that is, really closing the achievement gap – this almost certainly requires additional resources. English-language learners cannot be expected to master both English and an English-based academic curriculum in the same amount of time and with the same resources as English-speaking students" (Sadowski, 2004, p.123).

No professional development or in-service opportunities in the area of English language learner instruction are provided at River Bluffs Elementary so teachers are left to their own devices and on their own time to best educate this population of students. River Bluffs teachers expressed a lack of communication, support and resources from the administration. Lack of communication was articulated on several levels. In addition to not being informed when they were getting a new English language learner student, teachers stated that a new push for confidentiality in the district instilled a feeling that everything must be kept secret. The teacher participants in this study were not made

aware of any aspects of the district ELL program such as identification, placement, testing or services provided. They were also uninformed about who they should seek out for assistance with questions or concerns regarding ELL students. When asked who was in charge of English language learners teachers expressed a confusion of who to ask for assistance ranging from the Spanish teacher, guidance counselor, reading teacher or one of several administrators. There was a common theme of apprehension regarding requesting help for fear of rocking the boat and getting in trouble for not knowing something. One teacher boldly stated that she knew who was in charge of the ELL program but talking to that person about a concern didn't make a difference. Collaboration from one grade level to the next was non-existent in terms of communication regarding English language learners; most specifically in the case where an English language learner had not been identified. Teachers at River Bluffs Elementary were not communicating with each other. According to Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000), some teachers are hesitant to bring problems to the attention of their colleagues because of embarrassment. Lack of communication between colleagues causes stress and anxiety. In a study by O'Hair and Kreps (1990) teachers reported one of their greatest job related stressors was linked to their lack of communication with principals and colleagues.

School principals at River Bluffs Elementary were seen each morning greeting students as they entered the school building and those same principals were active participants in bus duty at the end of the day. Daily intercom announcements from the principal's office included congratulating students 'caught ya' being good and birthday wishes. There was an obvious positive connection between the administration and student

body, however teacher interviews revealed a disconnect between administrators and teachers. “Leadership really does make a difference” (Vojtek & Vojtek, 2009, p. 31).

Establishing genuine communication and gaining the respect of the staff is an important task for school administrators. Leaders in quality high-performing schools establish good relations with the teachers and staff and view them as valuable resources. According to Green (2009) “the best way to support your teachers is to let them know you respect their positions, prove to them that you will be there when they need you, and take their input seriously” (p. 23). Sorenson and Goldsmith (2009) argue that “the way principals and personnel communicate with each other significantly impacts their school’s cultures and climates” (p. 82).

*Leadership and Administrative Support*

Viewing teacher perceptions of their experience in teaching mainstreamed English language learners through the lens of administrative assistance, needs and support embody the conceptual framework for this study. “Creating a positive learning environment for ELL students starts with administrators” (Flynn & Hill, 2005, p.5). Flynn & Hill further state that it is imperative that school leaders exhibit a positive attitude, inform all staff about legal requirements regarding the education of ELLs, support teachers, make in-service and professional development a priority, and create a school atmosphere of acceptance and welcoming of diversity. Administrators must also determine what resources are needed and allocate those accordingly. “The most experienced teachers should be matched with the children who need them the most” (Flynn & Hill, p. 6). River Bluffs elementary teachers state they were never asked if they spoke a foreign language. Acquiring this information from teachers and placing English

language learners with an appropriate teacher more readily fits a student centered philosophy. It is the responsibility of the school leaders to establish a climate of respect and trust that allows teachers to take risks and speak their minds without fear of retribution. School leaders must also communicate a clear vision of the school's mission and engage in an open communication that is shared with all stakeholders to make informed decisions. Expectations, assessments and resources must be congruent with the district's mission statement. Professional development should fit the needs of the teachers as well as the district and allow growth for both (Vojtek & Vojtek, 2009). Teachers are the key to educating mainstreamed English language learners but administrators are the key to ensuring the needs and support of the classroom teacher is addressed.

## Recommendations from the trenches

Specific suggestions from the participating teachers at River Bluffs Elementary regarding the instruction of mainstreamed English language learners include 1) information regarding legal responsibilities, 2) directives on communication with ELL parents, 3) written policy, protocol, and procedures for educating ELL students, 4) vertical teaming and collaboration time, 5) professional development and in-service in area of teaching English language learners, 6) resources for translating documents to the native language of ELL students, 7) poll the staff for experience in foreign language and ELL experience and place students accordingly, and 8) provide a workshop day for teachers to peruse the permanent records of their classroom.

## Recommendations for Future Research

This researcher suggests a number of recommendations for further research in the area of English language learners. 1) Similar research in the area of teachers' perceptions

of experience in educating mainstreamed English language learners at the middle school and high school levels would be beneficial. 2) Expanding this research to include high-incidence districts as well as those in suburban and urban areas is recommended. 3) More in-depth investigation into the experience of school district staff and administration would provide a multi-faceted outlook on this study. 4) This study was viewed through the lens of the teacher which is only part of the picture. Exploring the educational experience through the eyes and voice of the student, parents, and school administrators would also provide valuable information.

## Summary

The participants in this study described their students as shy, capable and intelligent, and a joy to have in the classroom. Classroom experiences of these mainstreamed teachers in terms of relationships and diversity was positive, however there was a consensus that support and resources, specifically administrative support was severely lacking. Teachers expressed feelings of anxiety and frustration concerning a perceived inability to meet the needs of their ELL students. Lack of knowledge regarding how to best instruct their mainstreamed English language learners and being fearful to ask for administrative help was also a common theme.

Increased diversity in the classroom changes the scope of what teachers are being asked to do. Classroom teachers must provide differentiated instruction, present a curriculum that meets the needs of each student, buttress instruction with lessons that challenge the gifted and support students that struggle, include parents and caregivers, and "expand the concept of education to students' lives outside of school" (Arends & Kilcher, 2010, p. 7). Arends and Kilcher further state that "no longer is it acceptable to

simply teach a lesson aimed at the average learner" (p. 7). Add to that new initiatives and policies that require enormous amounts of time for assessing students and uploading data into computer programs and requirements to attend and prepare for numerous meetings and one can readily understand Sarah Collins statement "When do they want me to teach?" As classrooms become more diverse with a group of students who speak a language other than English and bring with them a different set of cultural expectations, administrators must help teachers view this diversity as not only a challenge but also as an opportunity (Arends & Kilcher, 2010). Policy makers and school leaders should listen to the teachers who are in the classroom every day taking responsibility for educating all students including English language learners. Acquiring teacher perspectives of their experience in educating mainstreamed English language learners is vital in determining what policies and procedures should be implemented. "Maybe I had been looking in the wrong place. Maybe it was the teachers, rather than the philosophers, researchers, or novelists, who had the answers" (Brooks, 2006, p. 88).

Throughout the U.S., school leaders are starting to recognize the importance of providing professional development and support to teachers as a means for retaining good teachers and improving the academic success of students (Berry, 2004). School administrators must ensure an understanding of the ELL program which means involving teachers and staff and articulating a common goal. Arends and Kilcher (2010) argue that "principals can't do it alone" and therefore should "chart a clear course for the school and help secure a collaborative vision for teaching and learning" (p. 14). Even though Smylie, Conley and Marks (2002) state that leadership filters through an organization and doesn't exist in one person or one position, teacher leadership isn't possible without the

cooperation of the school leader. School leaders must communicate with the teachers. "Just having an administrator or somebody in charge tell me anything would have been beneficial" (Stacy Brown).

August and Hakuta (1997) best sum it up in their study on optimal conditions in schools educating ELL students, stating that best practice would include,

> A supportive school-wide climate, school leadership, a customized learning environment, articulation and coordination within and between schools, use of native language and culture in instruction, a balanced curriculum that includes both basic and higher-order skills, explicit skill instruction, opportunities for student-directed instruction, use of instructional strategies that enhance understanding, opportunities for practice, systematic student assessment, staff development, and home and parent involvement (p. 171).

At no other time in the U.S. history of education and school reform has the demand for performance results and accountability been so great (Vojtek & Vojtek, 2009). Additionally, the demographics of our schools and society are increasingly diverse with students from various racial and ethnic backgrounds (Arends & Kilcher, 2010). Education policy makers have worthy intentions and have attempted to address the needs of all students and leave no child left behind, however with few legal mandates for low-incidence school districts, vague specifications for curriculum and programs, a lack of sound policy, and teachers who perceive a lack of support, resources, and leadership one wonders how many mainstreamed English language learners in a low-incidence school are left behind!

# Appendix A

## School District Approval Letter

[School District Identifying Info has been deleted]

February 8, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

The purpose of this correspondence is to give written approval for M. Rene' Yoesel to conduct her research study of elementary teacher perceptions regarding their experience in educating mainstreamed English language learners in the [River Bluffs] Elementary School, in partial fulfillment of her doctoral studies in the statewide cooperative Ed.D. program through the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program at the University of Missouri, Columbia.

It is my understanding that this study will be conducted over the spring semester of this academic year and will examine how the elementary school serves English language learners. I understand that Rene' Yoesel's study will involve observations of normal school activities including classroom observations, faculty meetings, and events relevant to this topic. Finally, I understand that Rene' will be conducting teacher interviews for her study which will not interfere in normal school activities.

Sincerely,

Dr. XXXX XXXXX, Asst. Supt.

Dr. XXXX XXXXX, Elementary Principal

Cc: Dr. Jeffrey Brooks (Advisor – University of Missouri, Columbia)

Appendix B

Internal Review Board Approval

----- Original Message -----
**From:** Bryant, Erin Lea
**To:** brooksjs@missouri.edu ; yaz@centurytel.net
**Sent:** Monday, March 01, 2010 2:04 PM
**Subject:** Campus IRB Exempt Approval Letter: IRB # 1161737

Dear Investigator:

Your human subject research project entitled Mainstreamed English language learners in a low-incidence school district: A study of elementary teacher experiences. meets the criteria for EXEMPT APPROVAL and will expire on March 01, 2011. Your approval will be contingent upon your agreement to annually submit the "Annual Exempt Research Certification" form to maintain current IRB approval.

You must submit the Annual Exempt Research Certification form before **January 15, 2011**. Failure to timely submit the certification form by the deadline will result in automatic expiration of IRB approval.

If you wish to revise your exempt activities, you must contact the Campus IRB office for a determination of whether the proposed changes will continue to qualify for exempt status. You may do this by email. You will be expected to provide a description of the proposed revisions and how it will impact the risks to subject participants.

Please be aware that all human subject research activities must receive prior approval by the IRB prior to initiation, regardless of the review level status. If you have any questions regarding the IRB process, do not hesitate to contact the Campus IRB office at (573) 882-9585.

Campus Institutional Review Board

Appendix C

Letter of Introduction

DATE:

TITLE:
POSITION:
SCHOOL:

Dear NAME,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study regarding elementary teacher perceptions of mainstreamed English language learners. I am completing this research project as part of the requirements for the Ed.D. Degree at the University of Missouri, Columbia. I am looking forward to meeting with you very soon to discuss your perceptions of your experience in working with mainstreamed ELL students. Your experience and working knowledge of the support and needs required to educate this diverse group of students are extremely important in understanding best practices and may provide valuable information to administrators, leaders and policy makers.

Please find enclosed an Informed Consent Form for you to review and sign. Be assured that the confidentiality of your personal identity and that of your school district will be closely guarded. You also have the choice to withdraw from the study at any time without fear of negative consequences. If you have any questions or concerns at any time please don't hesitate to contact me or my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Jeffrey Brooks.

Thanks again for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

M. Rene' Yoesel
636-XXX-XXXX Work
314-XXX-XXXX Cell
ryoesel@XXXXXXXXX

Dr. Jeffrey Brooks
Dissertation Supervisor
202 Hill Hall
573-882-8221
brooksjs@missouri.edu

Appendix D

Informed Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in the study "Mainstreamed English language instruction in a low-incidence rural school district: A case study" conducted by M. Rene' Yoesel, doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri, Columbia.

I understand the following:

- My participation in the study is voluntary. I may withdraw at any time and the choice to withdraw will have no adverse consequences.

- As an interview participant, my name and school affiliation will be kept confidential. Only Rene' Yoesel and her dissertation supervisor, Dr. Jeffrey Brooks, will have access to identifiable data. Any materials identifying specific individuals or schools will be kept secured and then destroyed three years after the completion of this study.

- The interview should take approximately 30-60 minutes and will be scheduled at a place and time convenient for the interview participant. Interviews will be audio taped. A copy of the transcribed audiotape will be given to me to check for accuracy and should take approximately 30 min. to review. Classroom observations will not be videotaped or audio taped, but field notes will be taken.

- This research has been approved by the Internal Review Board (IRB) at the University of Missouri, Columbia. If I have unanswered questions regarding participant's rights I can contact the Campus IRB office at 573-882-9585.

- The University of Missouri does not compensate human subjects if discomfort eventually results from the research. Nonetheless, the university holds medical, professional, and general liability insurance coverage, and provides its own medical attention and facilities if participants suffer as a direct result of negligence or fault from faculty or staff associated with the research. In such unlikely event, the Risk Management Officer should be contacted immediately at (573) 882-3735 to obtain a review of the matter and receive specific information. Related ethical guidelines about Protection of Human Subjects set forth in the Code of Federal Regulations "45 CFR 46" will be upheld. This statement is not to be construed as an admission of liability.

You are being given two copies of this Informed Consent. One is to be kept for your records and the other returned to me. If you elect to participate please sign and date this Informed Consent Form at your earliest possible convenience and return the signed copy to me. Your participation is very valuable and greatly appreciated.

_____

Signature

_____

Date

Respectfully,

M. Rene' Yoesel
636-XXX-XXXX Work
314-XXX-XXXX Cell
ryoesel@XXXXXXXXX

Dr. Jeffrey Brooks
Dissertation Supervisor
202 Hill Hall
573-882-8221
brooksjs@missouri.edu

Appendix E

Participant Interview Protocol

1) What is your teaching background?

   A. What is your teaching certification?

   B. How long have you been in education?

   C. How long have you taught at this school district?

2) Tell me about your experience in teaching English language learners at this school district.

   A. What is your training or background in teaching ELL students?

      1. What types of training have you received at this school district to prepare you to instruct mainstreamed English language learners?

      2. How have you been informed of the legal mandates regarding the education of English language learners?

   B. Tell me about the district English language learner program.

      1. How are ELL students identified?

      2. How are ELL students placed?

      3. What are the district policies regarding ELL students?

3) What types of support have you received to help you educate English language learners?

4) What types of professional development have you received to help you educate English language learners?

5) Who has been helpful in your school community?

   A. What types of leadership / administrative assistance are provided to you?

   B. How much time do you spend collaborating with colleagues regarding the instruction of mainstreamed English language learners?

6) What suggestions do you have for improving the existing ELL program?

Appendix F

Interview Protocol Form

Date: _____

Beginning Time:_____ Ending Time:_____

Participant:_____

Location:_____

Field Notes:

Appendix G

Observation Protocol Form

Date: _____

Beginning Time:_____ Ending Time:_____

Event / Classroom:_____

Location:_____

Field Notes:

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# VITA

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