
“Not In My Classroom”: Teacher Attitudes Towards English Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a triangulation mixed method study aimed at assessing prevailing ideological beliefs and attitudes mainstream teachers have regarding English language learners (ELLs) and the educational programs that serve them. Survey data was collected from 422 K-12 teachers and interview data from six ELL teachers. The research explored three topics: (1) the extent and nature of mainstream teacher attitudes towards ELLs, (2) the factors that contribute to teacher attitude development, and (3) how teacher attitudes towards ELLs vary by community demographics, in particular low-incidence schools, rapid-influx schools, and schools serving migrant students. The paper concludes with a theory of teacher attitude development towards ELLs with implications for improving teacher attitudes through professional development programs.

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This paper presents the findings of a triangulation mixed method study aimed at assessing prevailing ideological beliefs and attitudes mainstream teachers have regarding English language learners (ELLs) and the educational programs that serve them. Attitudinal assessment is important because teachers' attitudes and beliefs about language-minority children play a crucial role in determining the educational outcomes for this population of students (Valdes, 2001). Teachers who hold negative, ethnocentric or racist attitudes about ELLs, or who believe in any of the numerous fallacies surrounding the education of language-minority students, often fail to meet the academic and social needs of these students (Tse, 2001; Valdes, 2001; Youngs & Youngs, 2001) and work to maintain the hegemonic legitimacy of the dominant social order.

In order to confront and transform negative beliefs and attitudes, one must first understand the extent and nature of them. This paper examines teacher attitudes from several different angles. Relying on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, we first discuss the extent to which negative attitudes exist among the teaching population at large. We next provide an in-depth analysis of the common denominators that contribute to the formation and solidification of these attitudes. Finally, we consider variances in teacher attitudes from the perspective of the community context. We conclude with a discussion on attitude development and pro-active suggestions for

fostering the construction of positive attitudes and beliefs before negative ones can take root and solidify.

Background

Dominant Societal and Community Attitudes Affect Schools, Teachers and ELLs

Societal attitudes about English language learners and the educational programs that serve them have become increasingly negative in the US over the past decade. Evidence of this can be seen in California, Arizona and Massachusetts, where voter referendums have banned bilingual education and negated ELL instruction to a single year of structured immersion. Voters in these states have been influenced largely by prevailing societal attitude, media bias and glitzy propaganda campaigns funded by right-wing organizations such as “English for the Children” and “English Only” rather than accurate educational research (Krashen, 2003).

Societal attitudes regarding language-minority students, however, are not evenly blanketed across society at large. In Massachusetts, voter decisions to ban bilingual education varied widely across the state. In Lowell, MA, an industrial city heavily impacted by high numbers of Latino and Southeast Asian immigrants, 72% of voters supported the referendum. In Boston, a city largely known for its corporate strength in finance and technology, and with a population of immigrants representing all strata of international society, referendum results were roughly split. In Cambridge, MA, home of Harvard University, only 38% of voters supported the referendum to ban bilingual education (Sailer, 2002). Clearly, local community contexts are large determinants in the extent and nature of societal attitudes.

Horenczyk and Tatar (2002) state that “teacher’s approaches and behaviors toward culturally diverse populations do not exist in a social vacuum; rather they tend to reflect - and be affected by - the norms and values both of the larger society and of the educational settings in which the interactions take place” (p. 426). As members of the communities they live in, teachers cannot help but be influenced by dominant societal attitudes. When teachers internalize dominant societal messages, they bring them directly into their schools and classrooms. School administrators, other school staff and parents all internalize societal messages, creating a school ethos that mirrors that of the community and the dominant order of society at large.

Nieto (1995) contends that the attitudes and practices of schools, communities and society dramatically control the opportunities for success among various populations of students. If a society or community does not embrace its linguistically diverse citizens, it is probable that the schools and many of the teachers in that community will not embrace them, either, detrimentally impacting the quality of education these students receive.

In order to optimize and better plan for educational programs for ELLs, schools thus need to look beyond their walls to the wider community in order to determine how local dominant societal attitudes towards ELLs may be influencing what takes place in the classroom. This assessment needs to be done in a timely fashion, to prevent already-existing negative community attitudes from snowballing in the future.

The Urgency To Understand and Confront Negative Teacher Attitudes Now

There is an increased likelihood that teacher attitudes regarding English language learners in mainstream classrooms will significantly deteriorate over the next several years. The reasons for this are several: (1) the number of language-minority speakers in the US continues to grow, (2) teachers across the nation are significantly lacking in training for how to educate ELLs in the mainstream classroom, (3) immigrants and refugees are settling in less populated areas with little experience in linguistic and cultural diversity, overwhelming schools and teachers in these regions, and (4) recent changes in federal legislation are stringently holding schools and teachers accountable for the academic achievement of English language learners, which may result in a backlash against the very students the legislation is supposed to help.

The United States is experiencing an unprecedented increase in language diversity. Currently 18% of the US population speaks a language other than English at home, a figure that has doubled in the last 20 years (US Census Bureau, 2003). Even if all immigration stopped, the high birth rate among some language-minority groups will maintain substantial percentages and continued growth of this population (National Research Council, 1997). It is estimated that the number of language-minority children is growing at a rate four times that of native English speaking students (McCloskey, 2002). The eminent danger is that as the language-minority population in the US increases, dominant negative societal and community attitudes may correspondingly increase, further exacerbating the current problem of negative teacher attitudes regarding ELLs in the mainstream classroom.

Estimates indicate that as many as 45% of the nation's teachers currently have ELLs in their classrooms (McCloskey, 2002). This number is expected to increase with the nation's growing linguistically diverse population. Further, recent research contends that pull-out ELL programs are largely ineffective (Baker, 2001). Rather, a more promising model for ELL education is inclusion, similar to what revolutionized special education over a decade ago. In this model, the ELL teacher works with students in the regular classroom and helps the classroom teacher develop instruction that simultaneously supports academic learning and English language acquisition (Cornell, 1995). How will this impact teacher attitudes as more and more non-fluent English speakers are mainstreamed in ELL inclusion programs?

Most classroom teachers have minimal, if any training, in adapting their curriculum and teaching practices to meet the needs of linguistically diverse students (Byrnes, Kiger & Manning, 1997; Crawford, 1997; Youngs & Youngs, 2001). McCloskey (2002) reports that only 12% of K-12 teachers nationwide have training in working with English language learners. Research indicates that current opportunities for ELLs who are mainstreamed into the regular classroom are often minimal or non-existent (Bricker, 1995; Harper & Platt, 1998). This is not surprising considering the limited number of teachers with formal ELL training. Clearly, urgent professional development is needed. Assessing the extent and nature of negative teacher attitudes is critical in appropriately developing and optimizing the effectiveness of these needed professional development efforts.

Professional development in working with ELLs in the mainstream classroom is particularly needed in rural communities and small cities. In past decades, the majority of linguistically diverse students have resided in densely populated urban cities and attended urban schools. In the 1990's, language-minority families began increasingly settling in suburban communities. Now, in the 2000s, immigrants are being lured to rural areas in unprecedented numbers as poultry processing plants, meat packing firms and

manufacturing firms increasingly recruit low-wage labor from Mexico and overseas (Dalla et al., 2002; Fennely & Leitner, 2002; Wrigley, 2000). Refugee resettlement organizations are also increasingly placing refugee immigrants in rural areas and small cities for the better and more affordable living conditions they offer (Pipher, 2002). It is currently estimated that 44% of ELLs in the US are now living in rural communities (Bérubé, 2000).

In rural and small communities, where the majority of residents often have little or no experience with diverse populations, these sudden and dramatic demographic changes can translate into community misunderstanding and fear. Negative attitudes about immigrants and refugees have been documented in numerous towns and small cities across America as these communities have been confronted with change and unprecedented challenges (Beck, 1994; Curnette, 2000; Daviss, 2002; Galbally, 2001; Gasner, 2002; Roche & Mariano, 2002). These negative attitudes trickle down to the schools and teachers (Valdes, 2001; Wrigley, 2000). In growing numbers, schools and teachers in small cities and rural areas are becoming overwhelmed with the influx of immigrant and refugee students. These schools, by nature of their traditional homogeneity, are less experienced in implementing multicultural education approaches. They are less likely to have teachers with training or experience in working with ELLs, and have fewer dollars and opportunities to provide relevant professional development. Rural and small city schools also receive disproportionately small amounts of federal funding for English language learners due to new Title III formulas (Rasmussen & Walker, 2002).

Unprepared and overwhelmed by the changing demographics in both their community and classroom, teachers in rapid-influx areas (areas where a significant numbers of refugee and immigrant populations arrive over a short period of time) often experience a change in attitude towards English language learners. Valdes states of this nationwide phenomena,

The process of confronting and adjusting to change is a painful one. In the face of rapid population shift, the entire character of both the community and the schools change...Some teachers feel angry. They feel cheated at not having the "good" students they once had...Principals, however, do not have easy solutions. Sometimes they, too, wish that the new children would simply go away (2001, p. 31).

It is important to study and understand the formation of these negative teacher attitudes in order to implement pro-active strategies that will help teachers positively rather than negatively adjust to the new challenges of educating linguistically diverse students. President Bush's reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2000 has created yet another reason for immediate research regarding teacher attitudes regarding English language learners. Accountability standards in the "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) Act, as well as new Title III legislation, require schools for the first time ever to segregate and disclose both the academic achievement progress and the English acquisition rates of their limited English proficient (LEP) students. Schools that cannot demonstrate adequate annual progress among their LEP student population face stiff punitive consequences. NCLB further stipulates that by the 2013-2014 school year, all the students in a school, including LEP students, must score at the proficient level on state-wide assessments (Peterson, 2002). In spite of the new federal demands placed upon schools, federal funding for K-12 English language acquisition programs has actually been reduced by upwards of 50% since NCLB was implemented (NMABE, 2003).

NCLB legislation places tremendous pressure on schools and teachers to better educate their linguistically diverse students. Unfortunately, negative teacher attitudes regarding English language learners may dramatically worsen in light of this pressure. Teachers may strongly resent the new imposed federal demands, especially if they already harbor bias or deficit-theory beliefs about their ELL students. Instead of finding ways to constructively meet the new federal challenge, mainstream teachers may deflect their anger and frustration out on the very students NCLB and Title III legislation is supposed to help.

Due to the increasing population of ELLs in the nation's schools, and the increasing pressure placed on teachers and schools to be accountable for the educational achievement of these students, there is a critical potential for negative teacher attitudes to develop and/or increase. It is therefore crucial to examine existing research on teacher attitudes towards ELLs in order to better prepare teachers and schools to address these issues.

A Review of Previous Research

Based on an extensive search of the ERIC and PsychLit databases, we have found few studies that specifically investigated the nature and determinants of teacher attitudes in the context of English language learners in mainstream classrooms. A preliminary study by Byrnes and Kiger (1994) concluded, "to the extent that teacher's attitudes can facilitate or be a barrier to learning English for LEP children, it is important to understand the structure of teachers' attitudes to work toward constructive change" (p. 231). In their subsequent research, Byrnes, Kiger, and Manning (1997, 1996) surveyed 169 teachers in three states and determined that the most positive attitudes towards ELLs existed among teachers who: (1) had participated in carefully organized, formal ELL training, (2) had completed a graduate degree, and (3) came from regions where "strong and supportive," messages were passed down from the state legislature and by educational mandates (Byrnes, et al., p. 642). In a similar study, Youngs and Youngs (2001) surveyed 143 teachers regarding their attitudes toward ELLs. Their findings suggested that positive attitudes are more likely to be found among teachers who have: (1) taken foreign language or multicultural education courses, (2) received some training in ELL education, (3) lived or taught outside of the US, and (4) worked with a more diverse ELL population.

In another study, which addressed teacher attitudes toward culturally diverse students (although not specifically ELLs) Pang and Sablin (2001) surveyed 175 pre- and in-service teachers and concluded that underlying racist and prejudicial beliefs did, in fact, contribute to negative teacher attitudes. Racially biased teachers tended to believe that low-status diverse students brought too many deficits to the classroom for the teacher, even with the best teaching practices, to make a difference in their academic success. This in turn reduced the teachers' sense of efficacy. Sixty-five percent of the respondents in Pang and Sablin's study reported that no matter how hard they tried, the students still achieved poorly. Even more unsettling was the finding that in-service teachers held a lower sense of efficacy for teaching diverse students than did pre-service teachers. Pang and Sablin suggested that the in-service teachers may have been influenced, over time, by the attitudes of other teachers who were not successful in working with minority students (2001). This cycle of racism, negative attitudes and a lowered sense of efficacy unavoidably filters into the school and classroom environments.

While some acts of discrimination and racism are highly apparent, a far greater number are subtle and equally if not more damaging due their difficulty to detect and remedy. Pang and Sablin (2001) reflected that, "bias that is overtly shown through name-calling and other actions are more obvious and easier to combat and question. However, the practices and behaviors of people that are more covert or hidden are the most difficult to get rid of" (p. 182). One such form of discreet racism is cultural racism. Cultural racism is a way of thinking, speaking and responding that becomes so pervasive in the mainstream culture that it is almost invisible to the masses in the mainstream culture. It is all too easy for individuals to disassociate themselves from being a part of, or perpetuating, such beliefs and actions (Kendall, 1996). As such, it is imperative to explore teachers' attitudes, and what impacts them, in order to help teachers reflect on the origin of their attitudes and how this impacts all their students. Pre-service teacher education and professional development programs must make a stronger effort to challenge and change the negative attitudes and beliefs teachers have regarding language-minority students in order for school-wide reform to take place.

Research on the education of linguistically diverse children in general provides snatches of information about teacher attitudes. Misinformation and misnomers about ELLs, ELL education and second language acquisition are common throughout US society (Tse, 2001). For example, there exists a pervasive belief among regular classroom teachers that the real teaching/learning for ELLs occurs in the ELL classroom (Anstrom, 1997; Franson, 1999). This belief serves to justify teachers in their resistance to making curricular and instructional adaptations for ELLs (Youngs & Youngs, 2001). In light of the fact that the regular classroom is where ELLs spend most of their school day, the impact of such a response can be catastrophic (Anstrom, 1997; Cornell, 1995; Franson, 1999). Research has also highlighted the ways in school administrators influence teacher attitudes. The most decisive factor impacting school effectiveness for ELLs is the principal or school leader (Levine & Lezotte, 2001). Administrators with positive attitudes regarding linguistic and cultural diversity transmit their positive attitude to teachers (Levine & Lezotte, 2001; Wrigley, 2000).

Examined together, this body of research confirms the existence and potential dangers of mainstream teachers' negative attitudes towards ELLs. Educational deficit beliefs about ELLs and cultural racist beliefs can lead to negative teacher attitudes that in turn result in inferior educational services. Other documented factors contributing to negative teacher attitudes towards ELLs include the influence of attitudes held by school administrators, other teachers, and the community. This body of research concludes that both training in working with ELLs and teacher experience with diversity can result in more favorable attitudes. However, the limitations of the studies presented here are that they investigated teacher attitudes as fixed and universal entities, and did not take into account (1) how attitudes vary by community context and (2) the developmental patterns of attitude formation. The reviewed literature also did not yield information on the extent of teacher attitudes towards ELLs, leaving questions as to the percentage and proportion of teachers who hold negative beliefs versus those who hold positive beliefs. As such, our study attempted to explore teacher attitudes towards ELLs in light of these aspects.

Our Study

The study presented here adds new knowledge to the limited research base on teacher attitudes towards ELLs. The study is unique in that it integrates the extent and nature of teacher attitudes with data on the social contexts of communities and schools. Based upon this data, we then provide discussion from which to begin theorizing about attitude development, and implications for remedying and preventing the formation of negative teacher attitudes from the onset.

The study focused on the following research questions:

1. What is the nature and extent of mainstream teacher attitudes towards ELLs?
2. What are the contributing factors affecting teacher attitude towards ELLs?
3. How do these attitudes vary by community context?

In studying the nature and extent of teacher attitudes, we needed to understand the range of teacher attitudes regarding ELLs in terms of positive, neutral and negative attitudes, and how widespread and to what degree these attitudes existed in a large and diverse geographic region. In examining the various contributing factors related to teacher attitudes towards ELLs, we wanted to look at demographic teacher data including years of teaching experience, prior training in working with ELLs, gender, whether they had actually had an ELL in their classroom before and from what ethnic background/s. We also wanted to explore how misinformation and false beliefs about ELLs and ELL education, as well as teachers' sense of self-efficacy in educating ELLs, factored into the extent and nature of teacher attitudes. In exploring community context, we wanted to see how the extent and nature of teacher attitudes towards ELLs varied between schools in three types of communities: (a) white homogeneous communities with no or few ELL students (low-incidence), (b) white homogenous communities which had been suddenly overwhelmed with large numbers of ELLs (rapid-influx) and (c) white homogenous communities with a long history of a segregated minority ELL population (migrant).

Perhaps most importantly, we hoped that cross-interpretation of the results from the first three questions would provide data that would help explain how teacher attitudes towards ELLs develop in the first place. We expected that attitude development was influenced by a complex set of factors involving individual ELL students, teachers, schools, and communities. With a better understanding of this complexity, professional development efforts could be improved to both remedy negative teacher attitudes and to prevent their formation.

The Great Plains state in which this study was conducted provided a unique demographic opportunity to answer the research questions stated above. The largest and most urban city in this state is "River City". The River City school district has had a relatively small ELL program in place since 1970s for foreign children whose parents came to River City for business opportunities and for university study. In the late 1990s, River City and its neighbor city, West River City, experienced two unprecedented influxes of refugees, largely from Bosnia, Somalia, and the Sudan. The first and smaller wave of refugees occurred in 1990 - 1991. The number of ELL students increased by almost two-fold. The face of many neighborhoods rapidly changed as refugees settled in pockets throughout the two cities. Schools and teachers were suddenly overwhelmed with meeting the educational needs of these students. Approximately six years after the communities and schools had adjusted to this first shock, a second wave of refugees arrived. Many refugees in the second wave came from backgrounds with less formal

education and lower socioeconomic status than refugees in the first wave. We refer to impacted schools in the River City area as “rapid-influx”.

The northeastern region of this state is known for its sugar beet and red potato industries. Every summer large numbers of Hispanic migrant workers arrive for the harvest. Migrant children enroll in the public schools at the beginning of the school year and generally leave before mid-October when the harvest is finished. A smaller number of migrants return in the spring to help with the planting and growing season. School districts in this region have historically done little to provide ELL support for the migrant children, and instead have relied on sink-or-swim immersion practices and over-placement of Hispanic students in special education programs. In 2000, however, a large school district in the region was cited for violating a migrant student’s civil rights to ELL services and new legislation was passed in the state placing stricter requirements on schools serving limited English proficient students. There has also been a dramatic increase in the past few years of migrant parents finding year-round employment opportunities in these communities and permanently settling. Tensions in this region are high as schools find themselves forced to confront an issue that they have historically ignored. In our study, we classify schools in this region as “historically migrant”.

Communities throughout the rest of this state remain largely low-incidence in terms of their ELL populations. For many rural schools, their only experience with linguistic diversity has been with Western European foreign exchange students. While smaller cities are seeing an increase in their language-minority populations, the schools are not overwhelmed as they have been in River City/West River City. The adjustment process for teachers is greatly lessened as new enrollments of LEP students typically occur only one family at a time. In our study, we classify communities and schools with less than a 10% LEP enrollment as “low-incidence”.

The largest population of LEP students in this state, and the fastest growing, are Native Americans. However, because the vast majority of these students enter school with moderate to high levels of English proficiency they are not typically viewed by the general public, the schools, or teachers as being English language learners requiring specialized ELL instruction. Thus our study did not specifically examine teacher attitudes in predominantly Native American schools.

Methods

Design

This study uses a triangulation mixed method research design (Creswell, 2002) utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data was collected through both a survey and teacher interviews. The rationale for this design was to capitalize on the benefits of both sources of data collection. Quantitative data was needed to determine the extent and degree of teacher attitudes towards ELLs, and to cross-analyze data in terms of multiple demographic factors. Quantitative data was also needed to both generalize and contrast findings to teachers and schools throughout the state. Qualitative data, on the other hand, was needed to more deeply understand the factors influencing teacher attitudes. Factors such as racism and prejudice are difficult to quantify, and are best evidenced in observed actions, i.e. what teachers say and do. Furthermore, anecdotal information was needed to describe and demonstrate the

manner in which teacher attitudes towards ELLs played out in the classrooms and schools under study.

Instruments and Participants

A 14-question survey using a 5-point Likert Scale was developed which elicited responses related to the extent and nature of teacher attitudes towards ELLs. Survey questions were developed both on the basis of the literature review and on the authors' previous conversations with both mainstream and ELL teachers from across the state. These survey statements addressed the following themes: (1) teacher attitudes about ELLs as students (2) teachers' sense of self-efficacy in working with ELLs, (3) the impact of ELLs on the teacher's job responsibilities, (4) knowledge/opinions on English language acquisition and best practices in ELL education, and (5) the perceived school receptivity towards ELLs.

The survey also elicited information on six demographic factors: (1) whether or not the teacher had received training in working with language-minority students, (2) whether the teacher had previously taught ELLs; (3) the ethnic backgrounds of ELLs taught, (4) teacher's total years of teaching (0-4, 5-9, 10-14, 15-19, 20-25, 25-29, >30), (5) teacher's gender, and (6) teacher's educational background. In order to elicit qualitative data necessary to understand more fully the quantitative survey responses, a comment box was provided after each survey question.

Face validity of the survey instrument was carried out through review by a team of ELL specialists and educational researchers to ensure the instrument would solicit accurate information needed to fully address the study's research questions.

The participants for the survey portion of this study consisted of the teaching staff of 28 schools throughout the state, although only the responses of mainstream teachers are reported in this paper. We define mainstream teachers as those who are either elementary classroom teachers or are core content teachers at the middle school and secondary levels. These teachers proportionately represented schools in rapid-influx communities, schools in low-incidence communities, and schools serving migrant students across the state. Survey participants were also proportionately represented across the K-12 spectrum.

The second instrument employed in this study was an open-ended interview protocol designed for practicing ELL teachers. Protocol questions, based on research information and author experience, focused on (1) the extent and nature of existing ELL services provided in their schools, (2) perceived school and teacher attitudes towards ELLs, (3) the perceived obstacles and challenges these ELL teachers faced in providing a quality school-wide ELL program, and (4) ways in which negative teacher attitudes manifested themselves in the school setting. The interview protocol was designed so that the qualitative data provided by ELL teachers could be used to validate the survey results in terms of the extent and nature of negative teacher attitudes towards ELLs and to provide rich description of how negative attitudes detrimentally impacted the quality of education provided for ELLs in the surveyed schools.

Only 6 of the 28 schools surveyed in this study employed an ELL teachers. The other 22 schools in this survey employed at least one teacher who was enrolled in a Master's level ELL endorsement program at a state university, but these teachers did not have any official responsibility for teaching English language learners. Interview participants thus included only the 6 teachers working in an official ELL capacity.

Data Collection and Analyses

Surveys were distributed to the entire teaching staff at the 28 schools in this study. Twelve hundred surveys were printed and 577 returned, thus the minimum return rate was 48%. For the purposes of this paper, only the responses provided by the 422 respondents identified as mainstream teachers are reported (note: the actual frequency of response for the survey questions varied from 407 to 420). Survey responses to each statement were coded as follows: 5 = strongly disagree, 4 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 2 = agree, and 1 = strongly agree. Some items were reverse coded. The alpha reliability coefficient for the survey was .67.

The chi-square test of independence was used for statistical analyses of this data, except when considering the factor related to teacher training. For this factor the expected value for several cells of the contingency table was less than 5, thus making the t-test the more appropriate test. In the chi-square tests, the five original Likert responses were condensed into three codes: agree, neutral, or disagree: strongly disagree and disagree became 3 = disagree, and strongly agree and disagree became 1 = disagree. Neutral stayed the same, with the value = 2.

Teachers were encouraged to support their quantitative responses by writing comments in the comment box following each of the 14 questions. The qualitative written comments provided by teachers on the survey were analyzed and coded in two ways: by the five themes the questions set out to address, and also by emerging themes across the 14 survey statements.

The open-ended interviews were conducted with six practicing ELL teachers on an individual basis. Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and coded by emergent themes. After all of the statistical survey data, qualitative survey comment data, and ELL teacher interview data were analyzed individually, the three data sets were triangulated for purposes of validation and for emerging patterns across the data.

Findings

In this section we report the combined findings of the statistical survey data, the written teacher comment data and the interview data as they work together to answer the research questions for this study. Data will first be presented and discussed in terms of the extent and nature of the surveyed teachers' attitudes towards ELLs. From there we will discuss the extent and nature of teacher attitudes in light of the factors that appear to contribute to these attitudes, both factors directly studied by the survey, and emerging factors from the qualitative data. Finally, we will consider the data results in terms of how teacher attitudes towards ELLs vary across three specific community contexts: low-incidence schools, rapid-influx schools, and migrant-serving schools.

While interpretation of the results presented here depends on outlook, whether one views the glass as half empty or half full, one cannot ignore the extent to which attitudes impact educational opportunities for linguistically diverse students. The findings presented here admittedly focus on the negative. We believe that there is no acceptable amount of negativity in teacher attitudes towards ELLs and that even small percentages of negative attitudes can have detrimental effects and are cause for concern.

Extent and Nature of Teacher Attitudes Towards ELLs

Based on statistical analyses, the overall nature of teacher attitudes towards ELLs appears neutral to strongly negative in this study. Moreover, the extent of negative teacher attitudes appears pervasive across teachers of varying demographic categories and located in schools within different community contexts.

In terms of survey questions related to teachers' perceptions of English Language Learners as students, only 18% of all teachers (n=77) felt that ELLs academically performed well in school. The vast majority of teachers either believed that ELLs perform poorly in school (30%, n=124) or responded neutrally to the question (52%, n=218). Furthermore, 16% of teachers (n=68) felt that ELLs come from countries with inferior educational systems with another 41% (n=170) responding neutrally to the same question.

- In terms of survey questions related to teachers' responsibilities to ELLs, an overwhelming
- 70% (n = 288) of mainstream teachers were not actively interested in having ELLs in their classroom. Fourteen percent (n=58) directly objected to ELL students being placed in their classrooms and 56% (n=230) responded neutrally to the idea. Twenty-five percent of teachers
- (n=103) felt that it was the responsibility of ELLs to adapt to American culture and school life while 30% (n=121) responded neutrally. Twenty percent of teachers (n=83) directly objected to adapting their classroom instruction for ELLs, and another 27% (n=110) were neutral on this issue.
- Additionally, while 87% (n = 368) of teachers had never received any professional development or training in working with ELLs, 51% (n = 212) said they would not be interested in training even if the opportunity was available.
- The extent and nature of these findings is problematic. What happens when ELLs are placed in classrooms where 70% of the teachers do not actively want them? What happens to ELLs when teachers lower their expectations due to deficit beliefs about the learners? What happens to ELLs when a teacher objects to making adaptations (20% of respondents) or more importantly, has never received training in how to make adaptations (87% of respondents)?
- Unfortunately, these negative findings were not surprising given the authors' personal experiences in helping to develop ELL programs in schools across this Great Plains state. These findings also confirm and support the previous research on teacher attitudes towards ELLs (Byrnes, Kiger, and Manning, 1997, 1996; Youngs and Youngs, 2001; Pang and Sablin, 2001; Anstrom, 1997; Cornell, 1995; Franson, 1999). However, given the extent and nature of the negative statistics presented above, especially that 70% of teachers were not interested in having ELLs in their classrooms, the next two statistical findings were surprising in their positiveness:
- 62% (n = 254) of teachers felt that their schools openly welcomed ELLs and embraced their native cultures and languages.
- 78% (n = 318) of teachers felt that language-minority students bring needed diversity to schools.

How do we begin to explain this paradox? Perhaps political correctness dictates teachers to comment positively on issues of diversity. To outright state that a school does not welcome new cultures, languages, and diversity smacks of racism and

prejudice. It is far safer to complain about ELLs in terms of academic preparation and performance, and the added challenges they add to the classroom. Buendia, Crosland and Doumbia (2003) described this phenomenon as “the welcoming-unwelcoming of immigrant students”. When teachers are asked questions that move beyond the school level, questions that probe at a teacher’s ownership of their own classroom, political correctness ultimately falls aside. “Yes, diversity is good and yes, my school embraces diversity, but don’t you dare put that ELL in MY classroom.”

Many of the teachers in this study provided qualitative data to explain the extent and nature of their statistically negative responses. Teachers referred to a multitude of school-based factors in rationalizing their answer choices. These factors, as well as factors highlighted in the statistical analyses and the ELL teacher interviews, are discussed below.

Key Factors Contributing to Negative Teacher Attitudes

The extent and nature of the negative teacher attitudes presented in the above section were dismaying to us as researchers but not a total surprise. What we found most intriguing in our data was the extent to which teachers had written in qualitative comments to justify and explain their negative responses. These written comments, as well as the ELL teacher interviews, provided rich information in understanding the complex factors contributing to the pervasiveness of negative teacher attitudes. We discuss these findings in our second research question in terms of emerging themes that appeared across survey and interview data. These themes include: time and teacher “burden”, lack of training, the influence of negative administrator attitudes, malignant misnomers about effective ELL education, the ideology of common sense, and ethnocentric bias.

Time and Teacher “Burden”. Although our survey did not ask questions specific to the various demands placed on teachers’ time, many of the respondents who negatively answered questions about teaching ELLs in the mainstream classroom offered the rationale that there were already too many other school demands placed upon their time. There appeared a general consensus that teaching in a mainstream classroom has become more time-demanding due to inclusion of special education students, having to adapt curriculum to state standards, and the pressure teachers feel to prepare their students for state-wide assessments.

In particular, many teachers attributed their unwillingness to adapt their instruction for ELLs to a lack of time, responding with comments as “We are burdened enough with adapting for everyone else” and “The regular classroom teacher has enough on his/her plate already.” Teachers who answered negatively to wanting professional development in the area of ELL education echoed similar thoughts, responding with comments such as “At some point, but right now I feel too busy to fit that training in”. Other teachers were more blunt and flatly stated they would be interested in professional development only if it were “on school time.”

The dilemma in analyzing survey comments such as these is in determining their legitimacy. Yes, public school teachers have been presented with new challenges in the past decade, and yes, all of our lives seem to have become more hectic and busy. But does that justify teachers in refusing to make adaptations for ELLs and for not wanting specialized professional development?

As several of our respondents pointed out, many of the classroom adaptations recommended for ELLs are beneficial for all students. Perhaps overtime teachers who feel “burdened” by the range of learning needs in their classroom will learn to use efficient and effective inclusive methods that work for all learners. However, teachers need training in order to do this.

Lack of Training. Eighty-seven percent of survey respondents reported never having received any training or professional development in working with English language learners. This finding is not surprising; it is estimated that 88% of K-12 teachers nationwide have no training in this area (McCloskey, 2002). Several respondents mentioned this lack of training in justifying why they did not want ELLs placed in their classrooms. As one teacher remarked, “Although I would willingly take an ESL student, I am not qualified at this time and the experience for the student wouldn’t be beneficial.”

Mainstream teachers who have never had training in working with ELLs often feel overwhelmed when an ELL is first placed in their classroom. Unprepared teachers in our study reported feeling helpless and having no idea of where to begin. One extremely competent teacher who unexpectedly had two Romanian students placed in her classroom explained how inadequate she suddenly felt and lamented, “There’s got to be something that I can do to help teach these kids better.” Her sense of frustration was compounded by the fact that her school had no ELL teacher to support or advise her. Another teacher shared a similar story about her initial feelings in teaching ELLs: “I felt so lost...inadequate in that area. I knew how to teach elementary students to read, but there’s so much more that goes into it.”

For even the most well-intentioned teacher, the experience of not knowing how to help an ELL can quickly turn negative (not to mention how detrimental the experience can be for the student). Teachers who are uncomfortable with feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, and helpless may in time begin to deflect their negative feelings onto their ELL students and begin to believe in the widespread deficit theories teachers hold regarding ELLs.

Our findings support previous research (Byrnes, Kiger & Manning, 1997; 1996; Youngs & Youngs, 2001) that demonstrate that even a little appropriate training can go a long way in preventing and improving negative teacher attitudes. Statistical results demonstrated that teachers who reported having at least some training in ELL education were more likely to: (1) want ELLs in their class, (2) be more receptive to the idea that ELLs bring needed diversity to the school, and (3) hold a stronger belief that mainstream teachers need to adapt their instruction for limited proficient students (see Table 1).

Table 1

Results of t-test When Considering Teacher Training and Teacher Beliefs

Statement	Training	No Training	MSD	MSD	T	P
Would like to have an ELL in my classroom (n = 414)	2.48	0.79	2.89	0.89	3.07	< .01
ELL students bring needed diversity (n = 410)	1.67	0.63	2.09	0.77	3.62	< .001
Mainstream teachers should adapt instruction to meet ELL’s needs (n = 409)	2.39	0.98	2.71	0.99	2.12	< .05

While limited training will not totally prepare teachers to work with English Language Learners, it appears that it will at least increase teachers’ sensitivity to the needs of their linguistically diverse students. As one teacher remarked of her improvement in attitude

after receiving a minimal amount of training, “Now I feel a little more tolerant and more appreciative of what [the ELL students] are going through coming here.”

An important finding related to training is that a teacher’s desire for ELL professional development is highly associated with their number of years of teaching experience ($\chi^2(12, n = 413) = 33.73, p < .01$). Specifically, teachers with 0-4 years of teaching experience were more likely to want professional development than teachers with 10-30+ years of teaching experience. Although none of the qualitative data helped to explain this finding, it may be that new teachers are still strongly invested in establishing and improving their teaching practice, while more experienced teachers are confident in their teaching practice and do not feel a need for more professional development. It may also be that new teachers have received more multicultural education training in their pre-service education and hence are more aware and accepting of the complex educational needs of ELLs, compared to more experienced teachers who may not understand or appreciate the unique nature of working with English Language Learners.

As mentioned previously, an alarming 51% (n = 212) of teachers surveyed were not interested in professional development in the area of ELL education. Many volunteered explanations such as lack of time, a lack of money and not having ELLs presently in their classrooms. Others commented that they were no longer interested in “one-stop” workshops that promised all things for all teachers and students. A response that tended to summarize those of numerous others regarding training was, “What little we have had has not been useful.” Another, more blunt response for not wanting professional development was, “My experience is that when you have any kind of special training, you are automatically overloaded with that kind of student.”

This latter statement in particular emphasizes the fact that many mainstream teachers simply do not want ELLs placed in their classroom to begin with. There is a pervasive attitude that ELLs are poor academic performers who burden teachers with unwanted responsibilities. As discussed below, this attitude exists at the administrator level as well.

The Influence of Negative Administrator Attitudes. When we asked ELL teachers the interview question, “What do you see as the largest obstacles in implementing a quality ELL program in your school?” almost all of the responses included negative teacher attitudes. The ELL teachers repeatedly mentioned the unwillingness of many classroom teachers to make adaptations, or to have ELLs placed in their classroom. They mentioned the difficulty in finding classroom teachers who are interested in collaborative teaching, and the frustration of working with teachers who think ELL students should be the sole responsibility of the ELL teacher.

This interview data supported our statistical findings about the extent to which negative teacher attitudes exist. The interview data also provided a new perspective from which to reflect on the construction of negative attitudes. While none of the surveyed classroom teachers mentioned school administrators in their qualitative comments, many of the interviewed ELL teachers held school administrators accountable for the pervasiveness of negative teacher attitudes. As one teacher reported, “I see a lot of negative attitudes. My principal when I first got hired made the comment, just a small little comment, ‘the ESL students can cause some problems in the school.’” This seemingly “small” comment, however, speaks explicitly to how a principal can create a school ethos that not only tolerates but promotes the ideology that English language learners are to blame for their own social and academic failures.

Principals with negative attitudes about English Language Learners can create school climates that transmit and perpetuate negative attitudes among teachers (Levine & Lezotte, 2001; Wrigley, 2000). Two ELL teachers in separate interviews related an incident that occurred in their school district and that highlights how the negative attitudes of a principal can permeate all levels of school staff. A playground supervisor in a rapid-influx school complained to the principal about a handful of refugee students who had allegedly addressed her disrespectfully in their native language. The principal's reaction was swift and reactive. As one of the teachers related, "The ESL coordinator and the principal got all the kids together, all the ESL students together in one room and sat them down and said, 'You are not allowed to speak anything but English.'"

The principal's edict was enforced by school staff. In the cafeteria, the same supervisor and a janitor began to regularly deny students the right to a federally-funded free breakfast if they caught them speaking their native language while in line to receive their food. "On a weekly basis, two or three kids are denied breakfast because they've spoken their language...and it feels so wrong. It's just so blatantly wrong to me. It's really a frustrating part of my job is the whole attitude thing!" lamented one of the concerned ELL teachers.

Perhaps more alarming than the principal's edict is the fact that the ELL coordinator failed to advocate for her students' civil rights to free speech as well as their legal entitlement to a federally funded breakfast. This particular coordinator had been hired by the district on the basis of her experience in administering the district's Title I reading program; prior to assuming the position, she herself had no formal training or experience in working with English Language Learners. When this coordinator retired, the district replaced her with another administrator with no ELL background; the district did not consult with or consider one of the many experienced ELL teachers in the district for the position. The ELL teachers in this district felt particularly disenfranchised, especially since the negative and uninvested attitude about ELLs appeared to exist from the top echelons of district and school personnel down to the lowest. "Sometimes it is really defeating to think that nobody is backing you up here and nobody sees the great potential", stated one dedicated but frustrated ELL teacher.

Malignant Misnomers about Effective ELL Education. As discussed above, one of the frustrations cited by ELL teachers was the problem of both administrators and mainstream teachers believing in misnomers about effective ELL education. The survey results highlighted two common misnomers in second language acquisition believed by both teachers and by the US public. Fifteen percent of respondents (n=61) felt that ELLs learn better if they are prohibited from using their native language in school. The vast majority of teachers (46%, n=189) responded neutrally to this statement. Seven percent of teachers (n=30) believed that ELLs should be fluent in English after only one year of ELL instruction, and 27%(n=108) were neutral. The prevalence of these fallacies have been documented by other researchers (Tse, 2001). If this large a percentage of teachers are operating under inaccurate information, or do not know enough about second language acquisition to make informed decisions (i.e. it takes 5-7 years on average to attain academic proficiency), it is easy to understand the voter referendum results that resulted in one-year, English only ELL programs in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts (Krashen, 2003).

The qualitative comments volunteered by teachers on the surveys also revealed the pervasive existence of myths, fallacies, and outright misinformation. We were not surprised to see among our teacher comments the classic rebuttal to providing ELL

services: “My grandparents came to this country and did just fine without ELL education.” We also were not surprised to see the often echoed myth that teachers nationwide use to explain why they do not want ELLs placed in their classroom: “It would require learning Spanish. I don’t know if I want to do that.” Rather, what surprised us was the extent to which mainstream teachers felt their teaching responsibilities did not include English language learners. In our professional experiences working in these schools, only a small percent of teachers had declared these beliefs and opinions outright.

Numerous teacher comments declaratively stated that English learners should be the sole responsibility of the ELL teacher. Others, while not always overtly declaring so, implied that mainstream teachers should be responsible for only mainstream learners. Representative quotes include:

ESL students should not be placed in the mainstream classroom until they are ready to learn at that level.

I think ESL services should be rendered in a self-contained classroom by an expert in the field.

If an ESL student can do the work, I have no problem [having them in the classroom].

The latter two quotes came from teachers in schools that employ ELL teachers. Does having an ELL teacher on staff cause mainstream teachers to abdicate their responsibilities, and make them feel more justified in not wanting limited proficient students in their classroom and in refusing to make adaptations? Our data suggests that in schools without an employed ELL teacher, mainstream teachers appeared to be more accepting of their responsibility towards educating ELLs, even if they lamented the lack of training, time and support. As one low-incidence teacher reported, “We always strive to meet the needs of our children.”

Similar findings have been documented in other studies (Anstrom, 1997; Franson, 1999). A limitation of our survey research is that we were unable to ask these teachers to elaborate on their statements. Were they close-minded to all forms of inclusion and instructional adaptation or just those for English Language Learners?

Striving to meet the needs of ELLs is laudable considering the percentages of mainstream teachers who do not feel it is their responsibility to do so. Such efforts, however, becomes problematic when misnomers exist and teachers lack specialized training in the area. When well-intentioned teachers operate on misinformation rather than accurate data, they may inadvertently do more harm than good and make a multitude of mistakes. Striving to meet the needs of ELLs without adequate training may result in the “common sense” pitfall discussed below.

The Ideology of Common Sense. In attempting to understand both teacher resistance to professional development (51% of respondents) and the belief that certified ELL teachers are unnecessary in the education of English language learners (17% of respondents, n = 73), a previously unconsidered factor emerged. As one teacher articulated: “Teachers don’t need specialized ESL training; common sense and good intentions work fine.” Allusions to “common sense” were reflected in numerous teacher comments. A teacher in a rapid-influx school stated that although she had never had any formal training, she nevertheless felt extremely confident in working with her ELL

students. Her reason: “Common sense works well!” Several teachers stated that they were satisfied by having volunteers, aides and “the other children to help” educate English language learners in their classrooms. As most experts in ELL education would agree, common sense and good intentions are important in working with ELLs, but the complexity of the job requires a broad range of knowledge in second language acquisition, linguistics, multicultural education and ELL pedagogy (Banks, 2001; Calderón & Carreón, 2000; Morgan, 1998). Unfortunately, relying solely on common sense can lead to common mistakes that detrimentally impact student learning (Nieto, 1995).

The common sense fallacy also appears linked to over-representation of language-minority students in special education. Schools without ELL programs have often in the past provided support for English Language Learners through special education or speech language services, relying on the common sense premise that special education support is better than no support at all. Eight percent (n = 33) of our respondents felt that in lieu of an ELL teacher, special education provided an adequate alternative. Another 19% (n = 79) held a neutral attitude about this “solution”. As one teacher reported, “Special Ed to me means access to resource room and aides and these kids definitely need that. They do not need to be labeled handicapped.” While these beliefs are not necessary negative, they are extremely detrimental to the educational opportunities for English language learners. These beliefs also demonstrate a clear lack of understanding of both ELL and special education.

Ethnocentric Bias. The most elusive factor to tease out in studying teacher attitudes towards English Language Learners is that of underlying racism and prejudice. We agree with Pang and Sablin(2001) that racism and prejudice significantly contribute to negative teacher attitudes about linguistically diverse students. As researchers, however, we do not feel that our statistical data or the brief comments written on the surveys provide enough depth to draw conclusions about the extent to which these ideologies may exist among our teacher respondents.

What we can report is that almost half of the teachers (45%) agreed with the survey statement, “It is the responsibility of ELL students to adapt to American culture and school life”. Another 30% (n = 121) responded neutrally to this statement. As one teacher succinctly stated: “ESL students must assimilate to American school culture”.

Numerous survey comments, particularly from teachers in rapid-influx schools and schools serving Hispanic migrant students, alluded to the notion that ELLs detract from the learning of mainstream students. As one teacher stated, “Even one non-English speaking student requires a disproportionate amount of the teacher’s time. I am not sure that is fair.” This issue of “fairness” was especially documented in teacher comments regarding making adaptations for ELLs. “ESL students have such diverse needs, this would not be feasible nor fair to non-ESL students,” wrote one teacher. Other representative comments regarding making adaptations for ELLs, included: “Not at the expense of the other students” and “we need help to implement appropriate strategies that won’t interfere with the learning of others.”

Other teachers either directly stated or implied that their main responsibility was to the “majority” students in their classrooms. “I feel my other students are more important to teach to because they are the majority,” commented one teacher. Another teacher, in explaining why she did not feel it was her responsibility to make adaptations, stated: “Not if you have one ESL and 27 regular English speaking students.” These findings in which teachers abdicate themselves from their role in the academic success of ELLs allude to

Kendall's (1996) theory of cultural racism. Are comments such as the ones stated here embedded in racism, or can they be excused as simply pragmatic views about reaching the most number of students given limited time and resources?

A final finding in our study hints at widespread ethnocentric ignorance in terms of who teachers view as English language learners. Native Americans compose the largest number of LEP students in the state, and Native American LEP students are enrolled in several of the schools in this study. However, when teachers were asked about the ethnic backgrounds of ELLs they had previously worked with, only one of the 422 respondents mentioned Native Americans. In fact, one teacher mentioned Native Americans in the context of the question: "Do Native Americans count [as ELLs]?" The answer is yes. The federal definition of an LEP student includes "a person who is Native American or Alaska Native or a native resident of the outlying areas; AND comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency" (NCLB Act, 2001).

Ethnocentric bias, as discussed here, can range from the obvious favoring of the dominant student population over the ELL student population to the more subtle ignorance of teachers not understanding their ELL students' linguistic needs and legal rights. In the next section of this paper, we look at how ethnocentric bias plays a substantial role in how teacher attitudes towards ELLs differ across community contexts.

The Community Context: Low-Incidence, Rapid-Influx, and Migrant-serving Schools

While this study found that negative teacher attitudes and the factors that contribute to them were present at all schools surveyed, the extent of the negative attitudes varied significantly between low-incidence, rapid-influx, and migrant-serving schools. In analyzing the statistical differences between survey respondents, with supporting evidence from the qualitative data, several key factors emerged that help explain how teacher attitudes are influenced by the community context in which they teach. We discuss these findings here in order of attitude: (1) low-incidence schools that in many ways held positive but perhaps naively optimistic attitudes about ELLs, (2) rapid-influx schools that overall held neutral but often realistic and informed attitudes about ELLs, and (3) migrant-serving schools that in many cases evidenced the most negative and ethnocentric attitudes towards ELLs in comparison to the other two groups.

Low-Incidence Schools

Teachers in low-incidence schools in this great plains state have historically experienced little diversity in their classrooms. The conservative culture of many rural communities, as well as the Norwegian and German/Russian heritages brought by immigrants over a century ago, remain prominent throughout the state. As one ELL teacher in a low-incidence school remarked, "We've been sheltered from other cultures for a long, long time. And even though many of us think that we are open to lots of things, I think when it comes right down to it, many people aren't."

Despite this conservative and homogenous background, teachers from low-incidence schools on average appeared to hold relatively neutral attitudes about ELLs. In general, there was a significant relationship between type of school and teachers beliefs about the academic performance of ELL students ($\chi^2(4, n = 419) = 18.01, p < .01$), and the educational systems from which they come ($\chi^2(4, n = 418) = 30.50, p < .001$). Specifically, low-incidence teachers were the most likely to believe that ELLs tend to perform well academically and to disagree with the statement that ELLs usually

come from places with inferior educational systems. Many low-incidence teachers, although never having worked with ELLs, were optimistic. One low-incidence teacher stated that having an ELL in her classroom would be a “great learning experience for all” and another explained, “The challenge would be very interesting as well as the different culture.”

Teachers in low-incidence schools also positively believed that their schools welcomed ELLs ($\chi^2(4, n = 410) = 25.94, p < .001$). As one teacher remarked, “There have never been any ESL students at our school, but I would assume any student with any difference would be welcomed and supported!”

There appear to be two explanations for these positive outlooks. The few ELLs these schools have previously encountered have been primarily foreign exchange students, largely from Norway, Germany, and Russia. These exchange students have been moderately proficient in English, have had strong academic backgrounds, and have shared similar cultural norms as their American peers in terms of school culture. They also have been predominantly from middle-class backgrounds and have been motivated to learn English and immerse themselves in their educational adventure. The sum total is that in most cases, teachers find these ELLs easy to work with, quick to adjust to their new school, and requiring minimal support. For the low-incidence (or no-incidence) teacher, the foreign exchange/ELL experience is often a positive one.

Low-incidence teachers often have had positive experiences with traditional immigrant and refugee students as well. Typically in the rural areas of this Great Plains state, a single immigrant family may move into a school district and the school does a credible if not creative job of serving the children with the minimal resources available. Often the teachers go out of their way to help the new students. One teacher reported, “I’ve never taught an ESL student, but I can recall one family of Bosnian children who came to this school for one semester. We got to know the family and helped them with transportation. I even took the 4th grade girl to the emergency room.”

The community context of a school is highly associated with teachers’ desire to have an ELL student in their classroom ($\chi^2(4, n = 414) = 30.83, p < .001$) and their interest in ELL professional development ($\chi^2(4, n = 419) = 28.99, p < .001$). Teachers in low-incidence areas, however, were the least likely of the three demographic groups to want an ELL placed in their classroom. They were also the least interested in professional development in working with English language learners. As one teacher stated about training, “Not now, because I do not have any students. However, I may be interested if this changes.” While this attitude may seem understandable, especially if there are no ELLs currently enrolled in the teacher’s school, what happens in the increasing likelihood that a language-minority student does enroll in the school?

In summary, teachers in low-incidence schools have had positive experiences with foreign exchange students in the past, and on rare occasions when an immigrant family has moved into the community, the school has rallied around them in support. Teachers who have never worked with ELLs are often optimistic that it would be a positive experience for themselves and for their schools. Thus low-incidence teacher attitudes regarding English language learners, are in some regards more positive than those found in rapid-influx and migrant-serving schools. However, they are the least likely group of teachers to want ELLs placed in their classrooms. Additionally, because many teachers in low-incidence areas do not see an urgent need for training, they remain unprepared for the future.

Rapid-Influx Schools

Eight years have passed since the city of River City found itself overwhelmed with its first large wave of refugees. A second wave of refugees further overwhelmed the city in 2000, and the city continues to be impacted by yet more families moving to the area under family reunification programs. The refugees in themselves are diverse, and represent a variety of languages and cultures from Africa and Eastern Europe. Many low-incidence schools have seen themselves become rapid-influx schools seemingly overnight.

ELL teachers in the community report that the city was initially very responsive in supporting refugees during the first wave of resettlement in the mid-1990's. Church groups, social organizations and the schools donated food, clothing and furniture to help the refugee families get settled. Volunteerism was high. However, the initial welcoming gradually gave way to concerns such as increasing crime and the high cost of providing social services. The refugees did not quietly assimilate into the community, and in fact often had extreme difficulties adjusting to life in a small city. Community attitudes began turning negative. The second wave of refugees did not receive the same welcoming.

One ethnic group in particular appeared to be at the root of many of the negative attitudes. This ethnic group strongly resisted acculturating to the community and schools; they did not want to become American citizens and they did not want their children going to American schools. Their cultural beliefs and values often directly conflicted with laws in American society. As one teacher commented, "I know they have been kicked out of several apartment buildings now just because they don't follow the rules and River City is going to look down on them. I mean, they already are because they are stealing and racing cars...."

The River City schools experienced a similar increase in student infractions with the influx of refugee students. Many teachers associated the refugee students with discipline problems. Making matters worse, several of the new ethnic groups were antagonistic towards one another. Classroom management became a problem. As one frustrated ELL teacher explained, "There seems to be a lot of clashes between the different groups...They don't get along and they fight all the time...How do you actually help them learn?"

The refugees brought other challenges to the rapid-influx schools. Many of the students had little previous formal education; a sizeable number of the junior high and high school refugees were illiterate. The ELL teachers, let alone the mainstream teachers, felt extremely inadequate in helping these students. Some teachers felt burdened by the large numbers of ELLs placed in their classrooms. Yet others were concerned about issues of integration into the mainstream student population. "A lot of times they seem to be tucked away in a group somewhere - not intermingled" worried one ELL teacher. Similar findings have been documented in research on rapid-influx schools (Valdez, 2001; Wrigley, 2000).

However, despite the huge challenges, the average attitudes of the mainstream teachers remained relatively neutral to positive. (This survey was administered in 2002, one year after the K-12 ELL population in River City peaked). Perhaps the most startling statistic is that 83% (n = 151) of the mainstream teachers in the rapid-influx schools still agreed that ELLs bring needed diversity to the schools, and 74% (n = 135) believed ELLs were welcomed by their schools. Rapid-influx teachers were the most likely to want language-minority students in their classroom than the other two demographic

groups of teachers ($\chi^2(4, n = 414) = 30.83, p < .001$), as well as the most interested in training ($\chi^2(4, n = 419) = 28.99, p < .001$) and believing that schools should hire ELL teachers ($\chi^2(4, n = 420) = 12.17, p < .05$). They also believed the most strongly in making adaptations for English language learners ($\chi^2(4, n = 409) = 18.15, p < .01$).

Rapid-influx teachers appeared to realistically understand many of the factors surrounding a language-minority student's acquisition of English and their academic achievement. They were the most likely to understand that English fluency is not achieved in a single year ($\chi^2(4, n = 407) = 20.23, p < .001$). They were also the most articulate about understanding that language acquisition is largely dependent on the individual. As one teacher stated, "Each ESL student is different." Rapid-influx teachers frequently qualified their survey responses by saying "it depends" on factors such as the student's prior schooling and their experiences before coming to the US. In stark contrast, low-incidence and migrant-serving teachers did not differentiate between students of different backgrounds. Their attitudes and beliefs appeared to have been shaped by working primarily with only one ethnic group of students, high-status Western Europeans or marginalized Mexican Americans, respectively. Based on the absence of comments qualifying their responses to different ethnic groups, low-incidence and migrant-serving teachers appeared to have generalized these attitudes and beliefs to all English language learners.

In responding to the survey question about student achievement, rapid-influx teachers often noted that achievement depends on a myriad of factors such as the amount of English spoken at home, gender, cultural work ethics, previous school experiences, motivation and sense of comfort in the school environment. Many rapid-influx teachers reported mixed but realistic experiences with student achievement, i.e. "It is difficult to make a blanket statement. Some do very well and others don't". While some teachers reported negative experiences with ELLs, their comments did not appear to blame the students or parents, but rather appeared cognizant of the inherent challenges in educating a large population of ELLs. As one teacher wrote, "It's so hard to teach so many different levels and so many different ethnic groups." Other teachers reported positive experiences with student achievement. A few teachers commented that some ELLs actually achieved more than native-English speaking students. As one teacher commented, "Many are highly motivated and strive for success unlike some of their American peers."

In summary, although teacher attitudes towards ELLs had become slightly more negative with each wave of refugees, teachers in rapid-influx schools evidenced both legitimate concerns and realistic expectations of working with English language learners. This stood in contrast to the somewhat more positive and perhaps naïve attitudes of teachers from low-incidence schools with little experience in working with ELLs. The attitudes held by rapid-influx teachers also sharply contrasted to the teacher attitudes noted in migrant-serving schools.

Migrant-serving Schools

Schools in the northeastern region of this Great Plains state have been serving migrant students for decades. In fact, some schools boast that they have educated three generations of migrant students from the same family. However, these schools have historically provided no form of ELL education for their migrant students, and have only recently and reluctantly begun to develop ELL programs out of fear of being cited by the Office of Civil Rights and the state's Department of Public Instruction.

Teacher attitudes regarding English language learners in the migrant-serving schools in this study range from neutral to highly negative. Migrant-serving teachers, for example, were significantly more likely than low or rapid-influx teachers to view language-minority students as poor academic performers and as coming from “places with inferior educational systems.” Teachers serving migrant students tended to disagree with the idea that ELLs bring needed diversity to their schools. As one teacher of migrant students stated, “Diversity is not always a good thing, is it?”] Compounded with deficit-theory beliefs about ELLs, is the fact that many migrant-serving teachers object to making adaptations for ELLs in the mainstream classroom. Attitudes of the migrant teachers toward making adaptations were especially negative ($\chi^2(4, n = 409) = 18.15, p < .01$). Federal and state mandates to help improve sub-standard education for ELLs appear to be creating an even more entrenched resistance in schools serving migrant students.

Teacher comments that alluded to resentment of federal and state law included, “Federal mandates don’t come with federal funds” and “legally I have to [make adaptations] I suppose.” Forty-two percent ($n = 15$) of teachers in the migrant-serving schools were either neutral toward or not interested in ELL professional development, even though Hispanic students with a range of English proficiency levels sometimes comprised upwards of 20% of the schools’ population during harvest season. Myths and misconceptions about ELL education appeared to have skewed some teachers’ attitudes about professional development. One teacher explained her reluctance to participate in professional development by stating, “It would require learning Spanish. I don’t know if I want to do that.” This presents a conundrum. Professional development works to clear up harmful myths and misconceptions. But if those very myths and misconceptions cause teachers to resist professional development, then professional development alone is not a viable solution. Cultural racism (Kendall, 1996) may also be a large factor here considering that large numbers of migrant-serving teachers did not show evidence of actively working to improve the education of the Hispanic students.

Migrant-serving teachers in our study were the most likely to admit, compared with low-incidence and rapid-influx teachers, that their schools did not welcome language-minority students and did not embrace their culture or language ($\chi^2(4, n = 410) = 32.49, p < .001$). This could be interpreted as an encouraging statistic, suggesting many teachers of migrant students are at least cognizant of their negative attitudes. On the opposite hand, this could be an extremely discouraging statistic if ethnocentric and racist teacher attitudes are so ingrained that teachers feel comfortable candidly expressing them in public. One teacher offered this puzzling but telling comment: “Our school welcomes the students but as a whole doesn’t welcome the culture and language.” One wonders what is left of a student to welcome if you take away their culture and language?

Why do teachers of migrant students tend to hold these particular negative attitudes more so than other teachers? The answer requires understanding the context of working with Hispanic migrant children. Migrant students in this region of the state typically attend school only for the first 6-8 weeks in the fall, until the potato and sugar beet harvests are completed. They are among the poorest children in the state, not qualifying for funding available to traditional immigrants and refugees. Their culture often places family concerns before education, and migrant children may miss school in order to take care of younger siblings or other family responsibilities. Their education consists of the smattering of what they learn from attending numerous schools. They are often referred to as long-term English language learners, because their English

acquisition is hindered by frequently changing schools and limited opportunities for interaction with native English speakers. In sum, migrant students do pose unique educational challenges for mainstream teachers.

Many teachers in migrant-serving schools, however, appeared to take little responsibility for the academic achievement of their migrant students. (The following are perceptions expressed by some teachers in migrant-serving schools, not verified by this study). Many commented that parents often do not, or only belatedly, enroll their children in schools when they return to Texas and Mexico. Many commented that Hispanic parents do not attend school conferences and do not seem to care about their children's education. It was frequently reasoned that because the children are only enrolled in school for 6-8 weeks, there is no time to assess their English proficiency and provide any meaningful ELL instruction. They stated that the counterpart schools in the South often do not forward student records, do not provide information on previous special education testing and placement, and do not return teachers' phone calls about individual students. They believed that students speak only Spanish in the southern schools and learn no English. At the middle and high school levels, teachers noted the extremely high Hispanic drop-out rates.

Given these comments and perceptions, no doubt a complex blend of fact and fiction, it is easy to understand (but not justify) how negative attitudes about migrant students develop. The rural communities do little to welcome and create a sense of belonging for the Hispanic migrants; the migrants are expected to labor for a short period of time and then leave. Rather than being valued by the community, they are regarded as inferior. Over the decades, there has been little change in these isolated rural communities, and ingrained attitudes of racism and social hierarchy have gone unchallenged. In rural areas, the school often represents the heart of the community. Teachers in these schools have often grown up in the community or married into the community. There is little to separate community attitude from school attitude and vice versa. There is little to interrupt the cycle of racism that has been on-going for decades.

The findings from these migrant-serving schools, together with the findings from the low-incidence and rapid-influx schools, serve to lay a theoretical foundation for the following discussion on the development of teacher attitudes towards ELLs.

Discussion

In examining the entirety of the data in this study, especially in relation to how and why negative teacher attitudes towards ELLs differ by community context, a pattern of attitude development emerges. While our theorization on teacher attitude development towards ELLs needs to be researched more thoroughly, we present our initial thoughts here. The somewhat more positive but often naively optimistic beliefs and attitudes of teachers in low-incidence schools suggest several things. The majority of teachers do not appear to start out with negative attitudes about English language learners, or espouse overt racist or prejudicial beliefs about ELLs. Rather, the majority of teachers start out with little to no training in ELL education and as such are vulnerable to misinformation circulated by the media or the public at large. Most teachers who have never had experience working with ELLs appear open-minded or at least neutral about the challenge, and some actively seek it. Teachers who have had positive experiences with ELLs, especially in the context of foreign exchange students or having been able to devote their efforts and help to only one or two ELLs at a time, appear to feel a sense of

self-efficacy in being able to make a difference in an ELL student's education. Teachers with these positive experiences appear to develop positive attitudes about ELLs in general.

Negative attitudes begin to emerge when unprepared and unsupported teachers encounter challenges in working with ELLs. A well-intentioned teacher can easily become frustrated and overwhelmed when they don't have the prerequisite training to be able to effectively help an ELL student achieve academic success. Teachers may experience similar feelings when there is a lack of support from administrators or the support of an ELL teacher is unavailable. Teachers who hold misconceptions about second language acquisition may develop negative attitudes towards ELLs when their expectations for academic progress are not met. Certain populations of ELLs pose more challenges than others for teachers, and negative attitudes may begin to develop towards that one population of students or be generalized towards all ELLs. The more ELLs a teacher is given responsibility for, the greater the challenge in helping them, and the shorter the time span the teacher is given to prepare him/herself for these new students, all contribute to how frustrated and overwhelmed a well-intentioned teacher can become. Positive attitudes can quickly downshift to negative ones when teachers are not provided with the training and support they need to be effective, and feel ineffective, in their working with ELLs.

Data from the migrant-serving schools demonstrate what can happen when negative teacher attitudes towards ELLs remain unchallenged for long periods of time and additionally are based primarily on narrow experiences with a single marginalized ethnic group. If negative teacher attitudes are allowed to solidify and remain unchallenged, in this case for generations, and if the administrators and community allow teachers to abdicate their responsibilities for educating all students, a school climate is created that lends itself to the development and perpetuation of ethnocentric and racist beliefs against the minority group, furthering their marginalization and lessening their already poor chances for a quality education. The danger of this happening is more likely in isolated and insular communities that are not heavily influenced or pressured by outside influences.

Rapid-influx schools are in a tenuous position in terms of attitude development. Positive teacher attitudes towards ELLs may deteriorate if mainstream teachers begin to feel frustrated, overwhelmed, and unsupported in their efforts to adapt to working with these new students. On the encouraging side, well-intentioned and committed teachers may become more realistic in their understanding of the difficult and numerous challenges they face in helping their ELL students become both linguistically and academically proficient. Mixed and conflicting attitudes develop. Initially unprepared for the rapid-influx of refugees, rapid-influx schools may experience slow but steady progress in developing effective ELL programs that work with mainstream teachers and classrooms. But how long can teachers continue to feel a sense of inefficacy in educating ELLs before more attitudes downshift to negative? Teachers in rapid-influx schools are in critical need of training and support.

Mixed attitudes, especially among a large number of teachers, however, provide room for opportunity. In many cases, the findings in this study regarding the extent and nature of teacher attitudes towards ELLs did not point to a predominance of negative or positive attitudes, but rather to a predominance of neutral attitudes or a mix of the three. The majority of teachers responded neutrally to questions concerning the academic performance of ELLs, wanting an ELL student placed in their classroom and not allowing

ELLs to use their native language in school. One-fourth or more of teachers responded neutrally to questions related to training, expecting fluency after only one year, making adaptations for ELLs, and ELLs being responsible for adapting to American schools.

These large percentages of neutral responses have the greatest implication in this study. Negative attitudes, especially those resulting from negative experiences with ELLs and those based on ethnocentric bias, are difficult to change. Neutral attitudes, on the other hand, are not rooted in pre-conceived notions, misnomers, or elements of racism and prejudice. Being neutral, they are malleable to influence and change. Although this study cannot conclude to what extent the large numbers of neutral responses were a result of teachers simply not knowing enough about ELLs and ELL education to make a decision on the survey questions, it must be remembered that 87% of teachers participating in this survey had never received any training in ELL education. If the teachers who hold neutral attitudes were to receive accurate and adequate training in working with English language learners, as well as administrative and ELL support, perhaps their attitudes would become positive ones.

Implications

The findings in this study, in terms of the extent and nature of teacher attitudes towards ELLs, the factors associated with attitude development, and the ways in which community context affects attitudes, point to an urgent need for more professional development in working with English language learners. Professional development is needed for administrators, teachers, as well as the entire school staff in order to foster a positive school-wide learning environment that supports linguistic diversity. Professional knowledge is needed to dispel common myths and misconceptions, and to help school staff change their neutral and negative attitudes about ELLs, ELL education and diversity in general, and to provide school staff with a foundation in best practices of educating English language learners. However, professional development must be designed and implemented in a manner that takes into account the varying community contexts of schools and school districts. Most importantly, effective professional development needs to be provided in a timely manner so that teachers do not become overwhelmed or frustrated in working with ELLs or lose their sense of self-efficacy in being able to educate all of the students in their classroom.

The following suggestions for professional development and teacher support are based on findings from this study:

Administrators need professional development in the areas of second language acquisition, diversity and ELL pedagogy, in addition to specialized professional development in implementing and managing effective ELL programs. Administrators need this knowledge in order to create a positive school environment essential for effective inclusive education, and to optimize and support collaboration between ELL teachers and mainstream teachers.

ELL teachers need leadership training that will enable them to work constructively with mainstream teachers and school administrators. They need to be trained and supported as school resource experts. An ELL teacher with leadership

capabilities and advocacy skills can work to change negative attitudes from the inside-out.

“One stop” and “Fits All Teacher/Students Needs” training models should be avoided. Professional development efforts must be carefully designed so as to address the specific needs of teachers in their unique school contexts. For example, teachers in rapid-influx schools in River City might have benefited from conflict resolution training so as to reduce cultural dissonance in the classroom. They may also have benefited from training in which they were able to openly express and discuss their feelings about their changing classrooms and communities.

Professional development should be made available that offers specific information about the different ethnic cultures of the ELLs in a school or district. Migrant-serving teachers need to know more about Hispanic culture and the migrant experience from the perspective of the migrant student and family. The River City teachers wanted more training in the Muslim religion. While general multicultural education approaches can work well to help teachers explore their own cultural biases and negative attitudes, specific cultural training is needed to help teachers address specific cultural issues.

Professional development needs to be offered in a timely manner. As noted in this study, many teachers are not interested in professional development until an ELL is actually enrolled in their classroom. However, when an ELL is suddenly placed in their classroom, the teacher feels unprepared and overwhelmed, and negative attitudes towards the ELL may develop. Immediate and effective professional development is needed in these cases to support the teacher and prevent the negative attitude cycle from beginning or solidifying. Professional development efforts for teachers with seriously ingrained negative attitudes must focus heavily on changing attitudes first before they can focus on pedagogy and best practices.

Much more training in working with English language learners is needed at the pre-service teacher level, especially in states with low-incidence ELL populations. Teacher education programs in low-incidence areas should place emphasis on general multicultural education and teaching pedagogies that work for a wide variety of diverse learners, not just English language learners. Pre-service training should emphasize that teachers are responsible for all the students in their classrooms. With this foundation, teachers can then later seek out more specialized ELL training as warranted by the context of the ELL populations in their future classrooms.

Professional development efforts need to extend to the community as well. Community attitudes are large determinants of teacher attitudes towards ELLs. National organizations such as the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), as well as their respective state affiliates, need to increasingly work to educate the general public about English language learners and effective ELL education. Community outreach programs are important in

order to combat media bias and privately-funded propaganda campaigns espousing anti-pluralistic messages.

Limitations and Required Further Study

There are several noteworthy limitations of this study. The first is that while this was a large survey (422 mainstream teacher participants) across a large geographic area that encompassed low-incidence, rapid-influx and migrant-serving schools, the study did not encompass any high-incidence schools with a substantial history of educating ELLs. As such, findings regarding the extent and nature of teacher attitudes towards ELLs and the factors contributing to their formation, may in particular not be generalizable to high-incidence schools. Secondly, due to lack of data from high-incidence schools with a substantial history of educating ELLs, the theory of attitude development presented in this paper is missing a necessary piece. Further study needs to be conducted in order to explore the development and evolution of teacher attitudes long-term in working with large numbers of ELLs. Under what conditions and factors do high-incidence teacher attitudes towards ELLs evolve into either positive or negative ones?

A final limitation of our study concerns our findings and discussion of migrant-serving schools. While many teachers in the schools in our study did espouse negative and perhaps even racist attitudes about Hispanic students, this study was limited to a limited number of schools in a single geographic area. We realize that there are many migrant-serving teachers and schools across the nation that are providing exemplary educational opportunities for Hispanic students.

Conclusion

It is crucial to remember that negative attitudes are quick to develop but slow to change. Professional development efforts in helping teachers effectively teach English language learners in inclusive settings must be comprehensive, appropriate, and long-term, as well as heavily focused on confronting and changing negative attitudes that serve to impede progress. Entrenched community attitudes may be the most difficult to change. As a frustrated but still optimistic ELL teacher commented, “[This state] as a whole seems like it is negative to any kind of change. We’re really conservative... It’s just going to take time. It might not be this generation, but maybe the next one.” Unfortunately, for many English language learners, change may come too late.

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