

UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

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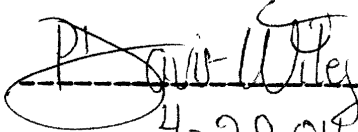
PROJECT TITLE:

"ESL Education in Tennessee":

A 2004 Overview

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UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

SENIOR PROJECT - PROSPECTUS

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PROJECT TITLE: "ESL Education in Tennessee:
A 2004 Overview"

PROJECT DESCRIPTION (Attach not more than one additional page, if necessary.)

This paper discusses several issues concerning ESL Education such as number of English Language learners in the US and in Tennessee, the number of ESL teachers, and the type of training teachers receive. In addition, the paper highlights the problems in U.S. ESL programs and discusses means of improvement, and the tools necessary to achieve this improvement.

Projected completion date: May 2004

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Return this completed form to The University Honors Program, F101 Melrose Hall, 974-7875, not later than the beginning of your last year in residence.

ESL Education in Tennessee: A 2004 Overview

a paper

submitted in fulfillment

of the

Senior Honors Thesis

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to the

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by

Janelle Chevon Coleman

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INTRODUCTION

The explosion of immigration to the United States over the years has drawn American society into a whirlwind of questioning regarding education. Perhaps the greatest inquiry facing American educators today is not where to put these students, but, specifically, how to teach them. How do schools provide the necessary services for these students—those whose native language is not English—in order to place them on an equal standing with their American peers?

ESL, or English as a Second Language, attempts to answer the aforementioned questions. This type of instruction usually involves teaching students of limited or no English proficiency in *only* English. Since its initiation as a discipline about 25 years ago (Leki, 1990, as cited in Gray, 1997), and as evidenced by the growing research in the area of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), ESL education has diverged into a wide variety of programs. This paper will explore the following types of programs: Sheltered English Programs, *pull out* programs, and, lastly, Structured Immersion Programs. Teachers of ESL do not need to be proficient in any other language but English in order to teach, and students in their classes tend to come from a variety of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds ("Common Qualifications," 1996). Some ESL programs are specifically designed to instruct certain academic content, while others focus solely on the grammar and structure of the English language.

The purpose of this paper is to isolate the various issues and problems concerning ELLs (English Language Learners) and ESL education, and to foster conversation that seeks to determine ways to alleviate these concerns. To this end, the paper will first perform a *bottom-up analysis* of the discussion beginning with the most important aspect of the education system, the student. The section of the report to follow will address the following: Who are these *newcomers* (new arrivals),

and where do they come from? What distinguishes them from their American peers, and what are their rights? Next, the paper will discuss the number and qualifications of ESL teachers. How are they trained? How do they fit in the grand equation of what makes a successful ESL program? Lastly, the paper will expound on the schools and the types of programs that exist in the United States, and, on a smaller scale, the state of Tennessee. A further investigation will be executed on how the students are placed in these programs—with an emphasis on Tennessee ESL education programs. Due to lack of discriminate data, assessment will not be presented on the types of programs discussed. Rather, a discussion of future needs and goals, which will include suggestions for improvement in the state of Tennessee, will end the paper.

THE STUDENT

While there has already been substantial discussion regarding the growing number of immigrants that have been making America their home, there has been remarkably less conversation with respect to where these people actually come from. It is not only preferable, but also essential that teachers develop a relationship with their students. Positive relationships between teachers and students engender an atmosphere of trust and comfort in the classroom. Such an environment is even more important for students whose first language is not English. Possessing not only an awareness of these students' growing presence in the classroom, but also an understanding of their native cultures, makes ESL teachers better able to accommodate their students. In light of these observations, this section will discuss the English as a Second Language student in his or her totality. To this end, the numbers and cultures of the immigrant children arriving in the United States, as well as the characteristics of ELLs will be explored. This section will also deal with the history of ESL Education, and the state and federal legislation that has been developed to protect the interests of these students. The main objective of this discussion is to inform the reader of the

growing cultural diversity of the United States, and the steps that have been taken to accommodate the rising number of children of limited English proficiency both on a state and national level.

Who are they? Where do they come from?

ELLs are the children who sit silently in the backs of classrooms all over America, picking their fingernails, or staring at the blank pages of the notebook that sits on their desks. They are the ones who are disregarded, made fun of, or misunderstood. But is there more to this story? Where do they come from? Why do they come in the first place?

According to the 2002 Statistical Abstract of the United States, in the year 2000, the highest numbers of immigrants came from Asia, North America (included in this category is Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America), and Europe. An overwhelming percentage of these immigrants came from nations such as Mexico (173,900), China (45,700), the Philippines (42,500), and India (42,000). The numbers of immigrants coming from Central and South America were 66,400 and 56,100 respectively. The most dramatic growth in immigration, however, occurred between 1981 and 1990; according to Hornberger, Harsch, and Evans (1999), immigration to the United States increased by 40% between 1980 and 1990. Of this increase, the number of Asian and Hispanics nearly doubled. In the six-year period of 1990-1996, the number of immigrants increased by 14%, comprising about 9% of the total U.S. population.

There are several factors to consider in the growth of the immigrant population to the United States. While the changes in immigration law have influenced these numbers—specifically the Immigration Act of 1965, which reopened the borders after years of quotas (Davis-Wiley, 2002), political and economic stability of the newcomers' home nations are also factors. In areas of political unrest such as Mexico and parts of Eastern Europe and Asia, refugee and asylee entries are high (Clark, Hatton, & Williamson, 2002). In 1998, 12% of visas distributed were employment

visas, and the majority of those who received them were from Western Europe and Canada (Clark, Hatton, & Williamson, 2002, p. 5-6). In addition to political and economic asylum and employment, many come to the United States with the hope of being reunited with their family members that are currently living here.

What are the characteristics of English Language Learners?

In the past, students who were unable to speak, or could speak very little English were referred to as either *language minority* (LM) or *Limited English proficiency* (LEPS). Due to the recent changes in the structure of ESL education, and in the growing emphasis on the student as *learners* and not as children with *limitations*, a new term was coined—English Language Learners (ELLs). This term is not only consistent with those students who speak English or are learning English as a Second Language, but it is also used to denominate students who are able to speak the language with a higher level of fluency (Hornberger, Harsch, & Evans, 1999). Thus, the term ELLs is an umbrella expression that includes groups of people with a variety of different levels of English proficiencies. ELLs come from a variety of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds; some were even born in the United States to parents of world origin (Hornberger, Harsch, & Evans, 1999).

Rights of English Language Learners

Not unlike most other minority groups in the United States, ELLs have had to earn their rights to an education that suits their needs and abilities. Over the years, the United States government has, through legislature, attempted to account for the needs for such students. The following section will address the rights and privileges allotted to English Language Learners, and the progression of events leading to the development of legislation concerning these newcomers. To begin this discussion, the paper will first look at the history and establishment of TESOL (Teaching

of English to Speakers of Other Languages) as a discipline. Finally, the development of legislation on both state and national levels geared toward the successful assessment and improvement of ESL education will be presented.

History of TESOL

While the teaching of English as a second language has been going on since the founding of the United States, TESOL as a discipline did not become a reality until the 1960s (Gray, 1997).

Many immigrants had to learn English in order to earn their citizenship (Gray, 1997). Before specific standards and qualifications were established for English teachers, it was believed that any native English speaker could teach the language. Then came the 1960s. With the ratification of the new Immigration Act of 1965, the immigrant population skyrocketed, with numbers reaching as high as 9 million (Davis-Wiley, 2002, p. 51). It was at this point that the federal government began to see a need to promote English proficiency among the newcomers. Not only was there a need for English classes, but also for qualified teachers capable of instructing these new students. Several laws, including the National Defense Education Act of 1965 and the Higher Education and Elementary and Secondary Education Acts of 1965, helped to implement new programs specifically for the teaching of English to non-native speakers. The Education Professions Development Act of 1968 sought to train teachers for the field of TESOL. As a consequence of this endeavor, graduate programs were developed in colleges and universities both to encourage students to pursue the teaching of English a profession, and to provide for the lack of qualified ESL teachers at that time.

Today, with the outstanding amount of research performed on how ELLs actually acquire the English language, numerous teaching techniques have since been and continue to be created. New legislation and standards regarding ESL programs have inspired the restructuring of such

programs in school districts all over the United States. The following section discusses this issue in detail.

Current Legislation

The road to equal rights for all citizens and residents of this nation has been ridden with hardship. The integration of new cultures and racial identities has led to the constant transformation of American society; in response to the changing scope, color, and language of this changing society, there was a need to consider the rights that should be allotted to these individuals. In this section, we will look at how the government responded to the needs of English Language Learners, as well as the continuing development of new legislation concerning this group.

Federal Legislation

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbids the discrimination of individuals irrespective of race, color, or national origin. The former Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (DHEW) further defined this Act in relation to the rights of ELLs in saying that,

Where inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national origin-minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students. ("Lau v. Nichols," 2004, para. 24)

The issue was revisited in the *Lau v. Nichols* case (1974) when approximately 1,800 Chinese students in the San Francisco School system didn't receive suitable instruction in English, which prevented them from being able to be active participants in educational activities in their schools. In response to the case, the DHEW wrote a document in 1975 of the suggestion that the Federal government should have greater influence over decisions made in regards to education at both state

and local levels (U.S. Dept of Education, 1990). In 1980, it was formally established by the new Department of Education that bilingual education was the most appropriate method of English language instruction for school districts with a large number of students of the same language group. This regulation was changed in 1981 when the Office of Civil Rights declared that it was the school district's right to determine the appropriate teaching methods to use in the ESL classroom. The only stipulation was that the district must provide a program for those students that cannot fulfill the requirements under the mainstream curriculum. In the event that the number of ELLs is small, the school district is not required by law to have a formal program in place so long as some assistance is provided for those who need it. Under the system put in place by the Office of Civil Rights, districts are monitored to ensure that staff involved in the maintenance and the instructional aspect of the programs are qualified professionals that have experience, and that the appropriate resources are provided.

To enforce these adjustments, an executive order was implemented in August 1990. This order made it clear that the Federal government must provide the resources and monies for the improvement of services for ELLs. According to the order, "each Federal agency shall examine the services it provides and develop and implement a system by which LEP persons [ELLs] can meaningfully access those services consistent with, and without unduly burdening, the fundamental mission of the agency" (U.S. Department of Justice, 1990, para. 2). The government gives standards to Federal agencies by which to evaluate their services, and, these agencies must subsequently develop plans for the improvement of these services and submit them to the Department of Justice. Furthermore, ELLs and those that represent them must have a say in the structure and the formation of these programs.

No Child Left Behind

This law, signed by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002, further extended the system implemented by the Office of Civil Rights. The influence of government is limited to the allocation of funds to different states. The number of ELLs in each state determines the allocation of funds. The funds are received by State education agencies (SEAs) who are to give at least 95% of the monies to districts; school districts with more than the standard number of ELLs are given an extra 15% (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, para. 6). Programs in these districts are evaluated on the basis of the students' progress, the fulfillment of state mandates, and the proficiency of the students involved in the program (U.S. Department of Education, 2001. para. 9). According to the *No Child Left Behind Website*, states must hold similar standards for *all* students, though the appropriate accommodations should be made for students with disabilities or ELLs (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, para. 11). While *No Child Left Behind* seeks to decrease intervention of the federal government in the educational systems of each state, it also attempts to make parents active participants in their children's education by giving them options in terms of the best programs for their children. Furthermore, the law asserts that teachers must have a certification to teach ESL and that "language instruction curricula used to teach limited English proficient children are to be tied to scientifically based research and demonstrated to be effective"(U.S. Department of Education, 2001. para. 2). In regard to students' performance, assessment must be performed annually; students are tested in the areas of language arts and reading each year. Every second fiscal year, SEAs are required by law to send a report to the US Dept. of Education concerning the effectiveness of ESL programs in their states regarding the students' progress.

Tennessee Legislation Concerning ELLs

Tennessee was the first state to enact Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as state legislation (Tennessee ESL Program Guide, 2003). The state, therefore, upholds its commitment to the provision of appropriate services to ELLs by monitoring school districts to ensure that their actions are in concordance with the law. Teachers are educated about the rights of their students, as well as their own as outlined in the Civil Rights Act. The state records information regarding its progress in the implementation and the enforcement of Title VI to the State Department Audit Section, which evaluates the state's progress. Under Tennessee law, all students—including immigrants—have the right to a free public education. Hence, ELLs should have access to programs that fulfill their academic needs and allow them to participate in mainstream activities. In addition, parents of ELLs have the right to have information regarding their child's program or their child's progress in a language they understand. The state complies with the *No Child Left Behind* law in that all state mandates must be met for ESL programs to be considered successful.

THE TEACHER

An integral part of the education system, teachers have a major influence in the way students view themselves, others, and the world around them. For this reason, it is necessary to evaluate teachers on the basis of their qualifications and their teaching ability. In addition, the training that teachers receive outside of the classroom—particularly teachers of ESL—is equally, if not more, important to consider. These issues, as well as the number of ESL teachers in the United States, will be addressed in the following section. To properly assess the performance of ESL programs in the United States, one has to look at the work that teachers are doing in the classroom to engage their students, and to help them adjust to a new culture, language, and, in some cases, education system.

What are the necessary qualifications for ESL teachers?

When children are first enrolled in school, there are certain implied expectations regarding students' responsibilities in the classroom (i.e., maintaining good grades, showing respect to teachers, administrators, and their fellow classmates). Parents play a role in helping teachers and administration to provide the best services for their children. Along the same lines, teachers are expected to respect their students and provide quality instruction suited to each and every student. To this end, both national and state governments have established certain standards for teachers in terms of their credentials and training. In regards to this paper, the emphasis will be on national mandates, and policies concerning the state of Tennessee in particular.

Basic National Requirements. In general, most institutions in the United States (elementary, middle, high school, and higher education) require that prospective teachers have a B.A. or B.S. Additionally, NCLB mandates that individuals pursuing a career in TESOL must be certified as English language proficient (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, para. 2). Teachers in primary and secondary education must, in most cases, secure a master's degree in education with an emphasis in TESOL, a master's in applied linguistics, or a master's in English with an emphasis in TESOL. However, this requirement is mainly designated for those who plan to teach in higher education ("Common Qualifications," 2004). The master's courses described above generally require that students take a total of 30-36 hours of coursework with a supervised internship in a school (Grades K-12).

Requirements for the state of Tennessee. The state of Tennessee mandates that teachers of ESL "must hold a current teaching license and hold the ESL endorsement to teach ESL in Tennessee schools"(Tennessee ESL Program Guide, 2003, Appendix A.9). They must have earned a Bachelor's of Arts or Science, and must either pass the Praxis ESL test, complete the coursework

equivalent of an academic major for ESL (24 semester hours, which may include up to 6 hours in a world language), or secure a Master's degree in English, Education, Curriculum and Instruction, or Linguistics, each of which must, in some way, have an area of emphasis in teaching ESL or Bilingual Education (Tennessee ESL Program Guide, 2003, Appendix A.9). In addition to these options, the prospective teacher may also earn a National Board Certification in ESL.

Teacher Training

In some cases, prospective ESL teachers are required—as part of their regular coursework in a college or university—to do an internship in which they are to teach a class in the presence of an advisor or other teacher in their field. Depending on the number of ELLs in a district, however, training may be different. Some districts only offer in-service training for anywhere from 34 hours in areas with relatively large populations of ELLs, to 9 hours in areas where the population of ELLs is small (Fleischman & Hopstock, 1993 as cited in Hornberger, Harsch, & Evans, 1999). Districts with large numbers of ELLs will not only require that teachers take college courses, but they will also pay for the teachers to do so. In areas where there are few certified teachers, alternative certificates are offered. To be eligible for this type of certification, the teacher basically must “hold a bachelor's degree, pass a standardized test, and attend an intensive training program”(Hornberger, Harsch, & Evans, 1999). The training program for these instructors may require that teachers “take about 200 hours of classroom hours of pedagogy and have some type of support, such as a mentor”(Pendas Whitten, et al., 1996, para. 52 as cited in Hornberger, Harsch, & Evans, 1999). Unfortunately, while the standards for teachers are becoming higher, schools and districts alike are coming to the conclusion that training and education of prospective instructors are both minimal and inadequate.

Number of ESL Teachers

The number of ESL teachers in the United States is substantially low. Few people are willing to consider TESOL as a viable career option, and many who are in the field are not adequately trained. According to a study performed by Fleischman and Hopstock, “only 10 percent of the teachers of LEP [ELL] students in 1991-1992 were certified in bilingual education and only between 8 and 9 were certified to teach ESL, with the greatest numbers being certified at the elementary level”(as cited in Hornberger, Harsch, & Evans, 1999, p.38). According to one study, forty percent of teachers working in the United States taught ESL classes. However, only 29% of those teachers had formal training (“Challenges facing Educators,” 2003, para. 7). The same study proposed that the national shortage of qualified teachers may be as high as 175,000 (“Challenges facing Educators,” 2003, para. 7). A second study showed that there are approximately 50,000 qualified teachers in the United States, which, according to Zhao, 2002, is only one teacher for every 100 students (Zhao, 2002, as cited in “Challenges facing Educators,” 2003, para. 7). If school districts were to mandate that the average class size would be 17 students for every teacher, an additional 290,000 teachers would have to be hired (Zhao, 2002 as cited in “Challenges facing Educators,” 2003, para. 7). On the other hand, while there is a significant gap between the number of qualified teachers and ELLs, “the number of teachers who instructed at least one [ELL] in grades K-12 in 2001-2002 has more than tripled since 1992” (McCabe, 2004, para. 6). Nevertheless, in many states such as Tennessee and Mississippi, the number of teachers is not nearly large enough to accommodate the growing number of newcomers. According to an article written in the Tennessean, there are about 17,000 students presently in ESL programs, but—based on last year’s count—there are only around 260 ESL teachers in the entire state (Riley, 2003, para. 7). Similarly, in Mississippi, there were 2, 279 ELLs enrolled in public schools in 2002, but only 111 qualified

teachers to teach them (Volz, 2003, para. 4). To remedy this situation, many states have resorted to pulling teachers from other disciplines into ESL classrooms. While there is seemingly no other means to change the current situation, the movement of teachers with little experience into such positions may become an impediment to students' learning.

THE SCHOOL

Perhaps the most important factor to consider when evaluating the productivity of ESL programs is the school itself. The types of programs, as well as the way in which students get placed into those programs play a key role in the student's ability to succeed and actively participate in the same activities as his or her English-proficient peers. Although there are a variety of ESL programs present in classrooms all over the United States, this paper will look at the following: Sheltered English programs, *pull-out* programs, and Structured Immersion. Next, the paper will discuss how students are placed in these programs particularly in the state of Tennessee. Finally, using data collected concerning the success rates of these programs, the report will evaluate and assess how well these programs actually work.

Types of Programs for ELLs

In this section, emphasis will be placed on the characteristics of the Sheltered English, *pull out*, and Structured Immersion programs. The descriptions will help the reader to draw conclusions about not only the placement of students in these programs, but also the ways in which these institutions attempt to and succeed in addressing the needs of ELLs principally in the state of Tennessee.

Sheltered English Programs. This type of ESL curriculum involves the teaching of specific subject in the target language (i.e., English) tailored to the proficiency level of the students. In most cases, sheltered English instruction is used in classrooms with only ELLs. It is also important to note that this type of instruction is primarily used in areas with larger populations of ELLs (Tennessee ESL Program Guide, 5.8). Sheltered English programs incorporate academic subject learning into a framework that allows for the acquisition of English with respect to listening, speaking, and writing skills (Genesee, 1999). This *mixed* instruction seeks to assist students in not only mastering the English language, but to also encourage such skills as critical thinking, summarizing and analyzing materials, and debating that will benefit the student later on in his or her educational career (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, in press cited in Genesee, 1999). Special care is made to ensure that students understand what is going on by means of interaction in the classroom and the use of materials (i.e., worksheets) for added practice. Nevertheless, the content areas that are taught are generally challenging for the students (i.e., math, science, social studies) (Lucas, 1996).

Pull-Out Programs. This particular method of ESL teaching is common all over the United States. Frequently used in elementary schools, students are *pulled out* of regular academic classes for either part of the day, or the entire day to receive special instruction in English (McKeon, 1987). Unlike Sheltered English programs, *pull out* focuses specifically on the intricate aspects of the English language (i.e. vocabulary and grammar). According to McKeon, teachers do not have to be bilingual or be certified to teach these classes, and ELLs are sometimes divided into groups in which their peers share the same first language (McKeon, 1987).

Structured Immersion. Similar in form to Sheltered English instruction, Structured immersion is a cross between academic content instruction and formal training in the English language. According to Hornberger, Harsch, and Evans, “all the students in the program are

English-language learners, usually though not always from different language backgrounds” (Hornberger, Harsch, & Evans, 1999, p.33). Generally, students in this type of program do not have a high level competency in speaking, writing, or reading the English language. Hence, teachers are bilingual, and principally use structures that are familiar to students (McKeon, 1987). In most cases, students receive no native-language support (Hornberger, Harsch, & Evans 1999).

Identification of ELLs

Before ELLs can be placed in an ESL program, they must first be identified as ELLs. This identification is performed in a variety of ways depending upon the standards held in each state. The most common means of identification is the Home Language Survey (Kindler, 2002). In this assessment, districts determine the student’s first language, the language the student uses most often outside of school, and the language he or she speaks at home with his or her family (Tennessee ESL Program Guide, 2003). Other common identifiers include teacher observation, teacher interviews, and parent information (Kindler, 2002). The next step—discussed in detail in the following section—is to test the student to determine if he or she is English- language proficient. Some of the test used across the nation to assess students’ comprehension, writing, and speaking ability include the Language Assessment Scales (LAS), the IDEA Language Proficiency Tests (IPT), and the Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey (Kindler, 2002).

Placement of Students in Programs

The placement of students in a particular program is generally performed by the school district. Each school district subscribes to the law of the state in which it resides. In most cases, students will be administered a standardized test to determine his or her level of English

proficiency. ELLs in the state of Tennessee are required to take the IDEA Proficiency Test once the student is identified as being limited English-proficient. Those who have taken the TCAP test (or any other national basic skills standardized test) and received a score of 35% or above on the Total Reading section are not required to take the IDEA test, and are labeled as proficient. If the student has to take the IDEA test and receives a low score, the school must offer ESL services to the child. Before the learner is placed in any program, his or her parents are notified and are made aware of their options. Parents may choose not to enroll their child in an ESL program if they so wish. Availability of different types of instruction (i.e., Structured Immersion) is dependent upon the state. Upon entering an ESL program, students are assessed yearly via the IDEA test to determine whether or not he or she is improving (Tennessee ESL Program Guide, 2003, 6.4).

Exiting the Program

Different states have differing standards for ELLs with respect to exiting ESL programs. According to Kindler (2002), most states “indicated the use of student grades, teacher observation, informal assessment, and student records in the reclassification process, and over one third of states made use of teacher interviews, parent information, referrals, and home language surveys”(Kindler, 2002). In the state of Tennessee, ELLs are eligible to exit the ESL program when they achieve Fluent and Competent levels on the oral, reading, and writing sections of the IDEA Proficiency test, or when “standardized test scores from the most recent assessment must be proficient or above in Total Reading and Total Language” and competence is demonstrated in the eyes of the ESL teacher or ESL Coordinator (Tennessee ESL Program Guide, 2003, 6.9).

DISCUSSION

In looking at the current situation with ESL Education, this paper has attempted to show that the current system of TESOL in this country has not been adequate in fulfilling the needs of ELLs. The state of Tennessee alone has several problems concerning its ESL programs, which this section will serve to address. The first issue with the current ESL program in Tennessee is a grave one: the lack of qualified teachers. While the number of immigrants—especially those from Mexico—continues to rise, the number of teachers remains the same. Given that the number of ELLs is about 17,000 and the number of qualified ESL teachers is about 260, there are some serious problems. For American students to get the most out of a normal world language class (i.e., Spanish or French) in the U.S., the average class size must be small to account for the students' needs for individual attention and comfort in the class. In the same way, ELLs need extra attention from their teachers. They need to feel as if they will not be made fun of or criticized when they make a mistake. Smaller classes accommodate those necessities, as teachers are better able to develop relationships with the students. Moreover, since the English language is very different from most languages that ELLs speak, the difficulty level in learning English is far higher than for most American students learning Spanish or French. Hence, ELLs need to have more opportunities for individual interaction with the teacher in case they require additional assistance outside of class. At 65 students per teacher, this type of interaction is difficult, if not virtually impossible.

Another concern that has probed the minds of many educators, schools, and states is whether or not the teachers currently in ESL are *qualified*. The state of Tennessee requires that teachers of ESL be currently certified and receive an additional ESL endorsement. The requirements for this endorsement are somewhat lenient; a prospective teacher who is currently teaching a different subject can earn an endorsement simply by passing the Praxis ESL test or take coursework with an

emphasis in teaching ESL. Nowhere in the requirements list does it state that Tennessee ESL teachers have to have either training with their coursework or in-service training. This information is quite unsettling given the growing population of ELLs; not only are there not enough teachers, but some of the teachers that do work are inexperienced.

Furthermore, there is some question as to whether the *No Child Left Behind* will truly fulfill the needs of ELLs in schools across America. One concern is that if states have relatively small populations of ELLs, will they provide quality programs for these students? Also, if parents are to be a factor in choosing whether or not to enroll their children into a program, will the resources needed to inform them of their options be readily available for parents who speak languages that few people speak (i.e., Vietnamese, Portuguese, Ukrainian)? In addition, methods to improve ESL instruction are not clearly defined; the law states that “language instruction curricula used to teach limited English proficient children are to be tied to scientifically based research and demonstrated to be effective”(U.S. Department of Education, 2001, para. 2). What “scientifically based research” is being mentioned here? What *exactly* are the methods being employed to teach these students, and who decides what methods to use with which students? What is considered effective, and, besides that, who is doing the research? Though the standards of success—as it relates to the scores and improvement of ELLs—are clearly stated in the law, there is no discussion of what methods are to be used, how, and why.

With respect to the standards presented in the law, one must consider whether or not the accountability is actually fair. When school districts and state education departments were evaluated in the past, the test scores of special needs students (i.e., children with disabilities and ELLs) were considered separately from those of the other students to obtain a more accurate assessment of the systems’ performance. Though *No Child Left Behind* does require that states provide disaggregate

data regarding the students' sex, race, English proficiency, and economic status, *all* students are placed under the same state-mandated standards. States that perform below baseline standard receive less funding. If the low scores of a state can be mostly attributed to the low scores of special needs students, then the students are being more or less penalized; if the state receives less funding, the opportunity for actual improvement in its schools is at stake. Ultimately, these students will not get the resources they need to even minimally achieve. This consequence will prove harsh for those states whose school districts already have poor access to resources for their students.

There is also some interest with respect to how ELLs are identified. According to the 2003 Tennessee ESL Program Guide, students that have taken the TCAP test (or any other national standardized test) and earned a score of 35% or above on the Total Reading sections are labeled as proficient. While the ability to read in any language is a sign of proficiency, it is not a strong enough determinant on which to found proficiency. For example, many students in Asian countries learn to read and write in English beginning at a young age. Therefore, when they arrive in the United States, these ELLs are able to read and write in English with facility, but may not be able to communicate with native speakers. This issue is one that should be considered when identifying ELLs. To provide the appropriate services for ELLs, schools should properly assess the student's level of proficiency.

On a final note, the lack of experienced teachers, the limitations of the *No Child Left Behind* law, and the problems associated with the identification of ELLs are just a few of the dilemmas this country faces in educating students whose native tongue is not English. Other issues such as the ignorance that teachers possess regarding their students' cultural values and the growing disputes on just how exactly to go about teaching these students are also being discussed among researchers, teachers, and schools systems all over the country. While the key to solving these problems is

gravely unknown, the need for dialogue within federal and state governments is clear. Teachers, school officials, and state legislators who are concerned about these issues should be the first ones to speak their minds and share their ideas on how to improve the system. Parents and students should also be given more of a voice; the emphasis in education should be placed on fulfilling the needs of the students. If more people—specifically those who are parents, teachers, school officials, and state legislators—take the initiative to express their concern regarding the rights and needs of ELLs, there would certainly be greater possibility for change in the current education system. Other solutions, such as tougher requirements for ESL teachers, increase in teacher salary, greater allocation of state funds toward education, and more teacher training are only smaller pieces to an even larger puzzle. As the future draws nearer, the need for education will continue to grow. New technologies and a greater capacity for communication across long distances draw us closer to worlds we have yet to know of and understand. An emphasis on education is needed to accommodate these changes in society; by implementing programs that provide for the needs of all children, the chances of improving society and civilization as a whole will increase.

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