

Knowing the learner:

What do secondary mainstream teachers know about their English language learners, and why does it matter?

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ELLs in our schools

- 23% of school population
- “over-represented in statistics of under-achievement” in New Zealand (Price, 2008, p. 8).
- “New Zealand has the largest gap in achievement in the OECD for English Language Learners (ELLs)”. (MOE, 2010, p. 30)

Ethnicity	Percentage
European	54.5%
Maori	22.5%
Pacific Islands	9.8%
Asian	9.5%
Other	2.4%
IFP	1.3%

What is the role of mainstream teachers in teaching ELLs?

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graph LR; MT((Mainstream Teachers)) --> ESOL((ESOL Specialists)); ESOL --> MT;
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Mainstreaming and ELLs

- access to the regular curriculum
- integration with language-majority students
- an authentic context for learning academic English

(Clegg, 1996, as cited in Wang, Many & Krumenaker, 2008).

The New Zealand Curriculum (2007)

“Effective teachers attend to the cultural and linguistic diversity of all their students” (p. 32)


“students who are new learners of English or coming into an English-medium environment for the first time need explicit and extensive teaching of English vocabulary, word forms, sentence and text structures, and language uses.”(p.16)

Why is teacher knowledge of ELLs important?

- Numbers of ELLs in our schools
- Most ELLs are in mainstream classes
- The achievement gap
- Curriculum expectations
- To meet the learning needs of ELLs
- To value learners of diverse backgrounds


What is the first thing that mainstream teachers need to do?

- ‘Know the learner’
 - The first of seven principles of effective teaching and learning for ELLs (*ESOL Online*)



What exactly do mainstream teachers need to know about ELLs?

- ‘Know your learners - their language background, their language proficiency, their experiential background’.




(Ministry of Education, ESOL Online, Principles of Effective learning and teaching for English language learners)

How can teachers find out about their ELLs?

1) The English Language Learning Progressions (2008)

“These progressions explain what ESOL specialists and mainstream teachers need to know about English language learners in order to maximise their learning and participation.”(p.4)




How can teachers find out about their ELLs? (cont’d)

2) The ESOL Online web site:
“a site for teachers to respond to the needs of their English language learners”.

3) The ESOL Funding Assessment Guidelines which include the ESOL Assessment Forms. (Ministry of Education, 1999)

How can teachers find out about their ELLs? (cont’d)

4) Professional Learning Modules



The present study – questions asked

- What do secondary mainstream teachers know about the background of their ELLs, and how important do they perceive this knowledge to be?
- What do secondary mainstream teachers know about the English language level of their ELLs, and how important do they perceive this knowledge to be?
- How do secondary mainstream teachers obtain knowledge about their ELLs?
- Do secondary mainstream teachers think they know enough about their ELLs?
- Are there any factors that have prevented secondary mainstream teachers from obtaining knowledge about their ELLs?

Participants

- Secondary mainstream teachers of English, Science, Mathematics or Social Science were sought to participate in the research
- 18 teachers
 - ✦ 10 – English
 - ✦ 2 – Social Science
 - ✦ 3 – Mathematics
 - ✦ 4 – Science

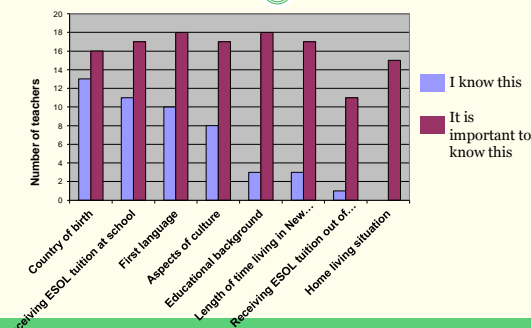


The survey

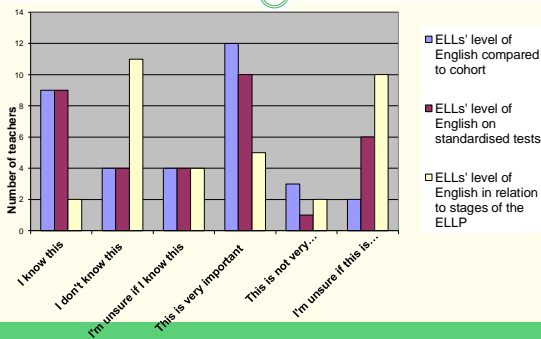
- Participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire.
- Mainly ‘closed’ questions, with some ‘open’ questions
- It was not compulsory to answer every question and one or more participants chose not to respond to some questions.



Teacher knowledge of ELLs' background

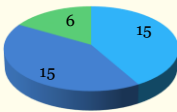


Teacher knowledge of ELLs' English



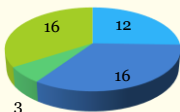
How do teachers obtain knowledge about their ELLs?

Background



From the ESOL teacher - 15
From the students - 15
From school records - 6

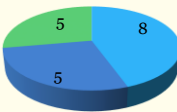
Level of English



From the ESOL teacher - 12
From own observations - 16
From classroom assessments - 16
From school records - 3

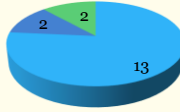
Do teachers think they know enough or want to learn more about their ELLs?

Background

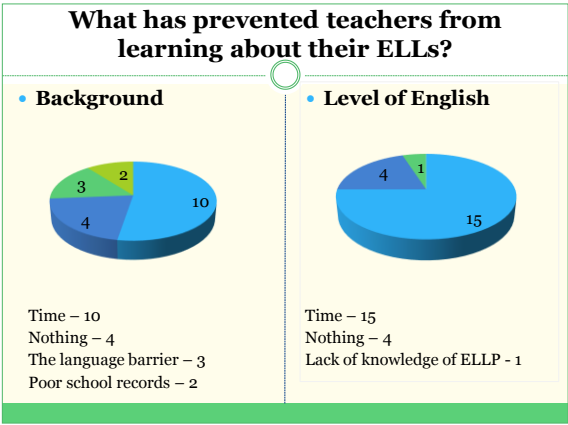


No, I don't know enough – 8
Yes, I do know enough – 5
Unsure – 5

Level of English




Would like to know more – 13
Would not like to know more – 2
Unsure – 2



- ### Summary
- Varying degrees of teacher knowledge about learners’ backgrounds
 - Teachers identified all areas of learner background as important - positive
 - Relatively little knowledge of learners’ English
 - The ELLP document seems to be under-utilised and undervalued
 - ESOL teachers are important, but only as important as teachers’ own information
 - Lack of time to gather information about learners is an issue

Overall conclusion

Secondary mainstream teachers may know only some basic information about their ELLs, rather than the wide range of information recommended as needed to enhance teaching effectiveness.



- ### Implications
- The needs of ELLs are not currently being met in our schools
 - A challenge not only for teachers, but also for school leaders and school management
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- ### Questions
- How do teachers in your school find out about their ELLs?
 - How do we enable mainstream teachers to learn more about their ELLs?

Thank you!

Please contact me if you would like a copy of the survey that was used:

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