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# Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists in Serving English Language Learners

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## Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists in Serving English Language Learners

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*Abstract:* The purpose of this study was to examine the training practices of NASP accredited graduate programs in school psychology with regard to best practices in working with English Language Learners (ELLs). Training directors of school psychology programs were surveyed regarding the amount of time and the extent of instruction they provided their school psychology graduate students on the topic of ELLs. School psychology interns were also surveyed regarding both their current knowledge about serving ELLs and their perceived preparedness to serve ELLs. Results indicated that school psychology programs are not adequately preparing graduate students to serve the growing population of ELLs. Faculty members cited time as the largest barrier to increasing their instruction about ELLs, particularly the amount of time that must be devoted to other requirements per state and national standards. Interns rated themselves as feeling less than adequately prepared to serve ELLs effectively, both during their internship and for their future practice. This article also presents implications for school psychology graduate training.

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The population of English Language Learning (ELL) students across the United States is rapidly growing, comprising nearly 10%, or an estimated 4.7 million students, enrolled in public schools in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013). The National Education Association (2008) projected that, by 2025, one out of every four students will be an ELL student. School psychologists are serving ELLs at an increasing rate, and these students possess unique needs and challenges. English Language Learners experience elevated levels of academic and psychosocial difficulties (Albers, Hoffman, & Lundahl, 2009), in particular, and studies have shown that, as a group, ELLs demonstrate the lowest academic achievement scores (Abedi, 2004) and the highest dropout rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Despite the increasing population trend and the growing needs of ELLs in the U.S., recent studies have pointed to a general lack of knowledge among school personnel

regarding ELLs (Batt, 2008; Durgunoğlu & Hughes, 2010; Newman, Samimy, & Romstedt, 2010; Zetlin, Beltran, Salcido, Gonzalez, & Reyes, 2011). These studies have indicated that teacher preparation programs fail to prepare teachers to serve ELLs and that, as a result, most teachers are unequipped to effectively teach ELLs in the classroom (Batt, 2008; Durgunoğlu & Hughes, 2010; Newman et al., 2010; Zetlin et al., 2011). In a survey conducted by Batt (2008), teachers conveyed their beliefs that the educators who work with ELLs in their school systems are not qualified to do so. Furthermore, the number of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and the number of bilingual teachers have not increased along with the population of ELLs (Batt, 2008; Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005).

This discrepancy extends to school psychology. For example, Albers et al. (2009) examined the literature on issues related to ELL students. Findings revealed that the number and the percentage of articles that addressed ELL-related issues in school psychology were relatively small (6.5%). Furthermore, more than half of the studies focused on assessment and eligibility, despite the rapidly expanding role of practitioners who serve ELLs (Styck, 2012). Additionally—and in spite of the clear population shift in U.S. students—the demographics of school psychologists have not mirrored this shift (Newell et al., 2010); 90.7% of school psychologists are White/Caucasian (Curtis, Castillo, & Gelley, 2012). Previous studies have also investigated training differences in school psychology graduate programs in preparing their students to work with diverse students, specifically noting that training varies widely by program, and that the variation is often parallel to program accreditation (APA or NASP). Training requirements in this area varied from offering or requiring a specific course in working with diverse students, requiring trainees to obtain practicum and/or internship experiences with diverse populations, conducting research in the area, and utilizing a method for assessing trainees' multicultural competencies (Styck, 2012). Styck (2012) recently conducted a survey of training directors in school psychology programs and found no significant differences in multicultural training offered between accredited and non-accredited programs (either APA or NASP). A larger number of accredited programs ( $n = 41$ ) surveyed offered a separate course dedicated to multicultural issues than non-accredited programs ( $n = 11$ ) surveyed; however, it is important to note that the sample size in this study was very small, particularly the sample of non-accredited programs.

Although past research has examined the training practices of school psychology graduate programs in preparing trainees to work with diverse populations (see Rogers, Ponterotto, Conoley, & Wiese, 1992; Styck, 2012), studies investigating preparation to work specifically with ELLs are limited. Ochoa, Rivera, and Ford (1997) examined the graduate training received by members of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) who were practicing in states with large populations of Hispanic students, particularly their training with regard to bilingual psycho-educational

assessment. In a sample of more than five thousand NASP members, approximately 70% of the respondents indicated that their training was less than adequate regarding bilingual psycho-educational assessment; 80% indicated that their training was less than adequate in the second-language acquisition process; 87% indicated that their training was less than adequate in preparing them to conduct a bilingual psycho-educational assessment; 81% indicated that their training was less than adequate for interpretation of results from bilingual psycho-educational assessments. O'Bryon and Rogers (2010) more recently conducted a national survey of 276 bilingual NASP members regarding their assessment practices with ELLs. As a part of this study, the researchers investigated the relationship between bilingual school psychologists' education and training in ELL assessment and their use of best practice assessment methods. The authors noted that few school psychology programs provide specific preparation opportunities for practitioners to deliver bilingual services. Of significance was the finding indicating that pre-service applied training experiences (i.e., practica, internship) involving work with ELL students under the supervision of a bilingual school psychologist was directly related to best practice behaviors in assessing student acculturation, an important component of a comprehensive evaluation.

The Ochoa et al. (1997) study is an important contribution to this scant area of research; however, the implications of this study are limited given the length of time since its publication. In addition, the focus of this survey was on training in conducting bilingual psychoeducational assessments, despite the wider range of roles and responsibilities school psychologists may now have when working with ELL students (Styck, 2012). Given the rapidly growing population of ELLs, school psychologists are increasingly called on to provide both direct services (e.g., assessment and intervention) and indirect services (e.g., consultation and staff training) to this population of students.

It is presumable that advancements have been made in the preparation of school psychologists to serve ELL students since the Ochoa et al. (1997) study was published; however, few recent studies have actually examined training practices in this area. NASP's *School Psychology: A Blueprint for Training and Practice III* publication (2006), which denotes diversity awareness and sensitive service delivery as a foundational competency, specifically argues that sensitivity is not an adequate level of competency in this domain; instead, competency is demonstrated in knowledge, skills, and applications relevant to diverse populations. Accredited school psychology programs must address multicultural competency development per this domain, which should include training in service provision for ELLs. NASP (2006) further notes that both a failure to recognize the impact of language and culture on school performance and the use of inappropriate methods for assessing ELLs demonstrate inadequate competence in this domain. The 2010 NASP Standards for Training and Field Placement Programs in School Psychology require that "school psychologists demonstrate the sensitivity and

skills needed to work with individuals of diverse characteristics and to implement strategies selected and/or adapted that are based on individual characteristics, strengths, and needs” (NASP, 2010, Domain 2.5).

Despite the push to improve training in the area of diversity awareness and sensitivity via the revisions of important NASP publications, few studies have actually examined how this competency is addressed and developed in school psychology graduate preparation programs specifically in serving the growing population of ELLs. The survey conducted by O’Byron and Rogers (2010) further added to this literature base; however, the focus was on service provision by bilingual school psychologists, specifically with regard to best practices in assessment of ELLs. Additional studies have examined school psychology graduate programs’ multicultural training practices, which encompass training in cultural and linguistic diversity. Newell (in preparation) conducted a survey of program directors in doctoral and non-doctoral school psychology programs and found an increasing trend of programs (78%) that provided some form of multicultural training, though this content was varied and limited in terms of its integration into the core curriculum. Additionally, little evidence exists to determine the degree to which multicultural training results in improved student outcomes, including those of ELLs (Newell et al., 2010). NASP allows programs to self-identify their coverage of multicultural issues in their training, but without a critical review of these analyses (NASP, 2010). As such, there is significant variation in training and, in particular, practicum training, as noted by Li and Fiorello (2011) regarding service provision for ELL students; they reported that this variation may range anywhere from work in a school with ELLs to placement in a site with a bilingual school psychologist supervisor.

School psychologists who work with ELLs in schools must possess knowledge of several key aspects of this unique population of learners. First, it is important for school psychologists to understand the second-language acquisition process so they can determine if a student’s academic difficulties are due to her or his stage in the acquisition process (Rhodes et al., 2005), and how this can impact performance on a variety of assessment measures. Second, it is important for school psychologists to be able to differentiate between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), so they can determine if academic and cognitive assessments are (a) appropriate and (b) measuring students’ cognitive and academic abilities or their language abilities (Cummins, 1984). They must also be aware of the impact of acculturation on a student’s academic and behavioral performance and should account for this in a comprehensive evaluation. School psychologists should also understand best practices in assessing ELLs (e.g., examining skills in a student’s native and second language) and in employing an effective decision-making process for evaluations with this population (O’Byron & Rogers, 2010). For example, the English

deficiencies that ELLs may display are often misidentified as disabilities by educators initiating referrals for special education. Frequent ineffective practices and misidentifications of ELLs in special education reflect a lack of knowledge among both general and special education teachers about ELLs (Newman et al., 2010; Sullivan, 2011; Zetlin et al., 2011). Referral questions for ELLs often focus on whether the student is struggling due to a learning disability or the second language acquisition process, two factors that are often differentiated incorrectly (Sullivan, 2011). Finally, school psychologists need to understand and then utilize effective consultation strategies, including the use of interpreters in meetings, and they also need to understand and then provide interventions to teachers for supporting ELL students.

Given the limited recent literature examining training practices, it is unknown how much time and to what extent school psychology programs are addressing the topic of ELLs. There are multiple ways that training programs may deliver instruction on ELLs to their graduate students (i.e., separate course, required practicum experience, observations in the schools, etc.); however, there is likely little consistency across graduate training programs. This may be attributed to a lack of specific national standards-based requirements regarding ELLs; therefore, information regarding instruction on ELLs in school psychology graduate programs is largely unknown. Given the sequence of the internship immediately following the training program, determining the knowledge that school psychology interns possess regarding ELLs may aid training programs in making appropriate adjustments to their curricula in this area. The present study posed three research questions: (1) How much time and to what extent do school psychology programs devote to educating their graduate students on the best practices in serving English Language Learners? (2) What are the barriers to increasing ELL instruction? (3) What do school psychology interns know about best practices in serving ELLs, and what are these interns' perceptions of their training regarding ELLs?

## Method

### Participants

**Faculty.** Surveys were distributed via email to training directors ( $n = 190$ ) of all NASP-approved school psychology graduate programs. In the email, program directors were asked to forward an intern survey link to current interns in their programs. Twenty-six faculty participants completed the electronic faculty survey (response rate of 14.7%). Participating programs offered masters (62%), educational specialist (69%), and doctoral (38%) degrees. Of the faculty respondents, 77% indicated that they were their program's director/coordinator; 27% indicated that they were their program's internship coordinator.

**Interns.** Sixty-seven interns completed the intern survey. A response rate could not be calculated for the interns who participated in the survey because it is unknown how many faculty members distributed the survey to their current interns; faculty were

not required to report this information. Of the intern respondents, 69% were seeking an educational specialist degree; 16% were seeking master’s degrees; 18% were seeking doctoral-level degrees. Ethnicity information was collected from intern participants: 76% of intern respondents were White; 9% Latino; 4% African American; 3% Asian American; and 7% Biracial. The number of languages spoken by interns was also obtained, and the majority of intern respondents (84%) indicated speaking one language; 12% spoke two languages; 3% spoke three languages; and 1% spoke more than four languages. Table 1 provides information about the state in which faculty and intern participants resided, along with data regarding the percentage of school-age students by state who participated in programming for ELLs in the 2011-2012 school year.

**Table 1**  
**Geographical Information for the Sample**

State	Faculty ( <i>n</i> )	Interns ( <i>n</i> )	% of students in the state participating in ELL programming <sup>1</sup>
Alabama	1	---	2.4
Arizona	1	---	7.5
Arkansas	---	3	6.9
California	2	12	23.2
Colorado	1	1	12.0
Florida	2	2	8.8
Illinois	1	2	8.2
Iowa	1	---	4.5
Kansas	1	1	8.5
Massachusetts	1	7	7.9
Nebraska	1	2	5.8
New Mexico	---	1	16.1
New York	1	3	7.8
North Carolina	1	3	6.7
Ohio	2	14	2.2
Oklahoma	1	---	6.7
Pennsylvania	1	4	2.7
Rhode Island	---	1	6.1
South Carolina	---	4	5.4
Tennessee	1	2	3.1
Texas	2	2	14.9

Washington	1	---	7.9
Wisconsin	2	1	5.1
District of Columbia	1	2	8.4
<b>TOTAL/AVERAGE</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>9.1</b>

<sup>1</sup> 2010-2011 data obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics

([http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13\\_216.50.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_216.50.asp)) ; These percentages only include students reported by districts as participating in ELL programming.

## **Instruments**

Two surveys were designed for the present study: (1) the program faculty survey, and (2) the intern survey (forwarded to interns by program faculty). The surveys (see Appendix) were piloted with current and past school psychology program faculty and interns at The University of Dayton. Results from the pilot yielded minor changes to the wording of the questions, the directions, and the formatting of the survey. The faculty survey included a demographics section (i.e., degrees offered, position, and state), followed by a set of questions regarding how faculty prepare graduate students in their programs to work with ELL students in a school setting. Faculty respondents were asked to list the number and title of any courses in which the topic of ELLs/second language acquisition is covered in their training programs. Faculty members were also asked to indicate the amount of time devoted to discussing ELL issues (i.e., entire course, embedded as a topic in other courses, etc.) as well as the specific resources (i.e., textbooks, websites, books, videos, handouts, etc.) used to supplement their instruction on the topic of ELLs. Faculty members were also asked to rate how prepared they believe their graduate students are to work with ELLs. Finally, faculty members were asked two open-ended questions regarding (1) reasons that they devote the previously identified amount of time to instruction on serving ELLs, and (2) the perceived barriers to increasing instruction on ELLs for school psychology graduate students. The faculty survey took approximately ten minutes to complete.

The intern survey (forwarded to interns by program faculty participants) was divided into the following three sections: (1) demographics, (2) knowledge about ELLs, and (3) perceptions of training experiences. In the demographics section, interns were asked to identify the degree they were seeking, ethnicity, and the number of languages spoken. Additionally, interns identified the number of courses in which the topics of ELLs and the second-language acquisition process were covered in their training programs, as well as the number of courses completed that addressed legal and ethical issues surrounding ELLs. Finally, interns were asked to provide an overall rating of how prepared they felt to work with ELLs in the schools.

The second section of the survey asked interns to answer ten true/false questions and two multiple-choice questions assessing their knowledge of ELLs. On each of the



true/false questions, interns were given the options of answering “True,” “False, or “I don’t know.” The questions on this section of the survey were derived from multiple resources on the best practices in supporting ELLs in the schools (see Rhodes et al., 2005), and they included questions pertaining to educational programming for ELLs, second language acquisition, assessment with ELLs, and the use of interpreters in working with ELLs.

The final section of the survey asked interns to rate how well their school psychology programs prepared them to complete nine common responsibilities of school psychologists regarding ELL service delivery on a five-point Likert scale. Responsibilities included tasks such as differentiating between a disability and language acquisition difficulties, participating in a multidisciplinary team for an ELL student, and developing intervention and progress monitoring plans for an ELL student. The final open-ended question in this section asked interns to list their primary concerns with providing services to ELLs in their internships and in their future practice. The intern survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

### **Procedures**

This study’s researchers obtained approval to carry out this study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Dayton. The faculty survey was distributed to school psychology program directors of NASP-approved graduate programs via email using Qualtrics, an online survey distribution tool. In this email, program directors were asked to forward the intern survey to current interns in their programs. The initial email was sent in November so that the interns’ recollections of their training programs were recent, and thus more accurate. A follow-up reminder was emailed to program directors two weeks after the initial email. The emails to both faculty and interns explained that completion of the survey was anonymous and that clicking the link to the survey served as informed consent. Interns were informed that their responses would not be linked back to their names or shared directly with program directors. As an incentive, both school psychology program coordinators and interns were given the opportunity to be entered into two separate drawings to receive \$50 Amazon gift cards; two interns and two faculty respondents were selected.

### **Results**

Results of both surveys yielded a mix of categorical and descriptive data. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data and a content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data collected from the final questions on both the faculty survey and intern survey.

#### **Coverage of ELL Service Delivery in School Psychology Programs**

Faculty members and interns were asked, “How do you address the topic of English Language Learning (ELL) students in your training program?” and subsequently

selected one answer that best described the training experience. Additionally, all respondents were asked, “How is the topic of the second language acquisition process covered in your training program?” Table 2 describes their responses to these questions.

**Table 2**  
**Coverage of ELLs and the Second Language Acquisition Process in School Psychology Programs**

Response	Faculty (n = 26)		Interns (n = 67)	
	<i>ELLs</i>	<i>Second Language Acquisition</i>	<i>ELLs</i>	<i>Second Language Acquisition</i>
A specific course is devoted to the population of ELL students and the topic is covered in other courses.	22%	4%	7%	21%
A specific course is devoted to the population of ELL students.	4%	4%	3%	1%
The topic is covered in more than four courses.	41%	21%	10%	22%
The topic is covered in three courses.	3%	13%	9%	26%
The topic is covered in two courses.	15%	38%	18%	15%
The topic is covered in one course.	7%	21%	34%	9%
The topic is not covered at all.	0%	0%	19%	6%

Of participating interns, 81% reported receiving some training (one to three courses) on legal/ethical issues and ELLs; however, a surprising 19% indicated receiving no formal training on ELLs and the second language acquisition process.

Participating faculty members were then asked to list the courses in which the topic of ELLs is covered for more than ten minutes and then to describe the extent of the coverage in each of the courses. This question was misinterpreted by several respondents; therefore, the average amount of time spent instructing on the topic of ELLs could not be computed. The majority of faculty respondents indicated that the topic of ELLs was taught in existing courses such as cultural diversity, assessment, practicum, and internship. Of the 24 faculty respondents, nine reported that they spend time instructing on this topic because of the high population of ELLs in schools. Additionally, faculty who covered ELLs noted the following: “the development of English provides insight into cognitive/ developmental mechanisms”; “state law requires a minimum of 3 ELL credit hours”; “students (need to) know how to assess ELLs”; and “students (need to) become culturally competent.” One faculty respondent simply noted, “We don’t do enough.”

### **Intern Knowledge of ELLs**

On the ELL knowledge survey items, participating interns answered 64.9% of the items correctly, indicated “I don’t know” on 24.6% of the items, and incorrectly answered 10.5% of the items. These results indicate that, overall, the intern respondents lacked knowledge about important and basic best practices in serving ELLs. Questions pertaining to educational programming for ELLs and the second language acquisition process were answered correctly, on average, 66% (ELLs) and 59% (second language acquisition) of the time. Interns demonstrated slightly better knowledge of assessment practices and ELLs, answering these questions correctly, on average, 74% of the time. These percentages do not include those interns who selected “I don’t know” as a response. Table 3 provides an item analysis of the responses on the intern knowledge survey.

**Table 3**  
**Intern School Psychologists' Knowledge of ELLs**

Question	% answered Correct	% answered “I don’t know”	% answered Incorrect
ESL programs and bilingual programs provide instruction the same way. <i>Answer = FALSE</i>	89%	11%	0%
BICS is associated with language skills that are needed to complete schoolwork (e.g., speaking, reading, and writing). <i>Answer = FALSE</i>	67%	30%	3%
It is appropriate for a school psychologist to use a translator to translate a behavior rating scale from English to another language and use the English norm-referenced scores of that rating scale in an evaluation (e.g., BASC-2). <i>Answer = FALSE</i>	67%	25%	8%
If a student is able to communicate fluently in a conversation with a school psychologist, this means he or she has obtained enough English proficiency to take a standardized assessment. <i>Answer = FALSE</i>	86%	8%	6%
CALP refers to the language that is needed for social interactions. <i>Answer = FALSE</i>	73%	24%	3%
It is not appropriate for a school psychologist to use a translator to translate a cognitive or academic assessment and use the English norm-referenced scores from the test in an evaluation. <i>Answer = TRUE</i>	76%	14%	10%
Assessing an ELL student’s skills only in English is appropriate during an evaluation. <i>Answer = FALSE</i>	94%	3%	3%
The strongest predictor of a student’s success with a second language is the amount of schooling the student received in his or her first language. <i>Answer = TRUE</i>	48%	21%	32%
Immersing an ELL student in English instruction is the	59%	19%	22%

most effective way for the student to acquire academic English. *Answer = FALSE*

ELL students with learning disabilities will exhibit a slow learning rate when progress-monitored with curriculum-based measures that measure literacy skills. *Answer = TRUE*

51%	40%	10%
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Which of the following types of programs have the most positive longitudinal outcomes for ELLs ? (options given: transitional/early-exit bilingual education programs; two-way/dual-language bilingual education programs; pullout ESL programs; content-based ESL/sheltered English programs; I don't know). *Answer = Two-Way/Dual-Language Bilingual Education Programs*

51%	35%	14%
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In what stage of the second-language acquisition process should an educator expect to experience a silent period with an ELL student? (options given: stage one; stage two; stage three; stage four; stage five; I don't know) *Answer= Stage One*

21%	65%	14%
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**TOTAL AVERAGES**

65%	10%	25%
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## Perceptions of Preparedness to Serve ELLs

Faculty and intern respondents were asked to rate (on a five-point Likert scale) how well their programs prepare students to serve ELLs in the schools. Table 4 summarizes participants' responses to this question.

Specific analysis of the knowledge and perception portions of the intern survey suggests that, although the majority of participating interns (81%) reported receiving instruction on ELLs in multiple courses, overall, interns do not feel prepared to serve ELLs. An average preparedness score was computed based on all nine of the responsibilities in which participating interns rated their preparedness. Approximately 20% of interns reported feeling "successfully prepared" and "over-prepared." They felt most prepared to participate in a multidisciplinary team for an ELL student in order to provide insight regarding whether or not an ELL student should be identified as having an educational disability. Intern respondents felt least prepared to participate in bilingual assessment procedures and deliver in-services to other staff members on the topic of ELLs. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between intern perceptions of preparedness to serve ELL students and intern knowledge of ELL best practices (based on a percentage of knowledge questions answered correctly). For this analysis, responses of "I don't know" were considered incorrect. There was a small positive correlation between the two variables,  $r = 0.157$  ( $n = 62$ ); however, the findings were not significant ( $p = 0.223$ ).

**Table 4**  
**Faculty and Intern Perceptions of Preparedness to Serve ELLs**

Response	Faculty (n = 26)	Interns (n = 67)
Graduate program does not prepare graduate students to work with ELL students.	0%	6%
Graduate program minimally prepares graduate students to work with ELL students.	12%	28%
Graduate program somewhat prepares graduate students to work with ELL students.	36%	44%
Graduate program successfully prepares graduate students to work with ELL students.	44%	32%
Graduate program over-prepares graduate students to work with ELL students.	8%	1%

Intern school psychologists were also asked to describe their primary concerns about providing services to ELLs in their internships and in future practice. The majority of responses indicated concerns regarding accurate assessment and evaluation of ELLs. Additional concerns included providing interventions to ELLs, assessing ELLs without a bilingual school psychologist, working through the language barrier with parents, lacking experience with ELLs, and the lack of educational resources available for school psychologists.

### **Barriers to Providing Effective Instruction on ELLs**

Nearly half (45.5%) of the faculty respondents cited not having enough time in the curriculum—due to other state and national requirements—to effectively cover the range of issues regarding school psychology services for ELLs. More specifically, participants indicated that, although coverage of this topic could be embedded in other courses, there was no room in their programs of study to add additional required or elective courses. Further, participating faculty reported limited knowledge of students' practicum and internship supervisors (22.7%) as an additional barrier to providing effective instruction. Finally, 18% of faculty respondents identified the lack of opportunity to apply best practices with ELLs in the schools as a barrier to providing effective instruction regarding ELL students.

## **Discussion**

Results of this study present multiple implications for graduate preparation in school psychology. For example, this study sheds light on the potential to provide additional instruction on this topic in school psychology graduate programs, particularly in light of the growing population of ELL students in U.S. schools. It is encouraging that at least some coverage of ELL-related issues was reported by all faculty respondents and by an 81% majority of intern respondents. Further, all participating faculty reported coverage of second language acquisition issues and 94% of participating interns also reported exposure in this area. Consequently, faculty and intern perceptions of preparedness were limited. Nearly half (48%) of faculty respondents noted that their programs minimally prepare or somewhat prepare students to serve ELLs, while 72% of intern respondents reported the same, with 21% of interns noting that their programs successfully prepared them to serve ELLs. Intern perceptions of preparedness are likely related to intern knowledge; however, the results of a correlational analysis were not significant, likely due to the small size of the sample in the current study. It would be important to further examine this relationship as well as the relationship between faculty perceptions of preparedness and intern knowledge, which was not examined because intern data could not be linked to faculty responses in the current design.

Many of the skills in which school psychologists are well trained (e.g., consultation, measurement, problem solving) lend themselves to providing high quality services to ELL students. However, ELL students have unique needs often related to the second language acquisition process, in addition to their cultural, socioeconomic, and learning issues. School psychologists should possess adequate knowledge of these issues in order to facilitate effective problem solving for ELL students. As previously noted, ELLs who are referred for special education evaluations frequently present with difficulties that are difficult/challenging to unravel, specifically the overlap between learning issues and the second language acquisition process (Sullivan, 2011). Often serving in a leadership role on school-based teams, school psychologists must, at a minimum, be able to explain these issues to others, to know what information is needed to assess and differentiate these factors, and to examine the problem in a systematic and culturally responsive manner that encourages the best possible outcome for the child and family.

Fortunately, participating interns felt most prepared to collaborate with others as a member of a multidisciplinary team making educational decisions for ELL students. However, their knowledge of issues related to second language acquisition, translator use, and assessment, was quite limited. Their overall average score on the knowledge survey fell in the “D” range, a failing grade in a school psychology graduate course. Few respondents (4% of faculty; 1% of interns), indicated that an entire course in their programs of study was devoted to ELLs, with faculty citing overwhelming accreditation requirements impeding this possibility. While it may not be necessary to carve out an entire course on the topic, programs must systematically plan for inclusion of significantly more relevant ELL content in their curriculum. This may be increasingly important for graduate programs located in states with high numbers of ELL students served in the school system. Often amidst the many issues that should be addressed, certain topics and skills fall through the cracks. The results of this study, coupled with the changing demographic profile of American schools, point to a need for continued examination of accreditation requirements and curriculum in school psychology graduate programs.

### **Limitations**

The current study is not without limitations. First, the low response rate resulting in a small sample size significantly limits the broad interpretations that can be made based on the data. The results may not necessarily be representative of all NASP-approved school psychology graduate program faculty and interns in the United States. Second, because the survey was completed electronically, technical problems preventing proper submission of the survey were possible. The response rate among faculty members was expectedly low (14.74%) and consistent with research demonstrating declining survey response rates in organizational sciences (Anseel, Lievens, Schollaert &



Choragwicka, 2010). There is always a potential for response bias given the self-reporting nature of the instrument. Although interns' responses were not linked to faculty responses, nor connected back to their graduate programs, it is presumable that interns may have answered the survey in a way that improved their perceived competence by others. Additionally, the school psychology faculty members and interns who chose to participate in this survey may have done so because of a strong interest in the topic of ELLs; therefore, the percentage of correct responses on the knowledge survey may be elevated. An additional limitation was the previously noted misinterpretation of questions on the survey. Finally, because intern and faculty surveys were anonymous, the researchers could not calculate correlations between faculty and intern responses, which may have provided opportunities for additional interpretations of the data.

### **Implications for Training and Future Research**

The implications for training are numerous. School psychology program faculty should conduct a critical analysis of their curriculum, identifying specific areas in which ELL-related issues are reviewed. Considerations should be given to requiring a practicum experience with a practicing school psychologist who works with ELL students on a daily basis—or at the very least, an observation of such a practicing school psychologist. Further, internship site placements should be closely examined with regard to opportunities for interns to directly serve ELL students and families, in addition to supervisor credentials and experience with this population.

Faculty should examine curricula content and delivery, as well as practica and internship experiences, with the aim to increase coverage, exposure, and practice of the following specific issues/skills related to ELLs:

- *Second language acquisition.* School psychologists require knowledge of this process, specifically the development and distinction of BICS (basic interpersonal communication skills) and CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency), the stages of language acquisition, and the observed differences between learning issues and second language acquisition.
- *Educational programming.* School psychologists need to possess an understanding of the various types of programming for ELLs in schools (e.g., bilingual, immersion, ESL pullout, content-based/sheltered instruction, etc.), and specifically an understanding of the research demonstrating the effects of these different options for different students.
- *Assessment practices.* School psychologists should know how to approach an evaluation for an ELL student that considers the multiple factors involved. This includes awareness of best practices in working with interpreters, interpreting bilingual reports, progress monitoring (i.e., issues involved in using CBMs for

ELLs), and how to obtain assessment information from students with limited English proficiency.

- *Legal/Ethical*. School psychologists should be aware of the laws in their state that guide practices for serving ELLs in the school setting. These laws may include requirements for educational programming, statewide assessments, and/or evaluations.
- *Effective interventions*. School psychologists should have knowledge of evidence-based academic and behavioral interventions that demonstrate effectiveness for ELL students.
- *Cultural/Family*. School psychologists need to possess multicultural competencies that have a positive impact on their consultation with families of ELL students. Specifically, school psychologists must understand in more detail, the intersection of culture, language, and learning, as well as the influence of a child's schooling history, immigration experience, and family background on his/her educational performance.
- *Acculturation issues*. School psychologists should have an understanding of how a student's and a family's level of acculturation influences language development, school adjustment, academic achievement, and social-emotional functioning.

Future research should thus include a more comprehensive analysis of school psychology programs' coverage of ELLs in their curriculum. Specifically, a NASP-initiated survey of training directors is warranted, given the length of time that has passed since the Ochoa et al. (1997) study was conducted. A close examination of programs that are effectively training their students to serve the population of ELLs—perhaps programs located in states with a large population of ELLs—could tangibly assist others in improving instruction in this area. It would also be interesting to investigate the differences in the knowledge of and use of best practices by interns and practicing school psychologists in states with high versus low percentages of ELL students. It is presumable that exposure to districts with large numbers of ELL students would result in more enriched practicum and internship experiences, but whether this would translate to utilizing best practices is unknown. Unfortunately, the small sample size in the current study did not allow for a close analysis of these potential differences.

The NASP website provides a list of 20 self-identified programs with a specific focus on multiculturalism/bilingualism, evidenced by a commitment to a multicultural curriculum, recruitment of culturally and linguistically diverse students, and faculty research on multiculturalism/bilingualism. Four of the identified programs provide a bilingual specialization. It would be interesting to work directly with these specialized training programs to develop a best practice framework to serve ELLs that graduate programs across the nation might utilize. Further, it would be interesting to examine

training provided by culturally/linguistically diverse school psychology faculty across the country to determine the influence this diversity may have on preparation outcomes. Finally, an updated assessment of needs from the perspectives of currently practicing school psychologists who work with ELLs, could help to inform the graduate preparation programs' delivery of this important content.

### **Conclusion**

The population of ELLs in public schools is rapidly growing (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2013), and research has demonstrated a lack of knowledge among school personnel regarding effective service delivery for ELLs (Batt, 2008; Durgunoğlu & Hughes, 2010; Newman, Samimy, & Romstedt, 2010; Zetlin et al., 2011). School psychologists play an important role in the lives of ELLs through both direct and indirect service delivery. Research regarding the training of school psychologists to serve ELLs is limited. The current NASP (2010) training domains do not specifically address coverage of ELLs in school psychology curricula. There is a clear need for increased and improved training of school psychology graduate students regarding the best practices in working with ELLs.

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## APPENDIX: SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

### FACULTY SURVEY

**Directions:** Please answer the following eleven brief questions about the training in your school psychology program. It is estimated that this survey will take five to ten minutes to complete. Thank you in advance for your time and help. You may skip questions that you feel uncomfortable answering and move to the next question to continue the survey. Remember, your answers will be kept confidential and your responses will in no way be linked to your training program. Thank you in advance for your time and help.

**(1) Is your school psychology program approved by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)?**

- Yes
- No

**(2) Please check all degrees that your program offers:**

- Master's Degree
- Education Specialist Degree
- Doctorate Degree
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**(3) In what state is your school psychology program located?**

**(4) What is your position in the school psychology program? (check all that apply)**

- School Psychology Program Coordinator/ Director
- Internship Coordinator
- Full Professor
- Associate Professor
- Assistant Professor
- Adjunct Professor
- Instructor
- Clinical Faculty/ Instructor
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**(5) How do you address the topic of English Language Learning (ELL) students in your training program? (please check only ONE answer that best describes the coverage)**

- A specific course is devoted to the population of ELL students and the topic is covered in other courses.
- A specific course is devoted to the population of ELL students.
- The topic is covered in more than four courses.
- The topic is covered in three courses.
- The topic is covered in two courses.
- The topic is covered in one course.
- The topic is not covered at all.

**(6) Considering your response to the previous question, please list the title of EVERY course in which the topic of ELL students is covered for more than 10 minutes and describe the extent of coverage in each of the courses you list with one of the following options:**

11-30 minutes                      31-60 minutes                      61-90 minutes                      more than 90 minutes.

**Please format your answers as follows:**

Course Title	Amount of Time Spent Instructing on the Topic of ELL Students
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**(7) Please list the textbook(s) and/or other resources (websites, books, videos, handouts, etc.) that are used in the courses that you previously listed to instruct on the topic of ELL students.**

**(8) Why does your program devote the amount of time they do to instructing on the topic of ELL students?**

**(9) How is the topic of the second-language acquisition process covered in your program? (please check only ONE answer that best describes the coverage)**

- A specific course is devoted to the second-language acquisition process and the topic is covered in other courses.
- A specific course is devoted to the second-language acquisition process.
- The topic is covered in more than four courses.
- The topic is covered in three courses.
- The topic is covered in two courses.
- The topic is covered in one course.



- The topic is not covered at all.

**(10) Please indicate how prepared you believe your graduate students are to work with ELL students on a scale from 1-5.**

- 1= We do not prepare our graduate students to work with ELL students.
- 2= We minimally prepare our graduate students to work with ELL students.
- 3= We somewhat prepare our graduate students to work with ELL students.
- 4= We successfully prepare our graduate students to work with ELL students.
- 5= We over-prepare our graduate students to work with ELL students.

**(11) What barriers do you see to providing effective instruction to your students on the best practices surrounding ELL students?**

## INTERN SURVEY

**Directions:** Please answer the following ten questions regarding your training in providing services to English Language Learning (ELL) students to the best of your ability. It is estimated that this survey will take approximately 10-20 minutes to complete. You may skip questions that you feel uncomfortable answering and move to the next question to continue the survey. Remember, your answers will be kept confidential and your responses will in no way be linked to your training program. Thank you in advance for your time and help.

### SECTION ONE: DEMOGRAPHICS

**(1) Are you currently an intern in a school psychology program?**

- Yes
- No

**(2) Is your school psychology program approved by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)?**

- Yes
- No

**(3) Please check the degree you are seeking.**

- Masters
- Education Specialist

- PhD
- PsyD
- EdD
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**(4) In what state is your school psychology program located?**

**(5) What is your ethnic background?**

- Asian American
- African American
- Native American
- White Latino
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**(6) How many languages do you speak fluently?**

- One
- Two
- Three
- Four
- More than four

**(7) Please indicate the language(s) you speak fluently.**

**(8) How are ELL issues addressed/covered in your training program? (please check only ONE answer that best describes the coverage)**

- A specific course is devoted to the population of ELL students and it was covered in other courses.
- A specific course is devoted to the population of ELL students.
- The topic is covered in more than four courses.
- The topic is covered in three courses.
- The topic is covered in two courses.
- The topic is covered in one course.
- The topic is not covered at all.

**(9) How is the topic of the second-language acquisition process covered in your program? (please check only ONE answer that best describes the coverage)**

- A specific course is devoted to the second-language acquisition process and it was covered in other courses.

- A specific course is devoted to the second-language acquisition process.
- The topic is covered in more than four courses.
- The topic is covered in three courses.
- The topic is covered in two courses.
- The topic is covered in one course.
- The topic is not covered at all.

**(10) How much training did you receive regarding the legal and ethical issues surrounding ELL students?**

- I received training in three or more courses.
- I received training in two courses.
- I received training in one course.
- I did not receive training.

**(11) On a scale from 1-5, how well do you feel that your graduate training program prepared you to work with the population of ELL students?**

- 1= My graduate program did not prepare me to work with ELL students.
- 2= My graduate program minimally prepared me to work with ELL students.
- 3= My graduate program somewhat prepared me to work with ELL students.
- 4= My graduate program successfully prepared me to work with ELL students.
- 5= My graduate program over-prepared me to work with ELL students.

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## **SECTION TWO: ELL KNOWLEDGE**

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**Directions:** Please answer the following ten true/false questions and two multiple-choice questions regarding your knowledge about the population of ELL students. Please do not use any outside resources to answer these questions, but rather answer them based on the knowledge you currently possess. You may skip questions that you feel uncomfortable answering and move to the next question to continue the survey. Remember, your answers will be kept confidential and your responses will in no way be linked to your training program. Thank you in advance for your time and help.

**For each of the questions in this section, please answer “True” if you know the answer is true, “I don’t know” if you don’t know the answer (please do not guess), and “False” if you know the answer is false.**

**(1) English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and bilingual programs provide instruction in the same way.**

- True
- I don't know
- False

**(2) BICS is associated with the language skills that are needed to complete schoolwork (e.g., speaking, reading, and writing).**

- True
- I don't know
- False

**(3) It is appropriate for a school psychologist to use a translator to translate a behavior rating scale from English to another language and use the English norm-referenced scores of that rating scale in an evaluation (e.g., BASC-2).**

- True
- I don't know
- False

**(4) If a student is able to communicate fluently in a conversation to a school psychologist, this means they have obtained enough English proficiency to take a standardized assessment.**

- True
- I don't know
- False

**(5) CALP refers to the language that is needed for social interactions.**

- True
- I don't know
- False

**(6) It is not appropriate for a school psychologist to use a translator to translate a cognitive or academic assessment and use the English norm-referenced scores from the test in an evaluation.**

- True
- I don't know
- False

**(7) Assessing an ELL student's skills only in English is appropriate during an evaluation.**

- True
- I don't know
- False

**(8) The strongest predictor of a student's success with a second language is the amount of schooling the student received in his or her first language.**

- True
- I don't know
- False

**(9) Immersing an ELL student in English instruction is the most effective way for the student to acquire academic English.**

- True
- I don't know
- False

**(10) ELL students with learning disabilities will exhibit a slow learning rate when progress-monitored with curriculum-based measures that measure literacy skills.**

- True
- I don't know
- False

**(11) Which of the following programs has the most positive longitudinal outcomes for ELL students? (Choose only ONE answer.)**

- Transitional/Early-Exit Bilingual Education Programs
- Two-Way/Dual-Language Bilingual Education Programs
- Pullout ESL Programs
- Content-Based ESL/Sheltered English Programs
- I don't know

**(12) In what stage of the second-language acquisition process should an educator expect to experience a "silent period" with an ELL student? (Choose only ONE answer.)**

- Stage One
- Stage Two

- Stage Three
- Stage Four
- Stage Five
- I don't know

### **SECTION THREE: PERCEPTIONS (FINAL SECTION)**

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**Directions:** Please answer the following brief questions about your school psychology program to the best of your ability. You may skip questions that you feel uncomfortable answering and continue the survey. Remember, your answers will be kept confidential and your responses will in no way be linked to your training program.

(1) To what extent do you feel that your school psychology program prepared you to **conduct a bilingual assessment**? Please rate this item from 1-5, where:

- 1= My program did not prepare me.
- 2= My program minimally prepared me.
- 3= My program somewhat prepared me.
- 4= My program successfully prepared me.
- 5= My program over-prepared me.

(2) To what extent do you feel that your school psychology program prepared you to **differentiate between a disability and ELL issues (e.g., language acquisition)**?

Please rate this item from 1-5, where:

- 1= My program did not prepare me.
- 2= My program minimally prepared me.
- 3= My program somewhat prepared me.
- 4= My program successfully prepared me.
- 5= My program over-prepared me.

(3) To what extent do you feel that your school psychology program prepared you to **develop and deliver in-services to school staff about ELL students**?

Please rate this item from 1-5, where:

- 1= My program did not prepare me.

- 2= My program minimally prepared me.
- 3= My program somewhat prepared me.
- 4= My program successfully prepared me.
- 5= My program over-prepared me.

(4) To what extent do you feel that your school psychology program prepared you to **be part of a multidisciplinary team serving an ELL student?**

Please rate this item from 1-5, where:

- 1= My program did not prepare me.
- 2= My program minimally prepared me.
- 3= My program somewhat prepared me.
- 4= My program successfully prepared me.
- 5= My program over-prepared me.

(5) To what extent do you feel that your school psychology program prepared you to **provide other school-age students with information about ELL students?**

Please rate this item from 1-5, where:

- 1= My program did not prepare me.
- 2= My program minimally prepared me.
- 3= My program somewhat prepared me.
- 4= My program successfully prepared me.
- 5= My program over-prepared me.

(6) To what extent do you feel that your school psychology program prepared you to **provide appropriate school-based interventions for ELL students?**

Please rate this item from 1-5, where:

- 1= My program did not prepare me.
- 2= My program minimally prepared me.
- 3= My program somewhat prepared me.
- 4= My program successfully prepared me.
- 5= My program over-prepared me.

(7) To what extent do you feel that your school psychology program prepared you to **provide accommodations or modifications for ELL students?**

Please rate this item from 1-5, where:

- 1= My program did not prepare me.
- 2= My program minimally prepared me.
- 3= My program somewhat prepared me.
- 4= My program successfully prepared me.
- 5= My program over-prepared me.

(8) To what extent do you feel that your school psychology program prepared you to **progress-monitor the academic progress for ELL students?**

Please rate this item from 1-5, where:

- 1= My program did not prepare me.
- 2= My program minimally prepared me.
- 3= My program somewhat prepared me.
- 4= My program successfully prepared me.
- 5= My program over-prepared me.

(9) To what extent do you feel that your school psychology program prepared you to **participate in an educational team involving the decision-making process of whether or not an ELL student should be identified as having a specific learning disability or be identified under another special education disability category?**

Please rate this item from 1-5, where:

- 1= My program did not prepare me.
- 2= My program minimally prepared me.
- 3= My program somewhat prepared me.
- 4= My program successfully prepared me.
- 5= My program over-prepared me.

**(10) What are your primary concerns with regards to providing services to ELL students in your internship and beyond?**

*(extended response)*