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English Language Learners and Learning Disabilities

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND LEARNING DISABILITIES

By

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ABSTRACT

The research question addressed in this capstone was, How do educators decipher whether a student is experiencing the typical language acquisition process or if they have a learning disability? This capstone provides research from current educators' knowledge around understanding and identifying potential learning disabilities in English language learners. In order to address the gaps in knowledge that were identified, professional development and scholarly articles were collected and presented to school administration to distribute and make recommendations around professional development opportunities for staff.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As an educator very new to the profession, I am beginning to understand and see firsthand the challenges that English language learners (ELLs) face with language acquisition within a highly diverse school population. I currently support English language learners who have been diagnosed with a disability. I see how the challenge of working to overcome a disability, along with learning English is difficult for students. It is through my experiences, that this question arose, *How do educators decipher whether a student is experiencing the typical language acquisition process or if they have a learning disability?*

My Journey to English Language Learners

For as long as I can remember, I have enjoyed helping people. It was not until later in life that I came to realize that passion would manifest itself into my path of becoming a teacher. While working as a special education paraprofessional, I began to explore different options within the education field. I came to realize through my time as a paraprofessional that my calling did not include becoming a traditional mainstream teacher with a class of 30 students. As someone with an introverted personality that is not where I feel my most comfortable. Instead, I wanted to have the opportunity to work with students in a small group setting or in a one-on-one capacity. I heard about a specialized segment working with ELLs, however, before I committed to this path, I needed to find out more. In an effort to get more information, I contacted a local English language learner teacher and asked if I could observe in her classroom. After the first observation in her classroom, I was hooked! After watching the students practice their language skills, I saw what a privilege it is to share the gift of language with students. In addition,

English language learners bring various cultural backgrounds and experiences to the classroom. Fast forward three years and here I am, in my first year of teaching, ELL. My teaching experience thus far has not disappointed. The students are engaging, and I am thoroughly enjoying having the opportunity to share language with my students.

My Professional Experiences

Although my professional experience as a teacher has been brief thus far, I have spent time within the classroom. As was previously mentioned, I worked as a special education paraprofessional in a level four setting, which means that students are removed from a general education setting and are paired with a paraprofessional in a one-on-one or small group setting. This was both physically and mentally challenging. I worked with students who were labeled with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Developmentally Delayed (DD), Learning Disabilities (LD), Developmentally Cognitively Delayed (DCD), Other Health Impairments (OHI), along with students who experienced mental health issues. Often these students did not possess the skills to verbalize their frustration, which manifested itself in violent and aggressive behavior. As professionals, we kept these students safe by placing them in restrictive holds. While this was a learning experience, I found that it was not a long-term fit for my personality and career goals.

After this experience, I worked as an English language learner paraprofessional at a middle school. While pushing into the classroom, I found that ELL students were hesitant to accept any help or to be seen as any different from their peers, even though their academics showed that they would have benefited from the additional support. I also struggled to work in an ELL program that was unorganized and poorly managed. To add to the chaos, the EL teacher left her position in the middle of the year and the interim

teacher was not licensed in ESL. Sadly, I observed how this affected the students and the disruption to their learning. I also felt much of what I was doing was behavior management verses providing language support. It was during this experience that I met a student who will stay with me forever. His name was Viktor (pseudo name). He was a Russian immigrant who had been in the United States for five years. However, he was extremely low in language and was failing most of his classes. When I was in his class, I would work exclusively with him, often taking him out into the hallway to complete his work. I observed in the classroom that the student was extremely disruptive, always acting as the class clown. The student at the end of his eighth grade year was being evaluated for special education, eventually being diagnosed as having a Specific Learning Disability (SLD). This meant that the student, when going to high school, would receive additional support. At this point, I was amazed that it took the school system this long to recognize and evaluate this student for special education. I thought it was a travesty that for all of these years, this student struggled through his classes, when he was really suffering from a learning disability. It was then that I came to the conclusion that the student learned to cope with his inability to keep up with his peers by being the class clown. This way he could make the joke before the students made him the joke. My thoughts often return to this student and about how we, as educators, failed him.

Application to Colleagues

As I began working in the education system and seeing how English language learners (ELLs) were accepted and educated in the mainstream classrooms, I began to realize that many of the ELLs were labeled having a SLD or speech-language impairment. While talking with my colleague about this, he mentioned the assessments

used to determine students' abilities were flawed because students often were not proficient in either their native language or English. This brought up the question of how we properly assess a student's abilities if they cannot understand what we are asking them in their native language or English? Another significant issue is if a student is not able to learn their native language then is there an underlying language issue? I also found more training is needed around this question because when mainstream classroom teachers discuss behavior and academic concerns of an English learner, they often struggle with whether or not to refer a student to the Student Assistance Team (SAT) based on the student's label as an English learner. There are many questions as to whether the student fully comprehends the content in the classroom due to a language barrier, behaviors due to cultural implications, or whether there is a true learning disability present?

During my time as a paraprofessional, I became increasingly more interested in understanding about learning disabilities and how they affect a student's learning. As I learned more about the English language acquisition process I began to wonder how educators decipher between the language acquisition process and a learning disability? Existing research indicates that there are a disproportionate number of students with cultural and linguistic differences, English language learners (ELL), who are misidentified as learning disabled when their problems are due to cultural and/or linguistic differences (Spinelli, 2008). Currently, the United States is the most diverse country in the world when it comes to linguistics, culture, religion, and ethnicity. Also, according to the U.S. Department of Education, 5.4 million students are classified, as Limited English Proficiency (LEP), which currently makes up the fastest growing student

population. According to Spinelli, 1 in 4 students by the year 2025 will fall under the classification of LEP. This poses a unique challenge to schools, which must shift the way they address and educate this unique type of student. Also, we must address the fact that, according to a recent survey by the National Center for Education Statistics, it was found that only 27% of teachers have said that that they feel well trained and prepared to teach EL students (Spinelli, 2008). The fact that so few mainstream teachers feel prepared with knowing how to effectively teach an ELL student can lead to misconceptions regarding the language acquisition process and incorrect diagnosis of learning disabilities within EL students. I also found more training is needed around this population of students because in my school when mainstream classroom teachers discuss behavior and academic concerns of an English learner, they often struggle with whether or not to refer a student to the Student Assistance Team based on the student's label as an English learner. There are many questions as to whether the student fully comprehends the content in the classroom due to a language barrier, behaviors due to cultural implications or whether there is a true learning disability present. It was this wondering that led me to the research question, *How do educators decipher whether a student is experiencing the typical language acquisition process or if they have a learning disability?*

Conclusion

It is through my experiences of working within both special education and with English language learners that I have seen how schools are pressured into categorizing and labeling students so that we, in essence, understand how to most effectively educate this type of student. However, with the overrepresentation of English language learners within special education, it is more important than ever to understand how to decipher

between the language acquisition process and a student who has a legitimate learning disability.

In Chapter Two, research will be explored on the topics of English language learners and what this label specifically encompasses, the language acquisition process, specific learning disabilities (SLD) and cultural bias in the classroom. I will explore why deciphering between language acquisition and a learning disability poses its own unique challenges.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss how I collected information on current staff knowledge on the language acquisition process and those of learning disabilities specifically around English Language Learners.

Next in Chapter Four, I will discuss the findings of my survey results. From these results, I will make suggestions to school administrators around specific professional development that will best serve licensed teachers so that they are able to make educated referrals for English language learners that they believe may be suffering from a learning disability.

Finally, Chapter Five will discuss any future implication this research may have on the way that my school district refers and assesses ELL students. This will include recommendations I have discovered through my research for the district moving forward with professional development opportunities they can offer mainstream teachers so that they can feel more confident in their choice in whether to refer an English language learner for special education evaluation.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter One, I described how I became interested in working with English language learner students, along with my experiences with special education and how those interests and experiences eventually overlapped. It is now as an educator that I am becoming aware firsthand how the overrepresentation of English language learners in special education is becoming a highly debated subject of which many are asking: *How do educators decipher whether an English language learner student is experiencing the typical language acquisition process verses a learning disability?*

Throughout my research on English language learners, the language acquisition process, learning disabilities and culturally responsiveness several themes emerged that created more questions. How do we put processes in place that help decipher between language acquisition verses learning disabilities? What interventions need to be implemented with English language learners before a special education referral is recommended? How do teacher's own cultural experiences and biases affect student learning in the classroom?

English Language Learners

This section will define English language learners and provide a brief history of English language learners in the United States. It will also provide an overview of how educators are learning to work with this ethnic and linguistically diverse student population.

Definition and features of English language learners. According to the National Council of Teachers of English (Jiminez, Rose, Cole & Flushman, nd), English language learners are defined as, "an active learner of the English language who may benefit from

various types of language support programs. This term is used mainly in the U.S. to describe K-12 students". In the United States, English language learners represent the fastest growing segment of the student population. It is because of this shift in student population that educators are struggling to understand how to best educate this segment of students. Although, awareness of this student population is at an all time high with new research continuously being conducted and continuing education becoming a requirement for teaching licensure renewal. Chu and Flores (2011) state that, as schools begin to see more students with linguistically diverse backgrounds the idea of identifying English language learners with learning disabilities has become very important to ensure that students are receiving the correct services. We are still struggling in our educational systems to understand what the correct services are for this population of students who have very diverse needs. These students come from backgrounds that include varied language proficiencies, socio-economic status, content knowledge, immigration status and expectations around formalized schooling.

According to Orosco and O'Connor (2014) fewer than 10% of ELLs actually comprehend what they are reading at or above proficient levels. This signals to us that the traditional literacy methods that are being implemented in the classroom are not effective. They also discuss that English language learners come to the classroom with many cultural and linguistic experiences. However, this experience is typically not honored, as ELLs must learn to separate their personal learning with the type of learning that is happening in the classroom. It is because English language learners' experiences and learning styles are not represented in the classroom, then their ability to learn may be

hindered and that is why we see such a large variance of success from native English speakers and English language learners.

The Language Acquisition Process

In this section I will provide an overview of the language acquisition process specifically in regards to English language learners. I will begin by providing a definition of language acquisition by Researcher Stephen Krashen. Krashen (2006) states that language acquisition is contrasted from language learning. Instead, acquisition represents 'unconscious' learning, which only takes place when the learner's attention is focused on the meaning rather than the language form. This is imperative since there are many subtleties and nonsensical grammar rules present within the English language that language acquisition can prove to be difficult. According to Orosco and Klinger (2010) English language learners may struggle with acquiring new language due to a difference in phonemes and graphemes, which can make decoding and spelling challenging. Phonemes are described as distinct units of sounds that distinguish words from one another. A grapheme is the smallest unit available in the writing system. In order to correctly articulate and spell words, it is imperative that English language learners are able to correctly identify and translate phonemes in graphemes.

When English learners struggle to be able to understand and process with their English language learning many educators may begin to wonder if the student is not understanding because of language acquisition or if the student is suffering from a learning disability? However, as Jim Cummins (1987) and others have pointed out, one particular group of children who have often been misdiagnosed as having language delays or disorders are children who arrive at their first day of school without an age-

appropriate knowledge of the language of the school. This includes immigrant children who speak another language at home, minority language children whose home language is different from the school language, and children who speak a different variety of the school language.

There are also other reasons that a student may struggle to learn English. According to Krashen (2006), a person may not be acquiring language because there is a barrier known as the "affective filter". This states that the language learner is not acquiring language because of feelings, attitudes and current emotional state. Also, if a learner is feeling like they are not being challenged or they are anxious about the language process they in essence may "filter out" the input. This can happen if the student is going through a "silent period" where the student does not produce any language for fear of producing language incorrectly or because they do not want to let go of their first language also known as L1.

This often poses a problem for educators because according to Case and Taylor (2005), teachers are not taught or do not understand what characteristics are present with language acquisition verses a student who is actually struggling with a learning disability. Since many of the characteristics of language acquisition and learning disabilities look the same, over-referral of English learners to special education is quite common. Also, as part of the second language acquisition development process, language learners often struggle with developing their pronunciation skills. This is affected by many things including; age, opportunities to use the language, and motivation. ELLs may struggle for years with pronunciation. According to Ortiz and Wilkinson (2006), research shows that

students whose native language is Spanish are more likely to have repeated a grade than students from other language groups.

<u>Learning Disabilities</u>

This section will discuss the characteristics of learning disabilities specifically within English language learners. It will provide an overview of why it is often difficult for educators to decipher between language acquisitions verses a learning disability.

In order to assist struggling English language learners Chu and Flores (2011) state "it is difficult to distinguish English language learners (ELLs) with learning disabilities (LD) from those who do not have a learning disability because the two groups share many of the same characteristics. Among the characteristics shared are poor comprehension, difficulty following directions, syntactical and grammatical errors, and difficulty completing tasks" (p.244).

As schools begin to become more linguistically diverse the idea of identifying ELLs with SLD has become very important to ensure that students are receiving the correct services. It remains difficult for there to be adequate assessments for ELs because according to Richardson (2008), when assessing students, most educators interpret ELL's performances through "white middle-class normative parameters of competence" which are inappropriate measures for many ELLs. These norms include basic assumptions about race, worldview, beliefs and epistemologies, as well as measures of adequate classroom progress.

In the state of Minnesota, for a student to qualify under a Specific Learning Disability, there are many performance measures that are used to determine eligibility. According to the Minnesota Department of Education (n.d), the criteria that is used to

determine eligibility is that the student is not performing adequately and is showing a severe discrepancy between their general intellectual ability and achievement in one or more of the following areas: oral expression, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, basic reading skills, reading fluency, mathematics calculation or problem-solving and written expression. Second, the student has a disorder that falls under one or more of the basic psychological processes such as; acquisition of information, organization working memory, planning and sequencing, verbal, visual, spatial memory, visual and auditory processing, their speed of processing, verbal and nonverbal expression and motor control for written tasks. Lastly, the student needs to demonstrate an inadequate rate of process. This process is measured over time through progress monitoring and through a scientific, research-based intervention (SRBI). There needs to be a minimum of 12 data points measured over the last seven school weeks in order to correctly determine a rate of process.

The difficulty in understanding how to adequately assess ELL students is a major issue. The question remains if the student should be assessed in English or in their native language or both. According to Wagner, Francis and Morris (2005) (as cited in Chu and Flores, 2011), it has been suggested that assessment in a student's native language may provide a more accurate understanding of a student's knowledge and skills than assessing the student in English. If a student is assessed in English, they may struggle to understand what task is being asked of them and without taking into consideration linguistic complexities the test items could lead to a measurement error and reduce the reliability of test results. It is suggested that since there are so many languages often represented in a school, that it can be difficult to secure testing materials in every language. In order to

ensure the least amount of testing error, a trained interpreter should be used. This way they can convey educational meaning when administering the test.

According to Scott, Boynton and Brown (2014), there is still much research that needs to be done to fully understand the implications of language acquisition verses a specific learning disability. Also, another factor in accurate identification of SLD students' learning needs is the extent to which a problem in learning a first language affects English acquisition. Another important factor to understand and take into consideration are the credentials and experience of the professionals who are performing assessments on English language learners. Scott, Boyton and Brown (2014), state that another theme that emerged was the expertise of personnel and that the team should consider how those professionals are prepared for their duties. This theme includes the use of interpreters, cultural liaisons', and/or bilingual personnel.

Culture In The Classroom

There are many assets that ELL students possess that they are able to share within the classroom. Not only do they bring about a different cultural perspective and linguistic diversity, they also are able to share with us different worldviews that may not otherwise be explored in the classroom. No matter who we are, we have cultural biases that exist because of our own life experiences. This is no different for teachers. These cultural biases can keep teachers from understanding students' behavior, language acquisition, and academic achievement especially when there are significant differences between the student's and teacher's cultural background. . This bias also extends throughout the entire United States school system. The school system is built around and based off of white cultural norms. Angela Valenzuela (as cited in Hollie's book, 2012) calls the process of

eliminating one's home culture as *subtractive schooling. "*Subtractive schooling is the divestment of students of important and social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure, and the discouragement of cultural identity by presenting such characteristics as undesirable". (p.28)

Many scholars in culturally and linguistic responsive teaching have highlighted the intersections between cultural bias and language learning and how this bias negatively impacts student achievement. Sharroky Hollie (2012) discusses that among students who are most likely to be underserved are those whose native and home language is not English. The mentality of negativity towards non-native English speaking individuals goes back many years. The first inequality was seen with enslaved Africans. They were often told that if they spoke their native language then they would be punished by having their tongues cut out or killed. Mexican Americans students must also fight the persistent myth that they value labor over education. The simple fact is that many students must be forced to leave school because of depressed wages of Mexican Americans and students must help their family meet their short-term needs.

Another cultural misrepresentation presents itself in the form of linguistic variety. Research has found that, "there is no basis to assert that poor performance is related to the grammatical and phonological characteristics of any nonstandard variety of English". (p.30) Often students are thought to be deficient because of their language variety. Linguistics have dubbed second languages as nonstandard. These languages have spanned generations and are still seen in present day. Some examples are African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which is a nonstandard language spoken by African Americans, for Native Americans, there are many Native American dialects and

for Mexican Americans, primarily second or third generation the nonstandard language is called Chicano English. These languages developed because these particular populations share a similar sociolinguistic history. Their ancestors were among those who were racially isolated and were denied the use of their indigenous languages. Today, their form of linguistic behaviors are often seen in the classroom as a deficit. It is only when educators are able to understand and recognize that a student's linguistic varieties are an asset that students begin to feel affirmed

<u>Summary</u>

In this chapter I explained the various aspects of English language learners, the language acquisition process, learning disabilities and cultural biases in the classroom in connection with the question: *How do educators decipher whether an English language learner student is experiencing the typical language acquisition process verses a learning disability?* The chapter began by defining what an English language learner student is and the diverse cultural and linguistic aspects these students bring to the classroom. An explanation was provided as to why it is difficult for educators to understand how to most effectively educate this segment of the educational population. The language acquisition process and why this can pose a specific challenge for English learning students was explained. The topic of how teachers bring their own cultural experiences and ultimately biases into the classroom and how these biases can hinder student language development was also explored. Since the English language often does not follow traditional language conventions, understanding and deciphering the English language can prove to be difficult. There is also the idea that English language learners are unmotivated or unwilling to learn a new language, which can cause a student to suffer from "affective

filter" which keeps students from accepting the input of a new language. There is also the idea that some English language learners suffer from learning disabilities that can cause the language acquisition process to be difficult. Also, since many of the characteristics of language acquisition mirror that of learning disabilities, English language learners are often misdiagnosed and overrepresented in the special education community.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss the school setting, demographics and methodology of my action research in which I asked current licensed staff within my school to self-rate their understanding of identifying potential learning disabilities within ELL students, their understanding of how cultural background can affect behavior in the classroom, familiarity with the language acquisition process, familiarity around when it's appropriate to refer an ELL student for special education services and an open-ended question around specifics on ELL students and disabilities they would like to learn more about. I will average the results for each question and identify gaps in knowledge therefore, making professional development recommendations to my school administration around answering the question:, *How do educators decipher whether a student is experiencing the typical language acquisition process or if they have a learning disability?*

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As I work with English language learners who are struggling academically I often

wonder, *How do educators decipher whether a student is experiencing the typical*

language acquisition process or if they have a learning disability? Since this is a topic

that is not widely understood or researched, it is more important than ever to try and

decipher the difference between a struggling language learner student and a student who

is struggling due to a disability. In the previous chapter, I provided a literature review that

presented relevant aspects of my research question. I had the opportunity review various

peer-reviewed sources on the language acquisition process, English language learners and

learning disabilities.

In this chapter, I will discuss methods that I have designed in order to gain

understanding of current staff knowledge around English language learners and

identifying learning disabilities within this population. Based on the results of the survey,

I will research and identify relevant professional development for our school and

potentially the district for certified staff, who are often the first to identify any concerns

they have regarding student academic performance in the classroom. The goal of this

professional development would be to fill in any gaps of knowledge that were identified

through the survey, so that staff is able to feel more confident in understanding if a

referral is the appropriate course of action. In helping answer any immediate concerns, I

distributed to certified staff, a table from Researcher, Catherine Collier (Appendix A) that

identifies typical academic or behavior concerns and how to understand if this is based on

language acquisition, a cultural difference or a potential learning disability. In order to

gather information about where the gap of knowledge existed for certified teaching staff

in the areas of language acquisition and learning disabilities, I distributed a confidential

survey (Appendix B) that asked staff to rate their current knowledge and comfort level in

understanding whether a student is experiencing language acquisition or a learning

disability. I also gave educators an opportunity to identify areas that they felt they would

like more knowledge through use of an open-ended question. The survey was distributed

to each licensed teaching staffs' mailbox located within the school and was attached to a

consent letter (Appendix C), which explained the purpose of the study, what was done

with the results and that staff have the right to not participate without consequence. Staff

received the survey in early March 2016, after full approval was received from the

Human Subject Committee (Appendix D). Survey participants had two full weeks to

complete the survey and the ability to complete it at the time and location of their

choosing. This survey contained no name markers, so participants were able to remain

anonymous. When the survey was completed, participants were asked to return the

survey and signed consent letter into two separate yellow envelopes, located within my

work mailbox. Also, in order to get a clearer understanding of the referral process for

English language learners within special education I discussed the process with the

Student Assistance Team (SAT). This is a team made up of a Speech Language-

Pathologist, Special Education teacher and mainstream teachers who initially meet to

discuss interventions to put into place before a student is formally referred for special

education evaluation. When an English language learner student is being discussed by the

SAT team the ELL teacher is asked to join the meeting to give their experience with the student.

<u>Research Paradigm</u>

For the research paradigm, I used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. I distributed Researcher, Catherine Collier's table and made suggestions around professional development based on the results of the surveys completed by staff. The quantitative data was used when calculating staff's understanding based on their self-ranking scores around their familiarity of English language learners, cultural background, the language acquisition process and learning disabilities on a likert scale with a ranking from one to five. The one represents "not familiar at all" to a five which represents" extremely familiar". The qualitative data was collected with the open-ended question at the end of the survey that asked staff to self-identify any topics concerning English language learners and learning disabilities they would like to learn more about.

<u>Setting</u>

The setting my research was conducted in is a Title I, Kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school in Minnesota. This is a public school located in a large school district within Minneapolis/Saint Paul. A Title I school is identified as a "federally funded program through the Elementary & Secondary Act (ESEA) that is designed to provide support to students who are performing below grade level in reading and/or math. The goal is to emphasize high academic standards in an effort to help students succeed in the regular classroom and reach grade level performance" (mpls.k12.mn.us). The school has 424 students. Of this population, there are 48 or 11% English language learners and 88 or 20.8% special education students. There are 32 licensed teachers in the school. Of

those licensed staff, of those 32 licensed staff there are five licensed specialists that were not given surveys. These specialists include the media specialist, art teacher, two gym-teachers and music teacher. The reason I did not include them as part of my results is because they are not involved with the SAT team or making referrals of ELL students for academic concerns.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have discussed the methodology around collecting my research results, how the survey results will be tabulated, along with what will be done with the survey results. I have also discussed the setting of the school in which the staff was surveyed. This included the demographics of the students that attend this school, along with the breakdown by percentage of students receiving special education services and those classified as English language learners. In the following chapter, I will discuss the results of the survey by discussing each question and the implications around the results. After understanding where staffs' understanding around ELL students, cultural background, the language acquisition process and familiarity in understanding when it is appropriate to refer ELL students for special education services, I will make specific recommendations around professional development that will answer staff wonderings around these specific topics.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In Chapter One, I described my experiences that brought me to English language learner students and how I became interested in understanding more around how to most effectively educate this population of students, which includes adequate and equitable assessment for ELL students around learning disabilities. Chapter Two, provides current research around how ELL students, the language acquisition process, learning disabilities and cultural biases within the classroom. The research discusses how often the language acquisition process and learning disabilities often share many of the same characteristics, thus making it difficult for educators and assessment teams to adequately assess whether an ELL students actually is suffering from a learning disability. Chapter Three discussed the methodology around collecting staffs' knowledge around ELL students, how cultural background affects behavior in the classroom, the language acquisition process and familiarity around referring ELL students for special education services.

Here, Chapter Four presents each question found on the survey. The average score for each of the question has been calculated and the results of those scores are discussed. The two lowest scoring questions will be identified as to where gaps in knowledge exist. The last question on the survey is an open-ended question. Each of the comments will be recorded and any common themes that emerge will be discussed. Next, research around professional development opportunities that can address these gaps in knowledge will be identified and discussed and formal recommendations will be made to school administration around the results and continuing professional development opportunities.

Chapter Four will allow for conclusions of learning that will be presented in Chapter

Five.

  The survey is made up of five total questions. The first four questions had

respondents answer by rating themselves on a likert scale from one to five. One

represents, "not familiar at all", two represents, "slightly familiar, three represents,

"somewhat familiar, four represents, "moderately familiar" and five represents,

"extremely familiar". Any overall average score that is a three or below will be

considered as a gap in knowledge and professional development around that particular

topic will be recommended. The fifth question is made up of an open-ended question that

asks respondents to self-identify topics around ELL students and learning disabilities they

would like to learn more about. The results of this survey will assist in answering the

question: *How do educators decipher whether a student is experiencing the typical*

language acquisition process or if they have a learning disability?

<u>Survey Question One</u>

My level of familiarity in identifying potential learning disabilities in English language

learner students is:

Not familiar at all	Slightly familiar	Somewhat familiar	Moderately familiar	Extremely familiar
1	2	3	4	5

Overall Average Score: **2.75**

Question one asked respondents to rate their current familiarity in being able to

identify a potential learning disability in ELL students. This question is important

because it sets the basis for the overall study. This question encompasses the wide

breadth of learning disabilities as it pertains to English language learners. In my survey, I

wanted to start out with broad topics such as ELL students and learning disabilities and

then measure specific aspect within each of these topics. The score of 2.75 shows that

there is a gap of knowledge when it comes to ELL students and learning disabilities. This

proves that professional development that addresses how these two topics overlap will be

needed.

Survey Question Two

My level of familiarity in understanding how English language learners' cultural background can affect behavior in the classroom is:

Not familiar at all	Slightly familiar	Somewhat familiar	Moderately familiar	Extremely familiar
1	2	3	4	5

Overall Average Score: **3.5**

Question two asked respondents to identify their level of familiarity in understanding how English language learners' cultural background can affect their behavior in the classroom. Since research shows that cultural background needs to be understood when evaluating the whole child, it is an important factor that an educator should take into account when they see concerning behavior in the classroom that may be explained by cultural norms and background. The overall average score of 3.5 demonstrates that the staff is somewhat familiar in being able to understand how culture can either positively or negatively impact a students' behavior in the classroom. While, the score of 3.5 shows that there is a need for professional development around understanding cultural background, professional development around the other areas with

a larger gap in knowledge may help staff understand ways in which to learn about

student's culture from the students themselves.

<u>Survey Question Three</u>

My level of familiarity in understanding the language acquisition process is:

Not familiar at all	Slightly familiar	Somewhat familiar	Moderately familiar	Extremely familiar
1	2	3	4	5

Overall Average Score: **2.9**

For Question Three, respondents were asked to rank their familiarity around the language acquisition process. The language acquisition process itself is complex and often the characteristics that are seen in ELL students who are acquiring language can resemble that of a learning disability. In order to assist struggling English language learners Chu and Flores (2011) state, "among the characteristics shared are poor comprehension, difficulty following directions, syntactical and grammatical errors, and difficulty completing tasks" (p.244). This is why it is imperative to truly understand how to look at the whole student including assessments, preferably given in the students' native language, academic achievement in the classroom and overall language acquisition score. In the state of Minnesota, this score is given in the form of an ACCESS test. ACCESS stands for Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners. This test is given annually to students identified as

English language learners. The students are tested in the modalities of reading, writing, speaking and listening. A score for each of the modalities is given, along with a comprehensive score. The score ranges from one to six. A one represents language skills of a newcomer and a six represents language skills similar to those of a native speaker. Understanding this score can assist teachers in understanding yearly progress in regards to language, along with understanding what language features a student should understand in terms of their ACCESS score. While this is not the only factor that should be looked at when understanding a student in terms of language acquisition, it can help staff understand the big picture and make educated decisions around special education services and ELL students. The overall survey average for this question was 2.9. That means that the staff falls under being "slightly familiar" in understanding the language acquisition process. A gap of knowledge exists that should be addressed through professional development. Also, this could be a topic that is further discussed as a topic during a Professional Learning Community (PLC) because adequate research and resources are available and accessible around the language acquisition process.

<u>Survey Question Four</u>

My level of familiarity in understanding when it is appropriate to refer an English

language learner student for special education services is:

Not familiar at all	Slightly familiar	Somewhat familiar	Moderately familiar	Extremely familiar
1	2	3	4	5

Overall Average Score: **2.9**

      In Question Four, respondents were asked to rate their familiarity in

understanding when it is appropriate to refer English language learner students for special

education services. The overall average score was a 2.9, which places the staff as having

knowledge and familiarity that equates to "slightly familiar". This shows that a gap of

knowledge exists around understanding when it is appropriate to refer ELL students for

special education services. Since this is under the ranking of three, then this would be

considered an area that some professional development could be planned around.

However, some of these wonderings could potentially be answered through continued

education from the Student Assistance Team and Lead Special Education teachers around

when referrals of ELL students for special education services. Also, more education

around what markers the SAT team looks for when an ELL student is initially referred

for academic or behavior concerns.

Survey Question Five

What specifics around English language learners and learning disabilities would you like to learn more about?

The open-ended question responses were coded to fall under the major categories of: cultural background, language acquisition, learning disabilities, special education referral and other. This was done so that any consistencies or patterns can be identified. Also, this data provides qualitative data that supports the quantitative data that was collected. It also provides the opportunity for the respondents to self-identify any topics around ELL learners and learning disabilities that were not addressed or surveyed in the first four questions.

Cultural Background

- "Getting some understanding of how behavior is affected with English language learners."
- "I would like to learn more about understanding how cultural background can affect behavior."
- "Would like to know about cultural differences in terms of compliances and viewing authority (ex. Do different cultures view male/female authority differently?) Also, how much negotiation latitude may be expected with different cultures?
- "I am always interested to (learn) more about the cultural background of English language learners. How does their home language affect literacy and language acquisition?"

- "How are cultural ways of being (are) sometimes misperceived as 'inappropriate behavior' in the classroom setting? How do we home culture while also teaching school expectations in a loing and informative way (as opposed to punitive measures)?"

Language Acquisition Process

- I think continued learning around the length of time it takes to truly be ready for academic English."

- "What is the relationship between a student's native language and English?"

Learning Disabilities

- "What age should we refer EL students if we see a potential learning disability?"

- "At what point in time (years) do you recommend LD testing?"

- "How do we sort out EL struggles from LD struggles to get students the help they need as soon as possible?"

- "How will I know when ELL students have a difficult time learning due to a disability?"

Special Education Referral

- "When it's appropriate to refer an English language learner for special education services."

- "I feel like kids who have a learning disability and are EL fall through the cracks. I understand that many kids need 4-5 years to learn a language, but when one of them finally qualifies in 4th or 5th grade they have missed so many interventions

that could have been in place a long time. They are so behind in math- it's super hard to have them sit in 4th and 5th grade math and be clueless".

- "I understand each case is different, but key things to 'look for' would be nice-specifically corresponded with interventions or assessments."

- "Providing special education teachers with a general flow sheet for EL evaluations-interventions to try, questions to ask, 'red flags' to watch for, recommended assessment tools, when to involve testing in home language, ways to incorporate family perspective/expertise, etc".

Other

- "I am interested in learning more about how to search for gifted EL learners. We give a nonverbal cognitive test in first and third grade, but beyond that is there more?"

- "What criteria can be used, or should be used (if ever) to remove a student from EL services who has an IEP and because of their year-to-year scores in assessments probably would never qualify for exiting EL services? What are the "best practices" in such a process?"

- "ELL (students) that are extremely low in all academic areas in the grade level, what I know and do currently is not retain them. Why? I think some students could benefit from another year."

- "How could district cultural family advocates and/or Equity Director, Carita Green and/or EL lead teacher, Leah Soderlund assist in this work? Also, considering special education leadership in district (coordinators, evaluation team)?"

- "Increasing classroom teacher skill and confidence around building on EL student strengths and implementing teaching content and methods aligned with EL student needs (considering cultural norms/background, BICS/CALP, WIDA 'can do's')".
- "I would like to continue to learn more about ELL and how I can make students who qualify more successful".
- "I would like more information about EL learners with communication disorders and how to differentiate the language barrier from the disability".

After coding the open-ended question responses into the four categories of cultural background, language acquisition process, learning disabilities, special education referral and other, I found that there was a large interest in understanding and knowing more about how cultural background affects student behavior in the classroom. A comment was made around wanting to understand how to effectively assist ELL students with classroom "norms" without having to use measures that may be interpreted as punitive. This shows that teachers are seeing cultural differences in the classroom that are leading to misunderstandings around what is deemed "appropriate" behavior in the classroom. Also, one of the respondents wanted to understand more around how authority figures are viewed in other cultures, along with how gender can affect responsiveness from students.

In the language acquisition process category there was a question around how long it takes to acquire academic language. The other question addressed wanting to understand the relationships between native language and English and how this can affect

the language acquisition process. The average survey score for familiarity with understanding the language acquisition process was 2.9. The category of language acquisition is one that requires additional professional development based on the results showing that there is some awareness around the language acquisition process, however, there is still room for significant growth so that staff are able to say that they feel extreme familiarity and competency. After there is more understanding surrounding the process, then potentially there may be more questions that arise while staff work to fully understand the complex facets that make up language acquisition.

Under the category of special education referral a common theme that emerged was around understanding when it is appropriate to refer an ELL student for special education services. Another question was at what stage in a student's schooling should special education referrals be made? Another specific idea that was identified was developing and providing the SAT team and special education team with specifics around behavior's and characteristics to look for when assessing EL students for special education. Also, when it is appropriate to discuss concerns with family to understand cultural perspective and experiences. The average overall result from the survey regarding familiarity in understanding when it is appropriate to refer an ELL student for special education services was a 2.9. This falls under "slightly familiar". This shows us that a gap of knowledge exists and questions around the timing of when it is appropriate to refer for special education support the survey result that more professional development is needed around ELL students and special education referral.

There were numerous comments that fell under the "other" category. These comments did not fit into the other categories, but presented other important

opportunities around continued education that could assist in answering some of the wonderings such as; discussion around identifying gifted and talented ELL students and the best way to do this. The idea that students are somehow deficient because they do not speak English is a mindset that needs to change. There was also discussion around how ELL students exit ELL services, if they cannot achieve the assessment and language scores needed to do so? If a student is labeled under special education, they may not have the cognitive ability to score high enough on assessments, even though their language skills align with cognitive ability. There needs to be discussion around how to align these standards to each individual student and their unique needs. Another discussion point was how can schools better utilize cultural advocates that are available district wide in order to create a better understanding of cultural norms and overall understanding of a student.

Recommendations for Professional Development

      The three specific areas that were identified as needing professional development in order to fill in gaps of knowledge are: how to identify and understand learning disabilities in English language learners, the language acquisition process and when it is appropriate to refer English language learners for special education services. I have included various methods of professional development delivery including, face-to-face, webinars and through educational videos.

Identifying and Understanding Learning Disabilities in English language learners

Training One

Title: Teaching English Learners and Students with Learning Difficulties in the Inclusive

Classroom.

Presented by: WestEd

Method of training delivery: face-to-face/seminar (Appendix E)

Who Should Participate:

- Teachers and specialists who provide academic instruction to English learners and/or students with learning difficulties in grades 4-12 (may include lower grades)

- Teacher support staff such as staff developers, specialists, and coaches

- School/district teams of general and special education instructional leaders, teacher support staff, and teachers for gradual school implementation

- Whole school academic instructional staff for immediate school implementation

Goals of the Workshop:

- Participants attain the knowledge and practice the skills to implement a doable, daily, research-based set of specific strategies to tailor academic instruction for English learners and students with learning difficulties such as specific learning disabilities, ADHD, and Asperger's syndrome.

- School/district teams attain the knowledge, practice the skills, and plan to implement the strategies school-wide, blending this approach with other improvement initiatives and prior professional development.

<u>What You Learn</u>

- The language skills of English learners at different developmental levels to learn and communicate what they have learned.

- The learning characteristics of students with prevalent learning difficulties
- How to blend direct instruction and inquiry-based, student-led learning for all diverse learners.

- How to develop academic vocabulary and discourse in a discipline for all diverse learners.

- How to integrate six strategies to scaffold content learning for all diverse learners.

- How to assess content learning in the classroom for all diverse learners.

- How to "put it all together" as a doable, daily approach to teaching in an inclusive classroom.

<u>Training Two</u>

Title: How to Address Special Education Needs in the ELL Classroom

Author: Kristina Robertson

Method of training delivery: article/discussion during PLC

Article located at: http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/how-address-special-education-needs-ell-classroom#h-language-acquisition-or-cognitive-difficulty- (Appendix F)

<u>Training Three</u>

Title: English Language Learners with Learning Disabilities

Featuring: Dr. Elsa Cardenas-Hagan

Method of training delivery: Video/discussion during PLC

Video located at: http://www.colorincolorado.org/webcast/english-language-learners-learning-disabilities

Summary: Discusses effective assessment and instructional strategies for English language learners with learning disabilities.

<u>The Language Acquisition Process</u>

<u>Training One</u>

Title: Language Acquisition: An Overview

Author: Kristina Robertson and Karen Ford

Method of training delivery: article/discussion during PLC

Article located at: http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/language-acquisition-overview

(Appendix G)

<u>Training Two</u>

Title: Classroom Instruction That Works with English Language Learners Facilitator's Guide

Author: Jane D. Hill and Cynthia L. Bjork

Method of training delivery: book/discussion during PLC

Chapter Two: The Stages of Second Language Acquisition

Key Ideas for Chapter 2

- Students acquiring a second language progress through five predictable stages.

Effective ELL instruction
- *Reflects* students' stages of language acquisition.
- *Helps* students move through the language acquisition levels.
- *Engages* ELLs at all stages of language acquisition in higher-level thinking activities.

(Appendix H)

Training Three

Title: Second Language Acquisition and Development

Method of training delivery: face-to-face training/seminar

Description:

In this introductory workshop, participants receive an overview of the principles of second language acquisition, and teaching, including concepts from the fields of linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociology, and education. Participants also learn practical ways to access the linguistic resources of students and provide linguistic support to students at different grades and level of English proficiency.

(Appendix L)

Referring English language learners for Special Education Services

Training One

Title: Sp/ELLing Out Institutional Barriers to Equity and Excellence for Students with

Disabilities and English Language Learners

Presenters: Luis Versalles and Deborah McKnight

Method of training delivery: face-to-face training/seminar

Description:

Participants will be lead through a process of transformation rooted in adaptive leadership principles that will build toward effective interdepartmental collaboration. The strengths and expertise of special educators and ELL educators will be leveraged to work in deep and meaningful collaboration with general education in order to provide a more rigorous, culturally relevant, and empowering mainstream experiences for Sp/ELL students, as well as the necessary differentiation based on students' needs. (Appendix I)

Training Two

Title: Preventing Disproportionate Representation: Culturally and Linguistically

Responsive Pre-referral Interventions

Author: Shernaz Garcia and Alba Ortiz

Method of training delivery: article/discussion during PLC

Article located at:

http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Preventing%20Disproportionate%20Rep%2Epf

(Appendix J)

Training Three

Title: Processes and Challenges in Identifying Learning Disabilities Among English
Language Learner Students in three New York State Districts

Authors: Maria Teresa Sanchez, Caroline Parker, Bercum Akbayin, and Anna McTigue

Method of training delivery: Training for the special education assessment team/EL leads
to discuss and review assessment process for ELL students.

Article located at: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/pdf/REL_2010085.pdf

(Appendix K)

Conclusion

In this chapter, results of the survey given to licensed staff were reviewed and
overall average scores were calculated on the level of familiarity around the topics of
English language learners and learning disabilities, how cultural background can affect
behavior in the classroom, the language acquisition process and referring ELL students
for special education services. A final, open-ended question had respondents self-identify
any topics around ELL students and learning disabilities they would like to learn more
about. These comments were then categorized into four sections; cultural background, the
language acquisition process, special education referrals for English language learners

and other, for comments that did not fit into the other three categories. Based on the responses received, the categories with the three lowest overall average scores were researched and professional development opportunities were identified that could assist with bridging the gap of knowledge that currently exists. Within the professional development opportunities many different methods of delivery were identified including; face-to-face in a seminar format, videos, scholarly articles that could be discussed during PLC's and articles aimed at the special education and ELL assessment teams that could assist with the overall referral process.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

<u>Introduction</u>

I began this project with the goal of learning more about English language learners and learning disabilities, while servicing a gap in knowledge that I came to identify while working with mainstream teachers. For me, in order to better service my students, I wanted to better understand those students who seemed to be struggling, while not being quite sure if it was due to language acquisition, cultural differences or a true learning disability. I also wanted to be able to provide a better answer to my colleagues when they asked me my opinion when it came to whether they should refer an English language learner for special education services.

The time that I spent reviewing and making conclusions around staff responses on the survey results have provided me with great insights into where gaps of knowledge exist. When I began this research, I had no inkling or preconceived notions as to what results the survey would render. My objective was to be able to make educated, researched recommendations for professional development around English language learners and learning disabilities for our certified teaching staff. My belief is that if I, as an English language learner teacher, struggle to understand if an ELL student is suffering from a learning disability verses the language acquisition process, then mainstream teachers would likely also be struggling to decipher between the two. I believe if we want to adequately support students, then we need to educate from the ground up. Since mainstream teachers are often the first to refer students based on academic or behavioral concerns, if we can educate these teachers to understand why they may be seeing certain

behaviors or academics in the classroom, then we can help reduce overrepresentation of ELL students within special education.

As my research and project comes to an end, I want to reflect on some of the important connections from my research, talk about limitations within my research and discuss future research possibilities.

Professional Learning

When I first began this research process, I wasn't entirely sure of where my research would take me or how I was going to research this topic. It was only after talking with mainstream teachers and understanding the ELL and special education referral process that opportunities for learning were presented. As as an English language learner teacher, it is my job and responsibility to educate mainstream teachers on methods for effectively educating ELL students and this includes understanding when it is appropriate to refer ELL students for special educations services. After conducting my research and getting a better idea of where staffs' current gaps in knowledge exist around ELL students and learning disabilities, I am better able to focus my research and knowledge in assisting staff in better knowing how to identify and service this population of students. This project also opened up many doors for me in knowing where I need to strengthen my education around the topics identified within the research and resource that are available for me to do so.

Revisiting the Literature

As I look back on the literature that was the basis for the action research project, I came to three major conclusions. The first conclusion was how little awareness and research exist surrounding the best ways to service and educate ELL students who also

have learning disabilities. As Chu and Flores (2011) state that, as schools begin to see more students with linguistically diverse backgrounds the idea of identifying English language learners with learning disabilities has become very important to ensure that students are receiving the correct services. We are still struggling in our educational systems to understand what the correct services are for this population of students who have very diverse needs. These students come from backgrounds that include varied language proficiencies, socio-economic status, content knowledge, immigration status and expectations around formalized schooling.

There are many misconceptions and misunderstanding around the language acquisition process and what this entails. The idea that all students should be willing to learn English is a mentality often seen in Western culture. We can often view our culture and way of living as a standard that everyone in the world strives to have. Krashen states (2006), a person may not be acquiring language because there is a barrier known as the "affective filter". This states that the language learner is not acquiring language because of feelings, attitudes and current emotional state. Also, if a learner is feeling like they are not being challenged or they are anxious about the language process they in essence may "filter out" the input. This can happen if the student is going through a "silent period" where the student does not produce any language for fear of producing language incorrectly or because they do not want to let go of their first language also known as L1. It is important that as educators, we understand and are sensitive to the attitudes and beliefs of our students, who may feel that they are giving up a part of their culture and life when they are asked to learn English.

Finally, the idea that language acquisition and learning disabilities share many of the same characteristics adds to the complexity in being able to accurately and dependably identify ELL students who may be struggling with a learning disability. Chu and Flores (2011) state "it is difficult to distinguish English language learners (ELLs) with learning disabilities (LD) from those who do not have a learning disability because the two groups share many of the same characteristics. Among the characteristics shared are poor comprehension, difficulty following directions, syntactical and grammatical errors, and difficulty completing tasks" (p.244). As educators, we are trained to try and diagnose and place students into categories so that we can best understand how to support them. However, as educators is more important than ever to be aware and sensitive to the fact that language acquisition and learning disabilities can mirror each other, therefore, we should not jump to conclusions before more information is known.

Limitations with the Research

Some of the limitations that exist on my research is I asked staff to self-rate their knowledge upon the subjects of familiarity in identifying learning disabilities among ELL students, familiarity in understanding how ELL student's cultural background can affect behavior in the classroom, familiarity in understanding the language acquisition process, familiarity in understanding when it is appropriate to refer an ELL student for special education services and an open-ended question around specifics of ELL students and learning disabilities. In asking staff to self-rate themselves, we run into limitations around being able to accurately rate ourselves either out of not understanding what we do not yet know. Also, according to McLeod (2008) likert scales often make people want to be socially desirable; therefore, they will rate themselves higher than they actually believe to

be true. Also, because the likert scale was based on a five-point scale, staff was able to rate themselves neutrally. If this survey were to be given again, the scale would be based on a four points, therefore, staff would need to rate themselves more definitively. In an effort to combat this phenomenon the surveys were anonymous. When collecting my survey results, I allowed for staff to fill them out themselves at a time and location of their choosing. I also did not include any name or identifying markers on the survey itself. Therefore, the survey was set up to collect the most unbiased responses possible. Another limitation that I encountered was not receiving one hundred percent participation from staff. I distributed 27 surveys to licensed staff. After two weeks, I received a total of 20 completed survey responses. This is a 74% response rate. Therefore, this needs to be taken into account when survey responses are interpreted and gaps in knowledge are identified. The results may not be representative of the entire staff's familiarity around ELL students and learning disabilities.

Also, as part of identifying gaps in knowledge and making recommendation around professional development for staff in order to close these gaps in knowledge, there needs to be thought around a way to provide on-going professional development around ELL students and learning disabilities. Although, this is a starting point to understand where staffs' current knowledge around these topics currently is, learning how to most effectively educate and understand this population of students is something that is continuously evolving. There is no one-day training that can encompass all there is to know, so limitations may exist around district funding for continuous education.

Implications for Education

        Since all students come to school with various cultural, socioeconomic and language backgrounds, it is important for teachers to try and understand the best way to effectively educate each student. In regards to ELL students, we have seen that culturally responsive teaching is effective in making students from cultures different from or own feel like the educational experience is authentic. It also breaks down barriers that can potentially exist and keep a student from reaching their true potential. As more ELL students are referred and qualify for special education services, we begin to see that the assessments of the past may not be a one-size fits all method for our rapidly changing and diverse population. As we have seen, more research and education around ELL, how to effectively educate these students, along with how to effectively and fairly assess their knowledge that is not language based is needed. I am hoping this research is just the starting point in understanding where we stand as a school in our knowledge around ELL students and learning disabilities and implement continuous professional development centered around answering these important questions.

Where Do We Go From Here?

        When I began this research project, I was a bit lost myself about what I could create or research that would have a far reaching effect. It was only after talking with mainstream teachers and understanding my school's own special education referral process for ELL students, that I began to understand that there many misconceptions and gaps of knowledge around how to best understand this population of student. I then began to realize that I too, did not have the answers to many of the questions that I was getting

from mainstream teachers around whether to refer an ELL student for special education referral. It was then that I realized that if I, a trained English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher who had specific training around this subject, did not know how to properly identify characteristics in this population of student, then how could I expect mainstream teachers to? For me, this research feels like the tip of the iceberg in creating a deeper understanding of ELL students and learning disabilities. This topic is still emerging and I am excited to learn more. I hope that as my career progresses, along with my experiences that I will one day have an answer for the teachers who look to me for guidance on whether to refer an ELL student for special education services. I also hope to serve as part of the process within my school district in regards to understanding and implementing fair assessment practices with ELL students. I know that as our school population becomes more linguistically diverse, this topic will need to be addressed and best practices will need to be established to ensure that ELL students receive equitable education and opportunities.

Conclusion

This research action project has helped me understand the scope of educational opportunities that lie around working with English language learners. It has put something that was an abstract thought and feeling, into a tangible and measurable plan that can have far and lasting effects for our ELL population. I hope that this sheds awareness on a topic that needs to more exploration within the teaching community.

Appendix A

A table by Researchers, Catherine Collier

Learning Disabilities Issues among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners

Presenting Concerns	Potential English Language Explanations	Potential Cultural Explanations	Potential Learning Disability Explanations
Problems with Cognitive skills			
Student has trouble understanding, remembering, and/or identifying: • New concepts • Cause and effect • Classifying • Summarizing • Abstract ideas • Idioms and slang	Student has limited academic language skills and background knowledge applicable to new concepts Student has limited reading/listening comprehension skills Words not spoken with familiar intonation are not paid attention to.	Different cultural experiences and references. Different cognitive learning style preferences. Different cultural norms regarding perceiving, categorizing and interpreting patterns.	Student may have trouble with: • Organization • Sequencing • Abstract reasoning • Executive function • Perceiving and interpreting patterns in language environment, e.g., words, sounds, numbers, behaviors, etc.
Problems with Time and task management			
Student has trouble: • Meeting deadlines • Finishing work on time • Following schedule • Attending • Organizing tasks & schedule	Student has limited comprehension skills and may not understand assignment expectations.	Different cultural norms regarding: • Time management • Deadlines • Scheduling • Sequencing • Task analysis	Student may have trouble with: • Organization • Memory. • Categorization
Problems with Tests and Testing			
Student does poorly on summative and formative assessments. Student has trouble following directions. Student's achievement is below his perceived ability.	Student has limited understanding of content due to unfamiliarity with school language and how to express what he knows in the school language. Student may fail to perceive unfamiliar sounds: or remember words out of context for non-English speaking children.	Different cultural norms regarding: • Test taking skills • Sharing work vs cheating • Group vs independent work • Guessing or estimating • Answering vs listening (some are taught to listen & observe first; not to answer or act until they are sure of doing it correctly)	Student may have trouble with: • Language processing • Expressing and organizing ideas • Focusing • Attention • Executive function

Problems with Social Interactions in Classroom			
Student has trouble interacting with: • Peers (taking turns, interpreting body language, behavior, etc.) • Teachers (asking questions, voicing needs, interpreting gestures, etc.) • Other education personnel (asking for help, interpreting directions, etc.)	Student may not understand: • Peers • Teacher conversations, directions and questions • Other education personnel roles and functions • Education personnel directions and questions	Different cultural norms regarding: • Touch • Proximity • Eye contact • Signs of respect • Teacher's authority • Function of other education personnel • Interacting with authority • Body language for politeness and attention	Student may have trouble with: • Language processing • Auditory processing • Oral processing • Abstract reasoning
Problems with Classroom Activities			
Student has trouble: • Following directions • Working in a group • Paying attention • Concentrating • Finishing tasks • Participating in classroom discourse	Student has: • Limited comprehension skills and doesn't understand activities • Limited access to scaffolding and support (visuals, demonstrations, comprehensible input, etc.) • Impact of inadequate or disrupted education	Different cultural norms regarding: • Expressing contradictory opinions • Group vs independent work • Gender roles • Action vs observation (some are taught to observe first and not to act until they are sure of doing it correctly)	Student may have trouble with: • Auditory processing • Language processing • Sequencing • Focusing • Prioritizing • Cause and effect
Problems with Reading			
Student has trouble: • Mastering sound/symbol relationships • Rhyming • Recognizing sight words • Learning new words • Comprehending text • Understanding written directions	• Student is not familiar with L2 phonetic rules and patterns • Student has limited literacy in L1 • Student may fail to perceive unfamiliar sounds: or remember words out of context for non-English speaking children. •	Different cultural experiences and references than those in the reading materials. Different orthography.	Student may have trouble with: • Language processing • Following text

Problems with Speaking			
Student • Doesn't speak for long periods • Has trouble pronouncing words • Speaks with frequent pauses and errors	Student: • Is in silent period • Hasn't learned structure and vocabulary in l2 • Is afraid to make mistakes • As different latency expectations Disrupted early experiences result in both native language and English differences. Social language is stronger than academic language.	Different cultural norms regarding: • Student participation in discussions • Expressing contradictory opinions. • Gender roles • Latency between speakers	Student may have trouble with: • Language processing • Expressing ideas • Understanding turn-taking in speaking
Problems with Listening			
Student has trouble: • Understanding spoken directions • Remembering what he has heard • Paying attention or focusing on conversation	Student has: • Limited aural comprehension skills • Needs scaffolding and support • Student may fail to perceive unfamiliar sounds: or remember words out of context for non-English speaking children. • Many English words sound alike to Spanish speakers	Different cultural norms regarding: • Demonstrating attention • Active listening	Student may have trouble with: • Auditory processing • Focusing
Problems with Writing			
Student: • Is reluctant to write • Has trouble expressing, organizing, developing ideas • Makes frequent grammar errors • Speaks more fluently than writes	Student: • Hasn't learned a variety of structures and vocabulary in L2 • Afraid to make mistakes • Social language is stronger than academic language	Different cultural experiences and references than those relevant to the assignment. Different orthography.	Student may have trouble with: • Fine motor skills • Expressing and organizing ideas • Focusing

Emotional & Behavior Problems			
Student feels: • Frustrated • Withdrawn • Anxious • Depressed • Angry Student: • Acts out • Avoids eye contact • Seems hyperactive • Has unexpected reaction to physical contact • Appears not to care Student may have difficulty perceiving and interpreting patterns of behavior in the learning environment.	Student may be: • Struggling to communicate • Feeling overwhelmed or tired by the demands of learning new language • Failing to recognize intent without the cues of dialect • Unfamiliar with expected school behaviors due to disrupted early learning experiences • Words not spoken with familiar intonation are not paid attention to. • Discrimination and inability to speak, read and write adequately may lead to rebellion and rejection.	Different cultural norms regarding: • Interactive style • Touch • Proximity • Eye contact • Asserting self Student is adjusting to new cultural context: • Feels stress due to current or previous situation and instability • Is in severe phase of culture shock • Desires to assert ethnic identity as part of positive self-image • Conflicted when forced into a role that contradicts values One stage in the acculturation process can be when youths refuse to give unquestioning obedience to parental views Continued discrimination can lead to feelings of unworthiness and values conflicts	Student may exhibit: • Hyperactivity • Attention deficit • Executive function difficulties Student may be aware that he is falling behind. Student may feel unsuccessful. Student may be experiencing learned helplessness. Student may have oppositional difficulties. Student may have control and monitoring challenges.

[Quoted text hidden]

Logan, Erin E. <emann01@hamline.edu>   Mon, Mar 21, 2016 at 11:23 A
To: Catherine Collier <catherine@crosscultured.com>

Dear Dr. Collier,

I had contacted you a few months back regarding my research on EL student and learning disabilities. You were kind
enough to share this wonderful table that you developed. I was wondering if you would give me permission to include
this table within my Master's capstone project? Also, would this be something I would have permission to distribute to
mainstream teachers within my school to assist with understanding in EL student academics and behavior in the
classroom?

Sincerely,

Erin Logan

On Fri, Dec 11, 2015 at 2:46 PM, Catherine Collier <catherine@crosscultured.com> wrote:
[Quoted text hidden]

Catherine Collier <drcatherine.collier@gmail.com>   Mon, Mar 21, 2016 at 10:16 P
To: "Logan, Erin E." <emann01@hamline.edu>

Yes, Erin, you can share it. Just be sure to keep my citation upon it, please.

Dr. Catherine Collier
CrossCultural Developmental Education Services
1004 West 58th Lane
Ferndale, WA 98248
Www.crosscultured.com
[Quoted text hidden]

Appendix B

Survey

1.) My level of familiarity in identifying potential learning disabilities in English language learner students is:

Not familiar at all	Slightly familiar	Somewhat familiar	Moderately familiar	Extremely familiar
1	2	3	4	5

2.) My level of familiarity in understanding how English language learners cultural background can affect behavior in the classroom is:

Not familiar at all	Slightly familiar	Somewhat familiar	Moderately familiar	Extremely familiar
1	2	3	4	5

3.) My level of familiarity in understanding the language acquisition process is:

Not familiar at all	Slightly familiar	Somewhat familiar	Moderately familiar	Extremely familiar
1	2	3	4	5

4.) My level of familiarity in understanding when it is appropriate to refer an English language learner student for special education services is:

Not familiar at all	Slightly familiar	Somewhat familiar	Moderately familiar	Extremely familiar
1	2	3	4	5

5.) What specifics around English language learners and learning disabilities would you like to learn more about?

Appendix C

Participant Consent Letter

March 2016

Dear Colleague,

I am a graduate student working on an advanced degree in literacy education at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. As part of my graduate work, I plan to conduct research with licensed teachers in our district in March 2016. The purpose of this letter is to request your participation.

The topic of my master's capstone (thesis) is how do educators decipher whether a student is experiencing the language acquisition process of if they have a learning disability? I plan to survey teachers about their perspectives and experiences with English Language Learners (ELL) and learning disabilities. The survey responses will be averaged to understand overall staff knowledge of the areas of language acquisition and learning disabilities. The survey questionnaires will be distributed in your school mailboxes and do not require a name identifier. Completed responses can be returned to the yellow envelope located in my staff mailbox. After completing the capstone, I will summarize the findings in a report to be distributed to school administrators.

There is little to no risk if you choose to participate. All results will be confidential and anonymous. Pseudonyms for the district, school, and participants will be used. The survey can be conducted at a place and time that is convenient for you. The survey response sheets will be destroyed after completion of my study.

Participation in the survey is voluntary and you may decline participation without negative consequences.

I have received approval from the School of Education at Hamline University and from Mrs. Tami Staloch-Schultz, Principal, to conduct this study. The capstone will be catalogued in Hamline's **Bush Library Digital Commons**, a searchable electronic repository. My results might be included in an article in a professional journal or a session at a professional conference. In all cases, your identity and participation in this study will be confidential.

If you agree to participate, keep page two. Fill out the duplicate agreement to participate on page three and return it to me via my school mailbox. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Erin Logan
225 Garden View Drive
Apple Valley, MN 55124
952-239-1820
emann01@hamline.edu

Informed Consent to Participate in Quantitative/Qualitative Survey

Keep this full page for your records.

I have received the letter about your research study for which you will be surveying licensed teachers and analyzing data related to English language learner and learning disabilities. I understand that participation poses little to no risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from participation in the project at any time without negative consequences.

Signature _____

Date _____

[Informed Consent to Participate in Qualitative/Quantitative Survey

Return this portion to the yellow envelope located in the mailbox of Erin Logan

I have received the letter about your research study for which you will be surveying licensed teachers and analyzing data related to English language learner and learning disabilities. I understand that participation poses little to no risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from participation in the project at any time without negative consequences.

Signature_____

Date_____

Appendix D

Human Subjects Committee Approval For Research

HAMLINE UNIVERSITY

Logan, Erin E. <emann01@hamline.edu>

HSC Approval
3 messages

Speranza-Reeder, Mary <msperanzareeder01@hamline.edu>   Thu, Feb 25, 2016 at 11:48 AM
To: "Erin E. Logan" <emann01@hamline.edu>, Karen Moroz <kmoroz01@hamline.edu>

To: Erin Logan
From: Vivian Johnson
Date: 2-25-16
Re: HSC Approval

On behalf of the Human Subjects Committee, we are pleased to inform you that your application has been fully approved and that you are now able to collect data related to your capstone.
Please accept our best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Vivian Johnson, PhD
Chair, HSC Committee
School of Education
Hamline University
vjohnson@hamline.edu
(651) 523-2432

_____

HAMLINE UNIVERSITY

Mary Speranza-Reeder
Program Administrator
School of Education
Office: (651) 523-2484
msperanzareeder01@hamline.edu

Follow me on Twitter! @msreeder101

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Appendix E

Professional Development: "Teaching English Language Learners and Students with Learning Difficulties in the Inclusive Classroom".

WestEd

Improving education through research, development, and service.

Teaching English Learners and Students with Learning Difficulties in the Inclusive Classroom

Who Should Participate

- Teachers and specialists who provide academic instruction to English learners and/or students with learning difficulties in grades 4-12 (may include lower grades)

- Teacher support staff such as staff developers, specialists, and coaches

- School/district teams of general and special education instructional leaders, teacher support staff, and teachers for gradual school implementation

- Whole school academic instructional staff for immediate school implementation

Goals of the Workshop

Participants attain the knowledge and practice the skills to implement a doable, daily, research-based set of specific strategies to tailor academic instruction for English learners and students with learning difficulties such as specific learning disabilities, ADHD, and Asperger's syndrome.

School/district teams attain the knowledge, practice the skills, and plan to implement the strategies schoolwide, blending this approach with other improvement initiatives and prior professional development.

What You Learn

- The language skills of English learners at different developmental levels to learn and communicate what they have learned

- The learning characteristics of students with prevalent learning difficulties

- How to blend direct instruction and inquiry-based, student-led learning for all diverse learners

- How to develop academic vocabulary and discourse in a discipline for all diverse learners

- How to integrate six strategies to scaffold content learning for all diverse learners

- How to assess content learning in the classroom for all diverse learners

- How to "put it all together" as a doable, daily approach to teaching in an inclusive classroom

What Resources Support Your Learning

The workshop is based on *Teaching English Learners and Students with Learning Difficulties in an Inclusive Classroom: A*

Appendix F

Professional Development: "How to Address Special Education Needs in the English
Language Learner Classroom".

How to Address Special Education Needs in the ELL Classroom
By
Kristina Robertson

On this page

- Initial Assessments
- Language Acquisition or Cognitive Difficulty?
- Academic Interventions
- Taking Cultural Factors into Account During Assessments
- Special Education Support
- Hot links

"We worry about what a child will be tomorrow but we forget that he is someone today."
— Karl Meninger

I remember a former Somali student of mine, Samira, who was dedicated, attentive, and friendly. I thoroughly enjoyed having her in my class as we worked on her English skills. When it came to assigning final grades, though, I had a dilemma because Samira wasn't able to successfully complete assignments. She came to my classroom often, asked for additional help, and did her best to understand the directions and complete the work. My heart broke every time I corrected her assignments because I realized that despite her efforts she either wasn't able to do the assignment, or she had copied someone else's work. She was obviously struggling, and at the time I attributed it to her refugee experience and lack of formal education. I thought that she just needed more time and English language exposure.

Now that I have more experience and have had the benefit of collaborating with ELL Special Education teachers, I believe it is likely that Samira had a learning disability that went undiagnosed because our teaching staff had not received training in how to recognize and address special education needs for ELL students.

I hope that your ELL staff will receive the same training and professional

development, and I encourage all ELL educators to look for and request such training opportunities. To get you started in the meantime, I will provide an overview of practical guidance on steps to follow when considering if a student has special education needs.

In addition, Colorín Colorado has an excellent webcast featuring an interview with Dr. Elsa Cardenas-Hagan on the topic of ELL students with learning disabilities. I highly recommend that teachers view this webcast to get good information on the issues surrounding ELL students with special education needs.

Initial Assessments

As you consider whether a student may have special education needs, it is important to remember to give ELL students time to adjust to their new surroundings and language, and to have an opportunity to demonstrate their learning over time. This may take up to a year, accounting for cultural adjustment, a silent receptive period, and the development of literacy skills in a second language.

However, if a child has obvious signs of cognitive or physical issues such as those listed below, they need to receive immediate support. Factors leading to immediate referral include:

- Documentation of known previous medical condition(s)

- A parent's request for an assessment

- An accident/injury, with doctor's request for an assessment

- Known brain damage

-Problems with hearing or vision

- Physical disability

- Cleft palate

- Cerebral palsy

- Brain injury

- Polio

- Post traumatic stress

- Documented severe malnutrition

After a year, the teacher(s) will have had more experience with the student and will have had multiple opportunities to observe his/her work. It can be tricky to determine if an ELL student is struggling with language barriers or if he/she has special needs because many of the behaviors displayed are the same. For example, if a teacher has a student who refuses to answer questions, makes inappropriate comments, has poor recall, comprehension and vocabulary, and struggles when sequencing ideas, the teacher might be concerned that the child needs special education support. While that may be the case, it's also important to remember that an ELL student may display any of these behaviors due to language difficulties.

Language Acquisition or Cognitive Difficulty?

The next question, then, is how a teacher knows if a problem is related to language or if it reflects a cognitive difficulty. The general guideline is that if a student is making academic progress at about the same rate as other ELL students from similar backgrounds (students who share similar linguistic, cultural, educational, or refugee experiences), then the student probably does not have special education needs. Rather, he/she may just need more time and language support as a result of having to process so much new information.

On the other hand, if the student is progressing much more slowly than other

ELL students with a similar background, or needs a lot of repeated instruction when other ELLs with similar educational experience do not, it is a good idea to take some initial steps to see if the student has special needs that haven't been identified. I know of a student who was having significant struggles with learning; when his teacher met with the family and a bilingual interpreter, she was told that the boy had had a brain injury in his home country, and learning had always been difficult for him.

There were no special supports available to him in his prior school, so his parents never thought to ask for them. An English Language Learner can be referred for academic assessment if:

Documentation shows no progress or change resulting from instructional strategies, alternative instruction, or interventions. An interpreter who speaks the student's native language should participate in interventions whenever possible.

The student has attended a U.S. school for at least one year. Documentation of the student's school record should include previous school experience, the location of previous schools, and length of time at each school.

ESL and/or bilingual staff support the position that the student is performing differently than his/her cultural peers.

Parents have been contacted and attended an assessment planning meeting and agree with the decision to assess.

Academic Interventions

If an ELL student is suspected of having special needs, it is very important that academic interventions are tried and the results recorded before any formal assessment is requested. This is important because students may have very different learning styles or comfort levels with the U.S. educational environment, or may be struggling with literacy skills. When a teacher does intentional interventions to provide support and documents the results,

valuable information is then available if an assessment is needed in the future.

Here are some common academic intervention options:

Re-word the text of the reading assignment in simple phrases.

Write hints or reminders in the text.

Use real life experiences when discussing the reading material.

Have the work or tests read orally.

Pair ELL students with other ELLs.

Use manipulatives or hands-on aids.

Use a tape recorder to play books on tape.

Provide native language support to the student in the classroom.

Explicitly teach study skills/habits, as well as effective ways of using educational resources and materials.

Use the student's name in instructional examples.

Break work into smaller pieces and do task analysis.

Provide visuals to support academic work.

Encourage re-reading of tasks/instructions.

Provide more time to finish assignments/tests.

Have the student use a 3 x 5 index card to cover the lines above or below while reading materials or taking tests.

Pair the English Language Learner with a gifted or older same-language student in tutorial situations.

Important note:
English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are not an intervention, but collaborating with the ESL teacher on planned interventions is helpful.

Taking Cultural Factors into Account During Assessments

If the interventions have not been effective up to this point, then further information must be gathered and an initial evaluation conference must be held with the parents of the student. It is extremely important that a highly trained interpreter be available to assist in explaining the concerns and the evaluation process in a way the family can understand. For example, in the Somali language there is no direct term that means "Special Education" and if the interpretation is not done sensitively, the family may believe the staff is referring to the student as "crazy" or "mentally defective."

If there is no trained interpreter at the building, it is possible that the district has a central interpretation staff that has had training in special education assessments. If the district does not have such staff, it is possible the state may have resources to assist. In the initial evaluation conference it is important to share with the parents the interventions that have been tried in the classroom, an explanation of what is involved in an initial assessment, and what support would be available to the child if he/she qualifies.

A good place to start an evaluation is with a very thorough family interview. The special education staff member and an interpreter can ask many in-depth and background questions to get more insight into any environmental or physical issues that may affect the child's learning.
Example questions might include:

1) Have there been any serious health problems in the family? Parents? Grandparents? Aunts and uncles?
2)What is the educational level of the parents and of the child? What was the child's educational experience prior to coming to the U.S.?

3)Has there been any trauma in the family? For example, has the child been involved in a violent situation, or witnessed violence and death in a war situation?

4)Has anyone in the family ever had psychological issues such as depression? (This may need to be described more in behavioral ways, such as describing someone who was sad or slept a lot.)

5)Have there been any other identifiable behaviors in the family such as stuttering or dyslexia? (Again, the behaviors may need to be explained.)

Special Education Support

If the child qualifies for special education services, then due process is followed, and again it is very important that the family have a skilled interpreter at the meeting when they consent to service and for all future Independent Education Plan (IEP) meetings. It is best if the child can receive special education services from a teacher who speaks the student's language, but this type of support is not often available.

Special education teachers who are working with ELL students would benefit from attending professional development sessions and getting resources that will assist them in understanding how to work effectively with ELL students. In the Hotlinks section I have included links to the Minnesota Department of Education website which contains lots of valuable ELL Special Education information, as well as forms translated into many languages.

As I think about my former student, Samira, I wonder where she is, and I hope that she's gotten the support she needed. If I'd known then what I know now, I would have realized that her inability to make academic progress at a similar pace to her ELL peers was a red flag, and not just a language issue. I encourage all teachers to find the support and detailed information they need to ensure that all of their students receive the services necessary for academic success.

All information included in the hotlinks below appears courtesy of Minneapolis Public Schools Special Education ELL department.

Appendix G

Professional Development: "Language Acquisition: An Overview"

Language Acquisition: An Overview
By
Kristina Robertson, Karen Ford

On this page

"One generation plants the trees; another gets the shade."
— Chinese Proverb

When I read *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams, I remember being fascinated by the "babel fish." These were fish, who when dropped in a person's ear, would provide immediate translation of any language, thriving on sound waves and converting them into comprehensible language.

Wouldn't it be just great if learning a new language were that easy (despite the "yuck" factor)? While we do have some technology that provides translation into a variety of languages, it often fails to translate accurately due to the complexity of language. Effective communication requires so much more than just being able to translate vocabulary words — it requires knowledge of intonation, dialect, and intent, and a nuanced understanding of word use, expression, and a language's cultural context. For example, one online translation application I tried translated "Fall Events" as "fall down events" in Spanish because it didn't know that I was referring to events in autumn.

So, without a babel fish or perfect technology, we are left with the old-fashioned way of learning a new language, which requires time, effort, and patience. How much time, effort, and patience depends a lot on the individual who is learning, as well as the learning environment and situation, but language researchers have developed a general outline of language acquisition that helps explain the process that language learners go through to develop skills in a foreign language. In this article, I will provide an

overview to the stages of language acquisition, and offer strategies designed to support ELL instruction at different stages of language acquisition.

Stages of Language Acquisition

Researchers define language acquisition into two categories: first-language acquisition and second-language acquisition. First-language acquisition is a universal process regardless of home language. Babies listen to the sounds around them, begin to imitate them, and eventually start producing words. Second-language acquisition assumes knowledge in a first language and encompasses the process an individual goes through as he or she learns the elements of a new language, such as vocabulary, phonological components, grammatical structures, and writing systems.

How long does it take for a language learner to go through these stages? Just as in any other learning situation, it depends on the individual. One of the major contributors to accelerated second language learning is the strength of first language skills. Language researchers such as Jim Cummins, Catherine Snow, Lily Wong Filmore and Stephen Krashen have studied this topic in a variety of ways for many years. The general consensus is that it takes between five to seven years for an individual to achieve advanced fluency. This generally applies to individuals who have strong first language and literacy skills. If an individual has not fully developed first language and literacy skills, it may take between seven to ten years to reach advanced fluency. It is very important to note that every ELL student comes with his or her own unique language and education background, and this will have an impact on their English learning process.

It is also important to keep in mind that the understood goal for American ELL students is Advanced Fluency, which includes fluency in academic contexts as well as social contexts. Teachers often get frustrated when ELL students appear to be fluent because they have strong social English skills, but then they do not participate well in academic projects and discussions. Teachers who are aware of ELL students' need to develop academic language fluency in English will be much better prepared to assist those students in becoming academically successful. (Learn more about academic language in Colorín Colorado's academic language resource section.)

Pre-Production	This is also called "the silent period," when the student takes in the new language but does not speak it. This period often lasts six weeks or longer, depending on the individual.
Early Production	The individual begins to speak using short words and sentences, but the emphasis is still on listening and absorbing the new language. There will be many errors in the early production stage.
Speech Emergent	Speech becomes more frequent, words and sentences are longer, but the individual still relies heavily on context clues and familiar topics. Vocabulary continues to increase and errors begin to decrease, especially in common or repeated interactions.
Beginning Fluency	Speech is fairly fluent in social situations with minimal errors. New contexts and academic language are challenging and the individual will struggle to express themselves due to gaps in vocabulary and appropriate phrases.
Intermediate Fluency	Communicating in the second language is fluent, especially in social language situations. The individual is able to speak almost fluently in new situations or in academic areas, but there will be gaps in vocabulary knowledge and some unknown expressions. There are very few errors, and the individual is able to demonstrate higher order thinking skills in the second language such as offering an opinion or analyzing a problem.
Advanced Fluency	The individual communicates fluently in all contexts and can maneuver successfully in new contexts and when exposed to new academic information. At this stage, the individual may still have an accent and use idiomatic expressions incorrectly at times, but the individual is essentially fluent and comfortable communicating in the second language

Stage	Strategies
Pre-Production	Emphasize listening comprehension by using read-alouds and music. Use visuals and have students point to pictures or act out vocabulary. Speak slowly and use shorter words, but use correct English phrasing. Model "survival" language by saying and showing the meaning. For example, say, "Open your book," and then open a book while the student observes. Gesture, point and show as much as possible. More advanced classmates who speak the same language can support new learning through interpretation. Avoid excessive error correction. Reinforce learning by modeling correct language usage when students make mistakes.
Early Production	Continue the strategies listed above, but add opportunities for students to produce simple language. Ask students to point to pictures and say the new word.

	Ask yes/no and either/or questions.
	Have students work in pairs or small groups to discuss a problem.
	Have literate students write short sentences or words in graphic organizers.
	Model a phrase and have the student repeat it and add modifications. Teacher says, "This book is very interesting." The student repeats it and says, "This book is very boring." Continue with as many modifications as possible.
	Avoid excessive error correction.
	Reinforce learning by modeling correct usage.
Speech Emergent	Introduce more academic language and skills by using the same techniques listed above, but beginning to use more academic vocabulary.
	Introduce new academic vocabulary and model how to use it in a sentence.
	Provide visuals and make connections with student's background knowledge as much as possible.

	Ask questions that require a short answer and are fairly literal. Introduce charts and graphs by using easily understood information such as a class survey of food preferences. Have students re-tell stories or experiences and have another student write them down. The ELL student can bring these narratives home to read and reinforce learning. In writing activities, provide the student with a fill-in-the blank version of the assignment with the necessary vocabulary listed on the page. Provide minimal error correction. Focus only on correction that directly interferes with meaning. Reinforce learning by modeling the correct usage.
Beginning Fluency	Have students work in pairs and groups to discuss content During instruction, have students do a **"Think, pair, share"** to give the student an opportunity to process the new language and concept. Ask questions that require a full response with explanation. If you do not understand the student's

	explanation, ask for clarification by paraphrasing and asking the student if you heard them correctly.
	Ask questions that require inference and justification of the answer.
	Ask students if they agree or disagree with a statement and why.
	Model more advanced academic language structures such as, "I think," "In my opinion," and "When you compare." Have students repeat the phrases in context.
	Re-phrase incorrect statements in correct English, or ask the student if they know another way to say it.
	Introduce nuances of language such as when to use more formal English and how to interact in conversations.
	Have students make short presentations, providing them with the phrases and language used in presentations ("Today I will be talking about") and giving them opportunities to practice the presentation with partners before getting in front of the class.

	Continue to provide visual support and vocabulary development. Correct errors that interfere with meaning, and pre-identify errors that will be corrected in student writing, such as verb-tense agreement. Only correct the errors agreed upon. You may want to assist in improving pronunciation by asking a student to repeat key vocabulary and discussing how different languages have different sounds.
Intermediate Fluency	Identify key academic vocabulary and phrases and model them. Ask students to produce the language in class activities. Use graphic organizers and thinking maps and check to make sure the student is filling them in with details. Challenge the student to add more. Help the student make connections with new vocabulary by instructing him or her in the etymology of words or word families such as, "important, importance, importantly." Create assessments that give students an opportunity to present in English after they have an opportunity to practice in pairs

	or small groups.
	Introduce more academic skills, such as brainstorming, prioritizing, categorization, summarizing and compare and contrast.
	Ask students to identify vocabulary by symbols that show whether the student "knows it really well, kind of knows it, or doesn't know it at all." Help students focus on strategies to get the meaning of new words.
	Have a "guessing time" during silent reading where they circle words they don't know and write down their guess of the meaning. Check the results as a class.
	Introduce idioms and give examples of how to use them appropriately. For example, "Let's wind up our work." What's another way you could use the phrase "wind up?"
	Starting at this level, students need more correction/feedback, even on errors that do not directly affect meaning. They should be developing a more advanced command of syntax, pragmatics, pronunciation, and other elements that do not necessarily affect meaning but do contribute to oral fluency.

	It may also be helpful to discuss language goals with the student so you can assist in providing modeling and correction in specified areas.
Advanced Fluency	Students at this level are close to native language fluency and can interact well in a variety of situations. Continue to develop language skills as gaps arise by using the strategies listed above. Although the student may seem completely fluent, he or she still benefit from visual support, building on background knowledge, pre-teaching vocabulary and making connections between content areas. Offer challenge activities to expand the student's vocabulary knowledge such as identifying antonyms, synonyms and the use of a thesaurus and dictionary. Demonstrate effective note-taking and provide a template. Offer error correction on academic work and on oral language. Because students at this stage have achieved near-native fluency, they benefit from support in fine-tuning their oral and written language skills.

Instructional Strategies

If you have ELL students in your classroom, it is more than likely there will be students at a variety of stages in the language acquisition process. What can teachers do to differentiate instruction according to language level? Here are some suggestions for appropriate instructional strategies according to stages of language acquisition.

Recommendations

Scaffold instruction so students receive comprehensible input and are able to successfully complete tasks at their level. Instructional scaffolding works just like the scaffolding used in building. It holds you at the level needed until you are ready to take it down. Scaffolding includes asking students questions in formats that give them support in answering, such as yes/no questions, one-word identifications, or short answers. It also means providing the context for learning by having visuals or other hands-on items available to support content learning. Also, when practicing a new academic skill such as skimming, scaffolding involves using well-known material so the students aren't struggling with the information while they are trying to learn a new skill. Scaffolding includes whatever it takes to make the instruction meaningful for the student in order to provide a successful learning experience.

Use cognates to help Spanish speakers learn English and derive meaning from content. The Colorín Colorado website has a helpful list of common cognates in Spanish for teachers to reference. Teachers can explicitly point out cognates for Spanish speaking students so they begin to realize that this is a useful way for them to increase their English vocabulary.

Explicit vocabulary instruction is very important in accelerating ELL students' English language development. Textbooks include lists of new vocabulary words based on grade-level content, but ELL students need further vocabulary instruction. There are many words in a text that may affect the ELL student's comprehension of the text that a teacher may

assume he or she knows. It is important for teachers to develop ways to help students identify the words they don't know, as well as strategies for getting their meaning. Of course it is also beneficial if teachers reinforce the language structures or common associations of vocabulary. For example, "squeak" is a sound that often goes with "mouse" or "door" and it may be stated as, "squeak, squeaky, squeaks, or squeaked."

Error correction should be done very intentionally and appropriately according to student language ability, as noted earlier in the article. Students who are just beginning to speak English are already nervous about using their new language skills and constant correction will not improve their ability; it will just make them want to withdraw. I inform students in advance of the type of errors I will correct, such as "missing articles" and "third person agreement," and then those are the only errors I check. In my class, I do not correct the errors; I circle the mistakes and return the paper to the student. They are responsible for correcting the errors and returning the paper to receive more points. Most of the time the students can make the corrections themselves when they see the area I've circled, but if they have difficulty, I guide them as they make the correction. In this way, I feel there is a manageable amount of correction information to work with and the student will actually learn from doing the correction.

Learning another language. If you learn the language(s) your students speak, they will be thrilled to hear you try it with them. I learned how to say "good morning" in Somali and had to practice for an hour before I felt comfortable saying it. When I did I was rewarded with the big grins of students as they entered the room. They were excited to teach me other phrases as well, and we discussed how much English they had learned since they arrived in the country. They were very proud to think of how much progress they'd made.

Seek the experts in your building or district who can offer you guidance on effective instructional strategies for your ELL students. There are many teachers who have taught ELL students in your content area, have taught a certain population of students, or are trained ESL or bilingual teachers who have a lot of advice and support to offer. Don't hesitate to look for support when you are challenged to reach students who are learning English. This can be especially true when you have a "pre-production" or "beginning level" student and you are responsible for grade level content instruction.

Appendix H

Professional Development: "Classroom Instruction That Works with English Language Learner- Facilitator's Guide".

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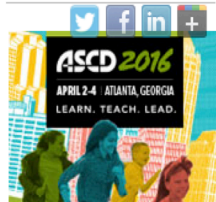
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Classroom Instruction That Works with English Language Learners Facilitator's Guide

by Jane D. Hill and Cynthia L. Björk

Table of Contents

Chapter 2. The Stages of Second Language Acquisition

[Facilitator: Show Slide 14.]

Slide 14

Key Ideas for Chapter 2

- Students acquiring a second language progress through five predictable stages.
- Effective ELL instruction
  - *Reflects* students' stages of language acquisition.
  - *Helps* students move through the language acquisition levels.
  - *Engages* ELLs at all stages of language acquisition in higher-level thinking activities.

[Facilitator: Show Slide 15.]

Slide 15

Classroom Instruction that works with English Language Learners Facilitator's Guide

Jane D. Hill and Cynthia L. Björk
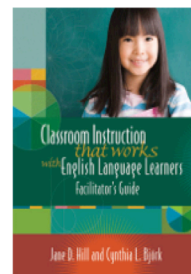
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Related Topics
- Professional Development

Appendix I

Professional Development: "Sp/ELLing Out Institutional Barriers to Equity and Excellence for Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners".

About the Presenter:

Courtlandt Butts began his education in the Philadelphia Public School System before moving to Orlando, Florida, where he completed his early schooling. He attended Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), where he earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education. He continued his education at the University of Northern Iowa (NIU), earning a Master of Arts in Education, with an emphasis in Educational Technology and Media. During graduate school, he worked as Project Director for an international youth services program that led him to work abroad, primarily in Spain, Japan and China. Courtlandt's commitment to educating children of all races and differing abilities led him to work at the Gretchen Everhart School for Exceptional Children in Tallahassee, FL, where he recognized the critical benefit of parent engagement and community outreach in building healthy children and communities. He was involved in developing community and family initiatives aimed at promoting student achievement through tutor programs and community activities. He later became an Assistant Professor in the Education Department at Spelman College in Atlanta, GA, which placed special emphasis on urban education that promoted advocacy, culturally responsive pedagogy, professional teaching, and dispositions. Courtlandt is currently the Director of Equity Transformation at Pacific Educational Group.

Cultural Competency

200:213 Sp/ELLing Out Institutional Barriers to Equity and Excellence for Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners

Presenters: Luis Versalles & Deborah McKnight

Learning Opportunity: Workshop

Time: 8:30 am-3:30 pm
Date: March 17 & 18, 2016
Location: WMEP Professional Learning Center, 4825 Olson Memorial Highway, Suite 100
              Golden Valley, MN 55422

Prerequisite: Beyond Diversity
Target Audience: All staff

Cost:
WMEP Member District Staff: Free*
Non-member District Staff: $400*
* This includes course materials

Sp/Elling Out Institutional Barriers

Description:
Participants will be lead through a process of transformation rooted in adaptive leadership principles that will build toward effective interdepartmental collaboration. The strengths and expertise of special educators and ELL educators will be leveraged to work in deep and meaningful collaboration with general education in order to provide a more rigorous, culturally relevant and empowering mainstream experience for Sp/ELL students, as well as the necessary differentiation based on students' needs.

About the Presenters:
Luis Versalles is a first generation Cuban-American, Luis Versalles was born and raised in Bloomington, Minnesota. His bilingual and bi-cultural life experiences have fueled his passion for fostering racial, linguistic, and cultural equity in education for all students. After completing his public school K-12 education, Luis went on to complete a Bachelor's degree and Master of Education, with emphasis on Second Languages and Cultures, from the University of Minnesota, becoming the first college graduate from his family in the process. This experience motivates his work in coaching school leaders to better understand the complexities of families of color in navigating both the K-12 educational system and higher education, in his work as Director of Leadership with Pacific Educational Group. Versalles began his professional career as a teacher of Spanish and English as a Second Language in his hometown of Bloomington and its neighboring district, Richfield. His teaching career provided experiences at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels.

Following his teaching career, Luis launched into the field of administration, working first as Magnet Programs Grant project coordinator for the Richfield Public Schools and later as program coordinator, assistant principal, and principal of Richfield Dual Language School. Luis was instrumental in the community outreach, feasibility study, and coordination required to bring into existence Richfield Dual Language School, the first suburban two-way immersion school in the history of the state of Minnesota. On the strength of his leadership experiences in two-way immersion education, Luis was awarded the Joyce Bilingual Preschool "Bridging Gaps, Bridging Cultures" award in 2008, which recognizes educational leaders in the Latino community of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. He has presented on several occasions at the University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisitions (CARLA) Summer Institute on the topic of "Immersion Principal Leadership Competencies" and has also presented for the Louisiana Department of Education on the same topic. Versalles, along with researchers from the Center for Applied Linguistics, and teacher leaders from Richfield Dual Language School, has presented on the topic of "Fostering Racial, Linguistic, and Cultural Equity in Two-Way Immersion" at the La Cosecha National Conference of Dual Language of New Mexico. He serves on the Executive Board of the Minnesota Advocates for Immersion Network.

Deborah McKnight has a BA in Elementary and Special Education from the University of Charleston in West Virginia. She also received her MS Ed in Learning Disabilities and Behavior Disorders from Buffalo State College at State University of New York. And she holds credentials from California State University for Educational Administration and Policy Studies. She is currently a consultant in Special Education for Pacific Educational Group.

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Sp/Elling Out Institutional Barriers

Appendix J

Professional Development: "Preventing Disproportionate Representation: Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Pre-Referral Interventions".

"PREVENTING DISPRORIONATE REPRESENTATION: CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE PRE-REFERRAL INTERVENTIONS"

Authors: Shernaz B. Garcia and Alba A. Ortiz

Disproportionate representation of students from diverse socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds in special education has been a persistent concern in the field for more than 30 years. To date, in spite of continued efforts by educators and researchers to identify contributing factors and develop solutions, student enrollments in special education range from over to under-representation, depending on the disability category and the specific racial/ethnic group, social class, culture, and language of the students (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Although examining rates of representation can alert educators to the existence of a problem, ultimately a key question in dealing with disproportionality in special education is, "Are we identifying and serving the 'right' students?

Pre-referral intervention emerged during the 1970s in response to the concern about inappropriate identification and labeling of children for special education and has evolved over time into a variety of models. The primary concern of all models has generally been to differentiate students with disabilities from those whose academic or behavioral difficulties reflect other factors, including inappropriate or inadequate instruction. In all these models, students who are persistently non-responsive to more intensive and alternative instructional or behavioral interventions over time are viewed as the most likely candidates for special education (Fletcher, Barnes, & Francis, 2002; Ortiz, 2002). Current discussions about response-to-intervention (RTI) models for the identification of learning disabilities (LDs) reflect these concerns as well (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). When RTI is implemented with culturally and linguistically diverse learners, it is critical that the pre-referral intervention process is culturally and linguistically responsive; that is, educators must ensure that students' socio-cultural, linguistic, racial/ethnic, and other relevant background characteristics are addressed at all stages, including reviewing student performance, considering reasons for student difficulty or failure, designing alternative interventions, and interpreting assessment results (Ortiz, 2002). Without such examination, even pre-referral intervention practices may not result in improved student outcomes and may continue to result in disproportionate representation in special education.

In this brief, we highlight four key elements of culturally- and linguistically-responsive pre-referral intervention for culturally and linguistically diverse students. These elements are (1) Preventing School Underachievement and Failure, (2) Early Intervention for Struggling Learners, (3) Diagnostic/Prescriptive Teaching, and (4) Availability of General Education Problem-Solving Support Systems.

Key Element 1:

PREVENTING SCHOOL UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND FAILURE AMONG
CULTURALLY AND LINGUSTICALLY DIVERSE LEARNERS.

When educators understand that culture provides a context for the teaching and learning
of all students, they recognize that differences between home and school cultures can
pose challenges for both teachers and students (García & Guerra, 2004) and that school
improvement efforts must be focused on preventing these types of academic and
behavioral difficulties. When considering the creation of student-centered learning
communities, there are many definitions for culture that can be used (Erickson, 2001). In
this brief, we will highlight the fact that all students have cultures composed of social,
familial, linguistic, and ethnically-related practices that shape the ways in which they see
the world and interact with it. In most cases, schools are places where dominant cultural
practices form the basis of social, academic, and linguistic practices and act as the driving
force for the varied experiences students have in schools. In cases where dominant
cultural practices shape school culture, many culturally and linguistically diverse students
and their families find it challenging to function and participate in school.

Four elements of school culture are particularly important: (a) shared responsibility
among educators for educating all students, (b) availability of a range of general
education services and programs, (c) collaborative relationships with culturally and
linguistically diverse families, and (d) ongoing professional development focused on
effective practices for culturally and linguistically diverse learners. In turn, these
elements influence the classroom learning environment as they influence teachers' efforts
to design and implement culturally- and linguistically-responsive curricula and
instruction for their students.

1.1

WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO TO CREATE A POSITIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT
FOR CULTURALLY AND LINGUSTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS?

Share responsibility for educating all students, including culturally responsive curricula
and instruction. A positive school climate is one in which educators (teachers,
administrators, and related services personnel) share the philosophy that all students can
learn and that they, as educators, are responsible for creating learning environments in
which their culturally and linguistically diverse students can be successful (Ortiz, 2002).
Ensuring student success, however, requires that educators have high expectations for all
students regardless of their cultural, linguistic, economic, and other characteristics. This
understanding leads to an additive view of culture and language (Cummins, 1986), and
there is a focus on designing accessible, inclusive, and equitable learning environments
that develop bicultural/bilingual competence among all students. Moreover, students'
success and failure are considered to be the results of a match (or mismatch) between the
learning environment and their learning needs and characteristics (García, Wilkinson, &
Ortiz, 1995).

Finally, shared responsibility for all students also means that teachers have systematic opportunities to plan and coordinate services when students are taught by more than one teacher (e.g., middle and high school students) or are served by more than one program (e.g., students receiving pull-out English as a second language [ESL] services, instruction from reading specialists, or special education). Failure to share responsibility can create a disconnect between instruction across teachers and programs and contribute to students' learning difficulties or slow down their progress.

Supporting all students also includes culturally responsive curricula and instruction. Culturally responsive curricula and instruction go beyond an additive approach to pedagogy, where diversity is represented superficially (e.g., food festivals or culture "days"). These practices add representations of diversity, yet contribute to "othering" or exoticizing culturally and linguistically diverse students and their communities (Oakes & Lipton, 1999). Culturally and linguistically diverse learners are better served by curricula and instruction that build on their prior socio-cultural and linguistic knowledge and experiences (i.e., their strengths and available resources). Students are actively engaged in the instructional process through meaningful dialogue between students and teachers, and among students in written and oral domains (Leinhardt, 1992). Classroom instruction is comprehensible at two levels: (a) it is embedded in contexts that are familiar to the students (i.e., socio-cultural relevance) and (b) the language(s) of instruction as well as the content are within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). This is accomplished through thematic instruction, guided participation (Rogoff, 1990), and instructional mediation using a variety of scaffolding techniques (Santamaría, Fletcher, & Bos, 2002).

1.2

WHAT IS MY SCHOOL'S RESPONSIBILITY TO SUPPORT CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES?

Make available a range of general and special education services. When schools offer an array of programs and services that accommodate the unique learning characteristics of specific groups of students, special education is less likely to be viewed as the logical alternative for students who are not successful in general education classrooms (Rueda, Artiles, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002). Examples of such alternatives include early childhood education, Title I services, bilingual education/ESL, gifted/talented education, and services for immigrant students. In addition, community-based programs and support services can offer teachers, students, and families access to resources that support learning. When coordinated effectively, these efforts can be successful in developing resilience and increasing educational performance (Wang & Kovak, 1995). These programs are academically rich (i.e., focus on higher-order thinking and problem solving in addition to basic skills) and provide high-quality instruction designed to meet high expectations (García et al., 1995). Of course, high quality instruction presumes the availability of highly qualified teachers who have expertise related to culturally and

linguistically diverse students. These two factors are particularly relevant because a large percentage of culturally and linguistically diverse students is being educated in low-income and urban schools staffed with teachers who are relatively inexperienced with culturally and linguistically diverse learners, teaching out-of-field, and/or on emergency certification plans (Barron & Menken, 2002). This once again raises questions about the contribution of inadequate instruction to students' difficulties.

1.3

IT'S DIFFICULT TO GET MY STUDENTS' FAMILIES INVOLVED WHAT CAN I DO?

Create collaborative relationships with students and their families. To increase the likelihood of student success, parents/family members must be seen as valuable resources in school improvement efforts and as partners in promoting academic progress (García et al., 1995). In a positive school environment, educators reject interpretations of student failure that place the responsibility and blame on families and adopt an additive framework that appreciates the funds of knowledge among all families, including those with limited resources (Moll, Amanti, & Neff, 1992). Given the focus on shared responsibility and equity, teachers work closely with parents and other family members from a posture of cultural reciprocity (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). These efforts communicate to families that their language and culture are valued, their educational goals for their child are important, and educators are committed to working within the family's cultural comfort zone (García, 2002). Ultimately these messages can serve to develop an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, in which culturally and linguistically diverse families are more likely to actively participate in a variety of roles, including school governance and decision-making.

1.4

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TO ENHANCE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT FOR CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUENTS?

Focus professional development on effective practices for culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Given the limited availability of teachers with adequate preparation in effective practices for culturally and linguistically diverse learners, it is essential that educators engage in professional development that will lead to culturally competent practice. Effective staff development on this topic requires attention to participants' cultural self-awareness, attitudes/expectations, beliefs, knowledge, and skills (Lynch & Hanson, 1998). This should lead to an increased understanding of socio-cultural influences on teaching and learning, as well as the socio-political contexts of education in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Given the emphasis on shared responsibility for all students, school-wide professional development also provides a foundation of shared knowledge from which educators can work together. The following

general topics are important to include:

a) Cultural influences on children's socialization at home and at school.
b) First and second language acquisition and dialectal differences.
c.)Instructional strategies that promote proficiency in first and second languages/dialects
d.) Characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy
e.) Culturally responsive curricula for literacy development, academic content, and social skills
f.) Culturally-responsive classroom and behavior management strategies
g.)Informal assessment strategies to monitor student progress
h.) Building positive relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse families and communities

In summary, professional development related to diversity must go beyond cultural sensitivity and appreciation to equip educators with explicit, research-based pedagogical knowledge and skills that they can use in the classroom (García & Guerra, 2004).

Key Element 2:

EARLY INTERVENTION FOR STRUGGLING LEARNERS

Even when school-wide practices are focused on prevention, it is likely that some students will experience academic or behavioral difficulties. In such instances, early intervention strategies must be implemented as soon as these learning problems are noted. In this discussion, the term "early intervention" is purposefully substituted for "pre-referral intervention." All too often, pre-referral activities are viewed as a hurdle before students can be tested for special education. Moreover, the pre-referral process is often activated too late to be successful. Thus, general education's failure to intervene in a timely fashion, not the presence of a disability, may be the real source of students' difficulties. Research shows that if students are more than a year below grade level, even the best remedial or special education programs are unlikely to be successful (Slavin & Madden, 1989). Timely general education support systems for struggling learners are important components of early intervention aimed at improving academic performance and reducing inappropriate special education referrals.

As with prevention efforts, early intervention has classroom- and school-level components. At the classroom level, teachers use diagnostic/prescriptive teaching approaches to validate the source(s) of the difficulty. When such efforts are not adequate, they have access to school-wide support systems, such as peer and expert consultation, general education problem-solving teams, and alternative programs such as those that offer tutorial or remedial instruction in the context of general education (Ortiz, 2002).

Key Element 3:

DIAGNOSTIC/PRESCRIPTIVE TEACHING

Clinical teaching involves instruction that is carefully sequenced. Teachers (a) teach skills, subjects, or concepts; (b) reteach using significantly different strategies or approaches for the benefit of students who fail to meet expected performance levels after initial instruction, and (c) use informal assessment strategies to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and the possible causes of academic and/or behavioral difficulties (Ortiz, 2002).

Teachers conduct curriculum-based assessments (e.g., using observations, inventories, and analyses of student work/behavior) to monitor student progress and use these evaluation data to plan and/or modify instruction (King-Sears, Burgess, & Lawson, 1999). In the case of English language learners (ELLs), for example, results of assessments of conversational and academic language proficiency are critical in selecting the language(s) of instruction and in determining learning goals and objectives for native language and English instruction (Ortiz & García, 1990). Assessment data, along with documentation of efforts to improve student performance and the results of these efforts, are invaluable if students are later referred to remedial or special education programs (Ortiz, 2002).
Key Element 4:

AVAILABILITY OF GENERAL EDUCATION PROBLEM-SOLVING SUPPORT SYSTEMS

When clinical teaching is unsuccessful, teachers should have immediate access to general education support systems for further problem solving (Ortiz, 2002).

4.1

PEER OR EXPERT CONSULTATION

Peers or experts can work collaboratively with general education teachers to develop strategies to address students' learning problems and to guide them as they implement recommendations. For example, teachers can share instructional resources; they can observe each other's classrooms and offer suggestions for improving instruction or managing behavior; ESL teachers can help general education peers by demonstrating strategies for successfully integrating ELLs into their classes; teachers can meet to coordinate ESL and content instruction; and so forth (Ortiz, 2002).

4.2

TEACHER ASSISTANCE TEAMS

Teacher Assistance Teams (TAT) (Chalfant, Pysh, & Moultrie, 1979) can help teachers resolve problems they routinely encounter in their classrooms. These teams, comprised of four to six general education teachers and the teacher who requests assistance, design interventions to help struggling learners. At the TAT meeting, team members (a) reach consensus as to the nature of the problem; (b) determine priorities for intervention; (c) help the teacher select the methods, strategies, or approaches to be used in solving the problem; (d) assign responsibility for carrying out the recommendations; and (e) establish a follow-up plan to monitor progress (Chalfant, Pysh, & Moultrie, 1979). The teacher then implements the plan, with the assistance of team members or other colleagues, if needed. Follow-up meetings are held to review progress toward problem resolution. If the problem is resolved, the case is closed; if not, the team repeats the problem-solving process.

When teachers contact the team, their focus is on requesting assistance from the TAT for themselves; they are not referring students to the team. In other words, they continue to "own" the problem but seek to resolve the situation with the assistance of peers, creating shared responsibility. This distinguishes the TAT process from pre-referral interventions that are initiated because the teacher views the student's difficulties as the responsibility of others, such as remedial or special education teachers.

Across the various types of support systems available at the school level, it is important to systematically monitor and document student progress as well as the fidelity of implementation of the recommended interventions. While TATs have been reportedly successful, there is scant discussion, if any, in these reports regarding the cultural and/or linguistic appropriateness of interventions. For this reason, when students do not appear to respond to more intensive or alternate interventions, schools need to consider whether or not the intervention responds to the cultural and/or linguistic needs of the students. Additionally, schools need to assess factors related to the cultural context of classrooms, such as appropriateness of the curriculum and/or instruction.

In addition to individual teachers receiving support for problem-solving, school-wide support systems are beneficial to the entire school in a variety of ways. Serving on the TAT is an excellent professional development activity for team members and especially for teachers who request assistance from the team (Ortiz, 2002). The next time they encounter a student with a problem similar to one that the team helped them resolve, they know what to do. An additional benefit is that the TAT coordinator can analyze the types of problems for which teachers requested assistance and share this information with the principal (without identifying the teachers who requested assistance). The principal can thus identify issues that need to be addressed on a broader scale (e.g., the need to revise the school's discipline plan or to implement a tutoring program) or professional development topics that might be beneficial to the entire faculty (e.g., how to determine when students are truly proficient in English or when to transition students from reading

in their native language to reading in English). As a result, the problem-solving process can generate data to refine or modify other components of the educational system in ways that are tailored to the unique characteristics of the school.

4.3

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

When teachers request assistance from school-wide, problem-solving teams, it is important that they have access to a range of alternative services to support their efforts. General education alternatives for struggling learners may include one-on-one tutoring, family and student support groups, family counseling, services supported by federal Title I funds, and so forth. The support provided to students through these programs is supplemental to, not a replacement for, general education instruction (Slavin & Madden, 1989). Moreover, services should be intensive and temporary; students who have had to be removed from their regular classrooms for supplemental instruction should be returned to those classrooms as quickly as possible (Anderson & Pellicer, 1998). Finally, as with all other components of the model, it is critical that such alternatives are based on what is known to be effective for culturally and linguistically diverse students, and that they reflect the same philosophy as the rest of the school (i.e., high expectations, equity practices, additive orientation, and resilience-focused).

NEXT STEPS:

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER PREREFFERAL?

Prevention and early intervention are not intended to discourage special education referrals. Rather, they are fundamental to preventing referral of students whose problems result from factors other than the presence of a disability. When these approaches fail to resolve learning difficulties, then referral to special education is warranted (provided that implementation was appropriate). Decisions of the referral committee are informed by data gathered through the prevention, early intervention, and referral processes (Ortiz, 1997).

Prevention and early intervention efforts can significantly improve the academic achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students. In turn, this will reduce the number of students (a) perceived to be at risk of failing, (b) inappropriately referred to remedial or special education programs, and/or (c) inaccurately identified as having a disability. These outcomes are critical given the concern that as the linguistic and cultural diversity of students increases, the special education system may be at risk of being overwhelmed by referrals of culturally and linguistically diverse students because the general education system has failed to accommodate their needs.

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Appendix K

Professional Development: "Processes and Challenges in Identifying Learning Disabilities Among English Language Learner Students in three New York State Districts".

Processes and challenges in identifying learning disabilities among students who are English language learners in three New York State districts

Using interviews with district and school personnel and documents from state and district web sites in three districts in New York State, the study examines practices for identifying learning disabilities among students who are English language learners and the challenges that arise. The study finds both similarities and differences in practices, with more differences in prereferral than in referral practices. It identifies eight challenges to the identification of learning disabilities in students who are English language learners and five interrelated elements that appear to be important for avoiding misidentification.

Research shows that students who are English language learners and also have learning disabilities face unique challenges because of their dual status (Artiles et al. 2005; Figueroa 1999; Harry 2002). As part of an initiative to help districts accurately identify students who are English language learners and who might have learning disabilities and to avoid over- and underidentification, the New York State Education Department asked the Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands for information on district practices for identifying learning disabilities among students who are English language learners and the challenges that arise, as perceived by district and school staff.

Two research questions guided the project:

- According to district and school personnel in three midsize New York State districts, what processes are used to identify students who are English language learners and also have learning disabilities?

- What challenges do those district administrators and school personnel describe about the process of identifying learning disabilities among students who are English language learners?

The research team profiled three midsize school districts in New York State. The team collected data primarily from semistructured interviews with district administrators and school personnel but also from publicly available sources and documents provided by respondents.

District identification processes

The three studied districts identify learning disabilities among students who are English language learners in two stages: prereferral and referral. Although the two processes are similar across the districts, there are also important differences.

Prereferral. The three districts follow a similar prereferral process that starts when teachers

identify students who are not progressing and consult fellow teachers, school support personnel, or administrators. The teacher and school colleagues discuss student data, consider instructional modifications, implement them with the student, and analyze the results. In all three districts the prereferral process is usually longer for students who are English language learners than for native English speakers to ensure sufficient time for the students to develop English proficiency and for educators to differentiate between language development issues and learning disabilities.

There are also some differences in the prereferral process of the three districts:

- *General staff organization for planning and problem solving.* Across the three districts there are differences in structured opportunities to discuss student progress and in access to staff with expertise in second language development.

- *Child study team staffing and roles.* Child study teams, a common way of organizing staff for prereferrals, are used in the middle schools in two of the three districts.

- *Supports and interventions.* The number of supports and interventions available in each middle school varies across the three districts.

- *Monitoring student progress in interventions.* The schools and districts monitor struggling students in different ways.

Referral. Because federal guidelines specify the steps to follow in the referral process, there are only minor variations across the districts. A

referral begins with obtaining parental permission and continues with the collection of student information, assessments, and overall evaluations by a district multidisciplinary team (the Committee on Special Education), which determines eligibility for special education services. Nonetheless, there were some differences in the districts' referral processes:

- *Initiating referrals.* In two districts referrals come from the child study team, in consultation with parents. In the third a school administrator initiates referrals, although teachers sometimes encourage parents to initiate referrals if they think a student's needs are not being met in a timely fashion.

- *Collecting student information.* In two districts most of the relevant student information has already been collected by the child study teams, while in the third district most of the information is collected during the referral period.

- *Sharing information between the English language learner and special education departments.* In two districts the English language learner and the special education departments begin sharing information about specific students before the referral process, while in the third district personnel from the two consult only after referral is initiated.

District challenges in the identification processes

Analysis of district and school interview data revealed eight challenges in the process of identifying learning disabilities among students who are English language learners:

Appendix L

Professional Development: " English Language Learner Culture and Equity Training Modules"

National Education Association Human and Civil Rights

nea NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Great Public Schools for Every Student

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER CULTURE AND EQUITY TRAINING MODULES

Language minority students (those with limited English proficiency) comprise the fastest-growing student group in the United States. The **English Language Learner Culture and Equity Training Program,** designed to close achievement gaps for linguistically and culturally diverse ELL students, provides general educators and ELL specialists with research-based, student-centered strategies and resources.

- **ELL Culture & Equity** (1.5–3 hours) — Recognizing that culture and equity must become critical components in all areas of the curriculum, this workshop Explore the impact of shifting demographics, examines common cultural assumptions and their relationship to educational equity, and promotes culturally relevant instruction. Workshop activities align with the new Common Core State Standards.

- **Optimal Learning Environment Conditions** (1.5–3 hours) — Recognizing that caring school communities are critical for students acquiring a second language, this workshop teaches participants to create the optimal school and classroom environments to help ELLs meet the complex cognitive demands of academic English instruction.

- **Second Language Acquisition and Development** (1.5–3 hours) — In this introductory workshop, participants receive an overview of the principles of second language acquisition and teaching, including concepts from the fields of linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociology, and education. Participants also learn practical ways to access the linguistic resources of students and provide linguistic support to students at different grades and levels of English proficiency.

- **Theory to Practice: Common Core in the Classroom** (1.5–3 hours) — Workshop participants learn 1) about the fundamental challenges faced by ELL students who are attempting to master academic content and increase their English proficiency and 2) how to engage these students in academic learning and English language development through ELL instructional strategies aligned and differentiated to lesson objectives and goals.

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Appendix M

Guiding questions to use in conjuction with professional development discussion

<u>Guiding Questions</u>

What are some factors that should be considered when an English language learner is being evaluated for special education services?

How can cultural background affect student behavior in the classroom?

What are the different stages and their respective characteristics within the language acquisition process?

What are some considerations that educators should take into account before referring an English language learner for special education services?

What do we as educators need to be more aware of when working with English language learners?

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