RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION WITH ENGLISH LEARNERS:
IMPLICATIONS FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT AND SPECIAL EDUCATION
REFERRALS

A Project

Presented to the faculty of the Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
California State University, Sacramento

Submitted in partial satisfaction of
the requirements for the degree of

SPECIALIST IN EDUCATION
in
School Psychology
by
Erin E. Crosby
Michelle E. Zozaya

SPRING
2013
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Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
Abstract

of

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The authors collaborated and shared equal responsibility in all aspects of the development of this project that reviews current research and best practices for assessing English Learners (ELs). The practice of assessing ELs for special education continues to be a problematic issue, as there is an over-representation of ELs in the special education population. The purpose of this project is to provide school psychologists, administrators, and teachers with current research and resources useful in making informed decisions regarding the need and appropriateness of assessing ELs. The workshop will provide information about ELs regarding: English Learners in schools, the over-representation of ELs in special education, EL special education evaluations, the process of acquiring a second language, promises of utilizing a Response to Intervention (RtI) method while assessing ELs, and possible problems and solutions. Those who attend this workshop are expected to gain insight into the over-representation of ELs in
special education, the issues incorporated with utilizing traditional assessment methods with ELs, and the potential benefits of using a RtI approach to assess ELs.

The prepared project is a five hour PowerPoint training workshop for school psychologists, administrators and teachers. Materials provided as a support to the workshop include: a presenter’s manual, related handouts, and presenter notes with each PowerPoint slide. This presentation is created so that implementation can occur by any school psychologist. The workshop is expected to introduce the topic of assessing ELs, provide current research, discuss the process of language acquisition, and offer an alternative to traditional assessment methods via a RtI approach.

________________________, Committee Chair
Catherine Christo, Ph.D.

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Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the kind guidance and encouragement of our advisor, Catherine Christo. We would also like to thank our supportive and loving families and friends for their patience through our long lasting educational journey.
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The project appendices contain note pages within the presentation slides. The notes are provided as a guide, for use during a workshop presentation. Slides should be viewed using Microsoft® PowerPoint software.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Due to the expanding presence of English Learner (EL) students in public schools within the United States, it is critical that educators and school personnel address and support their unique needs. Within the school setting, EL students face issues that may include acquiring a new language, progressing through various levels of acculturation, developing relationships with English-speaking peers and teachers, and achieving academic proficiency. Especially problematic, there is an overrepresentation of EL students within the special education population (Liu, Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson, & Kushner, 2008; Rueda & Windmueller, 2006). ELs are between 1.42 and 2.43 times more likely to be referred to special education and receive special education support than their monolingual English speaking peers (Spinelli, 2008). Although the overrepresentation of English Learners in special education has historically been a topic of concern, the issue continues to exist.

Background of the Problem

English Learners are often inappropriately referred to special education due to cultural and language factors rather than cognitive or learning impairments (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). More specifically, if teachers and school site administrators are not fully aware of the influence of language acquisition on an EL’s academic performance, they may be more likely to refer an EL student for a special education referral. It is well documented that learning a second language is a complex process. According to research completed by Cummins (1984), EL students typically acquire
“basic interpersonal communication skills” (BICS) in 2-3 years (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005, p. 70). Students who have acquired BICS are able to carry on social and information conversations like those between classmates or adults outside of instructional time. To be academically successful, however, English Learners need to be proficient in a second type of language skill that Cummins titled “cognitive academic language proficiency” (CALP). This level of skill may take a language learner between 5-7 years to become proficient and is necessary for students to complete academic work and progress in school (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz). Thus, if teachers and administrators are unaware of how long it takes ELs to master the English language, they may be more likely to make an inappropriate referral for a special education assessment.

Traditional standardized testing is typically used for measuring student progress, classification purposes, and for making special education eligibility determinations (Spinelli, 2008). This practice, however, is problematic with the EL population. According to Spinelli, “Many researchers have determined that standardized procedures are invalid and unreliable for ELLs because they do not adequately distinguish between learning and/or communication disorders or lack of language proficiency (p. 103).” Even when standardized tests are modified and adapted for EL students, there is a significant risk that assessment results will be unreliable due to “multiple factors, such as cultural differences, lack of academic support, limited English proficiency, and/or lack of opportunity to learn the subject matter of the tests” (Spinelli, p. 103). As a result, EL students are at high risk for misdiagnosis when they are referred for a special education assessment. Many EL students are inappropriately classified as learning disabled when
their academic problems are a result of their language acquisition. According to Spinelli, “The overrepresentation of ELLs in special education reflects a general lack of understanding in our school systems of the influence of linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic differences on student learning” (p. 104). Long-term implications of inappropriate special education classification and placement may include the following: (a) being denied access to the general education curriculum; (b) being placed in separate programs with more limited curriculum that may impact the student’s access to post-secondary education and employment opportunities; (c) being stigmatized as a misclassification may negatively impact students’ self-perception (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

In order to tease cultural and linguistic differences apart from learning disabilities, variables such as language, culture, and level of acculturation should be examined prior to an EL’s referral for a special education assessment. Proponents of a Response to Intervention (RtI) model see this as a possible way to ensure that these variables are addressed. RtI is a model of assessment that has the potential to provide EL students with quality, research-based effective academic instruction, early academic intervention, and systematic monitoring of progress. Within a RtI model, students at-risk for academic failure are identified early and educational decisions are made based upon ecologically valid data.

**Purpose of the Project**

The primary purpose of this project is to help reduce the number of inappropriate special education referrals and reduce the overrepresentation of EL students in special
education by increasing school psychologists’, school site administrators’, and teachers’ awareness of the current problem. The secondary purpose is to provide school psychologists, teachers, and administrators with appropriate alternatives to addressing the needs of struggling EL students. These goals will be met through a five hour training workshop for administrators, school psychologists, and teachers. Handouts will be provided during the course of the training to facilitate discussion and participants’ active involvement (e.g., What I Know, What I Want to Know, What I Learned Handout; The Case of Manuel; Quick Quiz). Additional informational handouts will also be provided to participants as a means of disseminating information and best practices (e.g., Minimal Requirements for the Evaluation and Determination of Eligibility Under the IDEA, 2004; English Learner Background Information Questionnaire; Basic Teaching Strategies for English Learners). A manual and presentation guide will allow the workshops to be delivered by any trained school psychologist.

**Description of the Project**

Information in this project has been developed into a five hour training workshop for school psychologists, school site administrators (e.g., principals, vice-principals), and teachers. A provided manual and presentation guide allow the workshop to be delivered by any trained school psychologist. School psychologists, school site administrators and teachers that attend the training workshop will acquire familiarity with the Response to Intervention (RtI) model, effective and evidence-based instruction, strategies to reduce the amount of special education assessment referrals for EL students, and effective teaching strategies for English Learners.
Definition of Terms

*Acculturation:* The process of adopting the norms and behaviors of the mainstream, surrounding culture (Rhodes, Ochoa, Ortiz, 2005).

*Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS):* The English basic language skills needed to engage in social and informational conversations and interact with others (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005).

*Cognitive academic language (CALP):* The English academic language skills a student must possess in order to complete academic work and progress in school (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005).

*Dominant language:* A student's dominant language is identified by the Home Language Survey as the language most frequently used (California Department of Education).

*English Learner:* Students for whom there is a report of a primary language other than English on the state-approved Home Language Survey and who, on the basis of the state approved oral language (grades kindergarten through grade twelve) assessment procedures and literacy (grades three through twelve only), have been determined to lack the clearly defined English language skills of listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing necessary to succeed in the school's regular instructional programs (California Department of Education).

*Home Language Survey:* A questionnaire that school districts distribute to students to help inform school staff of the child’s primary and dominant languages (California Department of Education).
Primary language: A student's primary language is identified by the Home Language Survey as the language first learned, most frequently used at home, or most frequently spoken by the parents or adults in the home (California Department of Education).

Response to Intervention: An assessment and intervention model that enables schools to deliver sound instructional methods to students (Brown-Chidsey, Steege, 2010).

Limitations

This project was designed to provide teachers, administrators, and school psychologists with the tools necessary to make informed decisions regarding assessing EL students. The majority of the research used within this project supports the need to decrease the amount of special education assessments for ELs. However, the authors recognize that many studies cited by those against assessing ELs are unable to support the contention that evaluating an EL student for special education is always wrong.

Information presented in this project is not meant to be used as an interpretation of current laws regarding the education and assessment of EL students. Furthermore, this project intends to provide a guide for school psychologists, school site administrators, and teachers. The implementation and effectiveness of this guide is not included in this project and warrants additional research.

Statement of Collaboration

This project was developed collaboratively by Erin Crosby and Michelle Zozaya, both graduate students in the School Psychology program at California State University, Sacramento. Each co-author had equal responsibility in the research, collection, and data gathering. Subsequent titles and subtitles were divided amongst the two individuals to
create a comprehensive project. All duties performed in the development of the project and training workshop were shared equally.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Assessment is a necessary component in the teaching and learning process. In our schools there are many different types of assessments that take place for a number of different purposes. The first assessment that may come to mind for Californians is the annual state standards test whose intended purpose is to account for how well schools and students are performing. The reported intention of these large-group assessments is to evaluate the effectiveness of our programs and improve student learning (California Department of Education, 2012). Great importance has been placed on such high-stakes group-based assessments; however, as Hoover (2009) explains, “There are significant challenges confronting diverse learners in the high-stakes assessment era because these students continue to be misdiagnosed as having a disability” (p. 40). With this in mind, the argument may be made that it is the small-group, and individual, assessments that play a more relevant and powerful role in appropriately serving our students. Classroom based assessments are often curriculum based and used to determine students’ levels of mastery within a particular subject area. These assessment results provide information to teachers when forming leveled instructional groups. They are also used to assist in identifying students who may be at-risk for academic failure. Such assessments are also used in the initial process of providing students who are falling behind with the supports that they need to be successful. Individual based assessments are also used in order to monitor the progress of students receiving such supports. In recent years, the implementation and monitoring of such interventions using individual assessment has
been titled Response to Intervention (RtI). This model focuses on delivering appropriate instruction to students achieving at multiple levels and using data to make decisions about how to best serve individual needs. Within this model students who are identified as at-risk and do not appear to make progress with additional interventions are referred for intensive individual assessment. This assessment helps to determine whether they may meet criteria to receive special education services.

According to Ortiz et al. (2011), English Learner students, “across grades, are twice as likely as their English-proficient peers to be reading below grade level” (p. 317). Indeed, students who are in the process of learning a second language often find themselves in the “at-risk” category. The academic challenges presented to average learners in the classroom are present in addition to the mountainous achievement of mastering a new language. Naturally, we expect English Learners (ELs) to require a greater amount of time and instruction to reach the level of their English Only (EO) counterparts. There is much ambiguity, however, in understanding just how much time and how much instruction is necessary for this gap to be closed. There is much ambiguity in the process of determining whether appropriate progress is being made. And finally, there is much ambiguity in differentiating learning differences from learning disabilities. When it comes to EL students, there is no real consensus regarding which measures to use and how to discriminate students who are responding from those who are not (Linan-Thompson, Cirino, & Vaughn, 2007). As Hoover (2009) puts it, “The fact that these students continue to be misidentified for special education is evidence that there needs to be a clearer understanding of the differences between a disability and
cultural/linguistic diversity prior to referral and/or placement into special education”
(p.40-41). The purpose of this research is to identify the current issues involved in
assessing English Learner students, as well as to explore how a Response to Intervention
approach influences the process of assessing EL students.

**Needs of English Learners**

According to data collected in 2010 by the National Clearinghouse for English
Language Acquisition and Language (NCELA), approximately 49.9 million students
were enrolled in United States public schools in Pre-Kindergarten to the 12th grade
(Batalova & McHugh, 2010). Of them, 10.7 percent, or more than 5.3 million students,
were English Learners (ELs) (Batalova & McHugh). This holds significant relevance in
states like California, where the number of EL students enrolled in schools was
approximately 1.4 million students, which was greater than the next five states combined:
Texas (701,799 EL students), Florida (234,934), New York (213,000), Illinois (175,454),
and Arizona (166,572) (Batalova & McHugh).

Due to the expanding presence of EL students in public schools within the United
States, it is critical that educators and school personnel address and support their unique
needs. According to data collected by the National Center for Educational Statistics
(NCES, 2011), in more than 1,300 U.S. school districts 76% of ELs scored below grade
level on tests of English reading. Although this isn’t surprising given ELs limited
proficiency in English, it is concerning since reading-related difficulties are one of the
primary reasons that EL students are referred for special education assessments
(McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, Cutting, Leos, & D’Emilio, 2005; Ortiz et al, 2011).
Therefore, ELs may be referred to special education at a higher rate than English only (EO) students due to a lack of English language ability rather than the presence of a learning disability. Generally speaking, critical issues such as appropriate norm groups, lack of consideration for language proficiency, and school history exist regarding the assessment of EL students in both general education and for special education eligibility (Barrera & Liu, 2010; Chu & Flores, 2011; Dominguez de Ramirez & Shapiro, 2007; Linian-Thompson, Cirino, & Vaughn, Summer, 2007; Ortiz et al, 2011; Sandberg & Reschly, 2011).

**Assessment Challenges**

A primary concern regarding assessment of EL students focuses on the notion that it is inherently difficult to establish what is being measured: an EL’s English proficiency or the construct a test purports to measure (Chu & Flores, 2011; Ortiz et al, 2011; Sandberg & Reschly, 2011). That is, a student may do poorly on a test because he does not thoroughly understand task instructions (Chu & Flores, 2011). For example, even tests of nonverbal reasoning frequently have verbal directions and require that answers be given verbally. This lack of understanding or confusion regarding procedures and expectations during the assessment process may result in reduced test scores for EL students, which may be a misrepresentation of their true capabilities and skills (Chu & Flores, 2011; Ortiz et al, 2011; Sandberg & Reschly, 2011). As such, a major issue in administering assessments to the EL population is determining whether to assess an EL student in English, in the student’s native language, or both languages (Chu & Flores).
Language of Assessment

Research suggests that assessing EL students in their native languages may provide a more accurate reflection of students’ knowledge and skills, compared to conducting such assessments in English (Chu & Flores, 2011; Wagner, Francis, & Morris, 2005). However, utilizing assessment tools in languages other than English poses practical challenges, as these tools can be costly and more difficult to obtain within a school district (Chu & Flores) and, if they are obtained, a school psychologist fluent in the child’s language may not be available. In these situations, the use of an interpreter may be necessary. Utilizing an interpreter within the assessment process, however, poses unique challenges as well. For example, interpreters that assist with the assessment process must not only fluently speak the language of the EL student, but they must also understand the educational and assessment context so that they can accurately convey meaning (Chu & Flores, 2011). It is also difficult to assess ELs in their primary languages, as many times they have limited academic language since they haven’t received educational instruction in their primary language. Thus, there are several layers of challenges and considerations that must be taken into account when assessing EL students.

Norm-Referenced Tests

The most common method of assessing ELs is through the use of published norm-referenced tests (Domínguez de Ramírez & Shapiro, 2006; Ortiz et al, 2011; Rhodes, Hector, & Ortiz, 2005). There are considerable limitations, however, of using norm-referenced assessments with EL students (Domínguez de Ramírez & Shapiro; Ortiz et al;
Rhodes et al; Sandberg & Reschly, 2011). First, these tests are often “selected, administered, and then interpreted in a manner that is not guided by the literature on how culture or language influence test performance of individuals from various cultures” (Rhodes et al., 2005, p. 154). Thus, using such tests with EL students may result in a biased assessment. Standardized norm-referenced tests are developed and normed with certain assumptions in mind, and when EL students do not naturally adhere to such assumptions, the results may be invalid. A major assumption of norm-referenced tests that may not be applicable for the EL population is the lack of the inclusion of EL students within the norm group. This lack of representation within the norm group may result in an inappropriate interpretation of test scores. Additionally, EL students may not have experience with standardized testing, which may place EL students at a disadvantage due to their unfamiliarity with these tests and their content, and negatively impact their scores for reasons other than their abilities (Ortiz et al.; Rhodes et al.; Sandberg & Reschly).

**Special Education Assessment of EL Students**

It is well documented that there is an over-representation of students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds in special education (Liu, Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson, & Kushner, 2008; Rueda & Windmueller, 2006). Research suggests that this over-representation is a reflection of inappropriate assessment of linguistically diverse students (Barrera & Liu, 2010; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Linian-Thompson et al, 2007; Ortiz et al, 2011). As previously mentioned, it is challenging to determine if an EL’s low scores on tests are the result of limited English proficiency, lack
of familiarity with the testing process, inadequate norms, test bias, or an actual learning
disability (Chu & Flores, 2011; Ortiz et al; Sandberg & Reschly, 2011). Moreover, it is
difficult to determine if academic challenges are the result of a learning disability or other
possible environmental factors, such as poor academic instruction, language proficiency,
language instructional support, culture and acculturation, and/or motivation (Gilbertson,
Maxfield, & Hughes, 2007; McCardle et al, 2005). In addition, it is challenging to
distinguish between EL students with lower levels of language proficiency and students
with learning disabilities because the two groups can often share many of the same
characteristics, such as poor comprehension, difficulty following directions, difficulty
completing tasks, and grammatical errors (Chu & Flores, 2011; Ortiz & Maldonado-

**Referral process.** The psycho-educational assessment referral process to which
EL students are subjected is also problematic. Although there are many routes to
referring a student for an assessment, best practice indicates referring a student following
the implementation of a problem-solving team or student study team (SST) that assists in
offering solutions and interventions to aid a student’s educational progress, and/or using a
Response to Intervention (RtI) approach (Chu & Flores, 2011; Linan-Thompson et al.,
2007; Ortiz et al., 2011). Within such an approach, students that are classified as
academically “at-risk” receive research-based academic intervention in their identified
area of weakness as part of their general education. If, after receiving such interventions,
a student does not demonstrate appropriate academic growth or progress, he or she may
be referred for an evaluation to investigate the presence of a learning disability. While
some special education referrals for EL students are the result of the previously mentioned best practices (e.g., SSTs, RtI), referrals of ELs often ultimately reflect an educator’s personal determination that a student has not demonstrated academic progress nor benefited from classroom-based interventions. Thus, if an instructor perceives that an EL student is not making adequate academic progress, it is likely that the student will be referred for an evaluation. Additionally, referrals also tend to reflect a teacher’s perception that the underlying cause of academic difficulties is the result of a learning disability (Ortiz et al., 2011). Thus, there appears to be a lack of systematic and structured protocols for appropriately referring EL students for special education assessments.

Studies have indicated that there are serious shortcomings in school districts’ implementation of special education referrals, assessments, eligibility determinations, and placement decisions for EL students (Chu & Flores, 2011; Linan-Thompson et al., 2007; Ortiz, et al., 2011). In a 2011 study investigating the practices for special education referral and assessment, Ortiz and colleagues found that educators’ concerns and the specific nature of students’ academic problems were not clearly identified in referral documents. Additionally, several students within the sample were receiving reading instruction in a bilingual special education program prior to being evaluated for a learning disability, indicating that students were placed in a special education setting even before a comprehensive evaluation was completed. Thus, special education in such cases was the initial “early intervention” that the EL students were provided. Moreover, a clinical judgment panel that reviewed all cases of EL students being placed in special
education programs found that 77% of the students did not qualify as learning disabled when information other than an IQ-achievement discrepancy was considered. The clinical judgment panel determined that documentation was sufficient to qualify only 23% of the special education EL sample as having a learning disability (Ortiz et al).

Of further concern in the referral process is the need to understand the cultural and linguistic context of EL students prior to initiating the process. Many standardized assessments provide an underestimate of EL’s skills and abilities due to their lack of cultural and linguistic sensitivity. In order to tease cultural and linguistic differences apart from learning disabilities, variables such as language, culture, and level of acculturation should be examined prior to an EL’s referral for a special education assessment. Proponents of a Response to Intervention model see this as a possible way to ensure that these variables are addressed.

**The Process of Language Acquisition**

Research completed by Hearne, 2000, Roseberry-McKibbin, 2002, & Ortiz & Kushner, 1997, indicates that students learning a second language go through four stages of acquisition (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). The first stage is called the *Preproduction* stage and is characterized by a period of silence. During this period the individual is focused on comprehension and uses “yes/no” responses or one-word answers. The second, *Early Production* stage, is characterized by continued focus on comprehension and using 1-3 word phrases. Students at this phase will begin to label items and are able to answer simple questions. The third, *Speech Emergence* stage, is characterized by increased comprehension and expansion of vocabulary. Students at this
stage are typically able to use simple sentences and carry on dialogue but make frequent grammatical errors. The final stage is titled the *Intermediate fluency* stage. This stage is characterized by improved comprehension and conversational abilities. Students at this stage appear to be conversationally proficient and make fewer grammatical mistakes (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). According to research completed by Cummins, (1984) moving through all four stages typically takes a language learner 2-3 years. Cummins titled this type of language proficiency “basic interpersonal communication skills” (BICS) (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005, p. 70). Students who have progressed through the four stages and acquired BICS are able to carry on social and information conversations like those between classmates or adults outside of instructional time. To be academically successful however, English Learners need to be proficient in a second type of language skill that Cummins titled “cognitive academic language proficiency” (CALP). This level of skill may take a language learner between 5-7 years to become proficient and is necessary for students to complete academic work and progress in school (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005).

**Variables of Language Acquisition**

Acquiring a second language is not a perfectly predictable process. As stated above, learning a second language requires significant time and exposure, but it is also affected by a combination of other cognitive and environmental variables (Hoover, 2009). First, an individual will more readily gain proficiency in a second language if they begin the process at an earlier age (Hoover, 2009). At a younger age, the amount of language required of an individual to meet the proficiency of their peers is much less.
Second, an individual’s level of language proficiency in their first language provides a foundation for learning a second language. The greater the proficiency an individual demonstrates in their first language, the stronger the facility for learning a second language. Also, the proficiency of one’s first language is affected by the cultural value placed on language and communication abilities (Hoover, 2009). A third variable that may affect an individual’s ability to acquire a second language is learning style. If the student’s learning style is aligned with a teacher’s style of teaching they will make greater progress in a second language. Finally, an individual’s attitude and motivation will greatly affect his/her progress in a second language. Specifically, those who are highly motivated and value the second language will be more successful in attaining mastery (Hoover, 2009).

Learning Differences

There are a number of characteristics that are frequently observed regarding students in the process of acquiring a second language. In order to avoid misidentification of a disability, it is important to be able to identify such learning differences. One such characteristic is titled Interference. Interference is when the communication style of the first language interferes with the expression in the second language. For example, the Spanish expression for “I am hungry” is “tengo hambre.” A student who states, “I have hunger” may be experiencing interference. A second characteristic observed among language learners is known as Interlanguage. Interlanguage occurs when an individual experiments with extending the rules of
grammar and sentence structure from one language to another. Hoover (2009) explains that,

The development of interlanguage follows a natural and systematic process and is not mastered easily or quickly, and as learners progress through the stages of acquisition their errors and confusion with various aspects of the second language are reduced, resulting in mastery of the second language over time. As a result, behaviors associated with normal interlanguage development must not be misinterpreted as cognitive deficits or evidence of emotional disorders (p. 43).

A third characteristic is known as Code Switching. Code Switching is when an individual shifts from one language to another, sometimes within a single sentence. Using words from both languages at the same time is, “often misinterpreted as a deficit in language development or usage, rather than as the useful and higher-level language skill it is in communication” (Hoover, 2009, p. 43). The final characteristic that is frequently misidentified as a disability is Language Loss. Language Loss occurs when the heavy concentration on acquiring a second language weakens an individual’s knowledge of their first language. For a time within the process of acquiring a second language it may appear that a student has low verbal knowledge in both their native and second languages. This may especially occur for students who do not receive any instruction in their native language in school (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). Understanding the process of language acquisition and the characteristics of language learners are key in appropriately addressing student needs and avoiding misidentification of ELs as learning disabled. The Response to Intervention model has the potential to consider learning
differences of ELs, and to differentiate these differences from disabilities (Xu & Drame, 2007).

**Response to Intervention**

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a term used to label the “assessment and intervention model that enables schools to deliver sound instructional methods to students” (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010, p. 2). This is typically a 3 to 4 tiered system utilized to inform instruction dependent on students’ demonstrated needs. The first tier in an RtI model represents research-based core instruction delivered within the general education classroom. Instruction at this level is ideally meant to meet the needs of roughly 80% of a given school’s population. The second tier represents targeted, evidence-based, instruction for students who have been identified as struggling with the core curriculum, and/or are at-risk of falling behind their peers. Typically these are small-group interventions concentrating on students who require some extra support in addition to tier 1 instruction. This tier ideally represents approximately 15% of a student population. Finally, tier 3 represents the 5% of the student population that is unable to reach expected academic goals with both tier 1 and 2 supports. These students typically require a comprehensive educational evaluation to identify whether or not they have a learning disability and meet eligibility criteria for special education. Third tier activities typically include specialized academic instruction, specialized intensive interventions, modifications and/or accommodations for these students (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010).
What sets RtI models apart from other teaching and assessment practices are the underlying themes of systematic, evidence-based teaching practices in combination with data-based decision making (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010). The “Intervention” portion of RtI refers to the act of using scientifically researched curricula to provide targeted instruction to students. The “Response” portion of RtI refers to the systematic assessment and progress monitoring of a student’s response to the intervention. “Essentially RtI is a way of looking at the cause-effect relationship(s) between academic or behavioral interventions and the student’s response to the intervention” (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010, p. 2).

**Characteristics of Intervention in a RtI Model**

Across the United States the words “Intervention” and “Instruction” are often used interchangeably in the title of RtI. This is because one of the largest components of RtI is the idea of using high-quality instruction methods at every tier (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010). For students who are not making adequate progress with tier 1 instruction alone, additional, more intensive intervention/instruction may need to take place. This instruction typically provides support for the student by increasing the intensity, duration, and/or frequency of instruction (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010; Christo, 2005). For example, a student who requires tier 2 interventions for reading may require more time to learn the material (additional reading groups), more access to the teacher (smaller student to teacher ratio), or more targeted skill instruction (phonemic awareness instruction). When selecting an appropriate intervention, the individual needs of the student must be considered. This is especially important for English Learners whose needs may be more
unique and intense than the English Only population. While core features of effective instruction/intervention are well documented there is little information about effective strategies specific to ELs within the RtI model (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010; Christo, Davis, & Brock, 2009; Foorman, 2003; Torgesen, 2002).

**Measuring Responsiveness in a RtI Model**

The second key component to implementing RtI is strategic assessment and data-based decision making (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010). Strategic assessment refers to the identification of students who may be at-risk for academic failure. For example, completing simple reading fluency benchmark testing several times throughout the school year can provide teachers with information regarding their students’ current ability and possible need for more intensive (tier 2) supports. Once students are placed in appropriate intervention groups these assessments may be used for the purpose of progress monitoring to discern whether or not a student is “responding” to the intervention. Examples of assessments used to monitor student progress include: embedded assessments, basic skills assessment and fluency based measurements (Christo, 2005). Embedded assessments refer to measurements that directly assess what is being taught in a given curriculum. These assessments identify a sequential set of skills on which the student must demonstrate mastery (Christo, 2005). Basic skills assessments refer to measurements that assess basic key skills needed for adequate progress in a given area. For example, the Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation is used to identify students who need targeted instruction in phonemic awareness (Yopp, 1995). Fluency based measurements refers to Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) or
Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). These measurement tools are formed using curriculum as test materials and frequently emphasize fluency. These measures, commonly called probes, may be used repeatedly and frequently to measure progress over time (Christo, 2002). Methods of assessment such as these provide objective data that teachers can utilize to make instructional decisions about their students. Performance on these measures may provide teachers with information about whether a goal needs to be modified, if the intervention needs to be changed, or if making a referral for a full academic evaluation is appropriate.

**Setting goals for English Learners.** The way that data is interpreted plays a large role in a RtI model. The emphasis on data-based decision making places great importance on effectively discerning whether or not a student is adequately responding to an intervention. This can be done by setting goals using end-of-year benchmarks, using a normative comparison group, or using an intra-individual framework (Hosp, Hosp, & Howell, 2007). However, there are challenges to each of these methods when applying them to the English Learner population. First, when using end-of-year benchmarks to set goals, the student is expected to attain the minimum score for their grade level to indicate they are no longer at-risk for academic failure by the end of the school year. Problems arise here, however, when this model is applied to the EL student who is two or more grade levels behind in a given area. For example, it may not be reasonable to say that a student is “not responding” to an intervention when in fact they do make one and a half grade levels of improvement in a single school year. Second, when using national or local norm groups to set goals, EL students are often not adequately represented. When
determining the progress of an EL student there must be a comparison to the performance of like-peers (Butterfield, 2012). Lastly, an intra-individual framework uses the student’s current performance and rate of progress to set end-of-year goals (Hosp, Hosp, & Howell, 2007). However, there are cautions for using this method of setting goals because they, “may underestimate a student’s rate of learning and may never catch him up if he started out behind” (Hosp, Hosp, & Howell, 2007, p. 122). Since the EL students that are being served with tier 2 supports are typically behind their English Only peers, this may not be the most appropriate way to set goals and determine appropriate responsiveness to intervention.

**Effect size.** Because of the above mentioned challenges to measuring responsiveness using traditional goal setting strategies, it may be more effective to calculate the effect size when determining a student’s responsiveness to an intervention. This method does not require the use of norm-groups, which may be biased against ELs, or grade-level standards that may require unrealistic growth. While these comparisons should still be used to provide information about a student’s progress in comparison to their peers, adding an effect size calculation may provide a more complete picture of whether or not EL students are responding to interventions. Traditionally an effect size of 0.3 and below is considered small, 0.4-0.6 is considered moderate, and 0.7-0.9 is considered large (Leitner & Brock, 2012). Taking this information into account, the interventions that yield large effect sizes for individual EL students could be identified and continued while less effective interventions could be discontinued.
Eliminating the “Wait to Fail” Model for SLD Identification

Proponents of the Response to Intervention model paint a promising picture of its potential benefits. The most commonly stated benefit of using an RtI approach to assess English Learners is the elimination of the discrepancy, or “wait to fail” model (Haager, 2007; Liu, Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson, Kushner, 2008; Xu & Drame, 2007). Historically, to receive specialized services a student must be classified as learning disabled by documenting a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and one or more areas of achievement (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEIA], 2004). However, the reliability and validity of this model for the purpose of identifying learning disabilities has been questioned repeatedly (Liu et al., 2008; Xu & Drame, 2007). First, the definition of a severe discrepancy varies from state to state. Therefore a student who may be classified as learning disabled in one state may not be in another. Second, a student whose difficulties begin when he or she enters school may not be identified or offered appropriate supports until the second or third grade, since it may take several years for the discrepancy to be acquired. Third, relying on an achievement gap alone makes it difficult to differentiate between students with a disability versus students who are struggling for other reasons such as language acquisition or economic disadvantage (Liu et al., 2008). In regards to EL students, these “other reasons” become another barrier to identifying learning disabilities and providing specialized services.

In order to be identified as learning disabled a student must not only demonstrate a severe discrepancy, but also must *not* demonstrate any of the exclusionary criteria. These exclusionary criteria include limited school experience or poor school attendance,
which may be more common among culturally and linguistically diverse students (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEIA], 2004). These, and other documented short-comings of the discrepancy model, have fostered the belief that using a Response to Intervention approach is at least better than the “wait to fail” alternative. This is especially true when assessing English Learners since the discrepancy model has been found to contribute to disproportionate minority representation in special education programs (Xu & Drame, 2007). Liu et al. (2008) explains that, “in addition to providing early intervention, response to intervention approaches are touted as holding promise for resolving disproportionate special education representation of culturally and linguistically diverse learners” (p. 178). This may be due to the emphasis that an RtI model places on empirically based general education practices and differentiated instruction for all students.

Effective, Evidence-Based Instruction

The response to intervention approach has the potential to improve the intervention and instructional appropriateness and effectiveness of education in both general and specialized settings (Xu & Drame, 2007). This is because the RtI approach is congruent with the IDEA criteria that states quality, evidence-based instruction must be used at all tiers regardless of disability (Rinald & Sampson, 2008). The RtI approach places emphasis on curriculum-based-measures (CBM), classroom observations, and work samples in determining the effectiveness of instructional delivery. Due to this emphasis, the RtI approach may improve the quality of instruction at all tiers by increasing the perceived responsibility and accountability of the greater educational team.
in providing students with differentiated and appropriate access to the curriculum (Orosco, 2010). The nature of the RtI approach encourages strong teaching practices and remedial opportunities across all educational settings in order to meet the needs of individual students, regardless of whether or not they have an identified disability. This increased awareness may encourage the members of the education team to work collaboratively, increase communication, and distribute the responsibility for student success across the general education, special education, English language teachers, administrators, parents and other service providers (Orosco, 2010; Xu & Drame, 2007).

**Appropriate instruction for ELs.** The question of appropriate instruction is particularly important for ELs and will determine the effectiveness of an RtI model for this population. It is not sufficient that instructional staff understand generally effective instruction; they must know what types of instruction are going to meet the unique needs of any given student under unique conditions (Klinger, McRay-Sorrels & Barrera, 2007; Saenz, 2008). Teachers need to know a variety of strategies to use with different populations (Mathes, Pollard-Durodola, Cárdenas-Hagan, Linan-Thompson, & Vaughn, 2007; Xu & Drame, 2007). For example, Gersten et al., (2006) identified some of the critical elements in reading interventions for ELs. Notably a comprehensive approach that targets all areas of reading (e.g., phonics, fluency, comprehension) along with language development (e.g., vocabulary, sentence structure, narrative) was identified as the most successful approach.

**Need for professional development.** Professional development is important to the successful implementation of RtI models for linguistically diverse students.
According to Haager (2007), in order to make significant gains, “EL students need teachers to be using effective instructional techniques in general, adjusting their instruction for individuals having difficulty, engaging their students in interactive and engaging vocabulary and comprehension development, and providing high-quality explicit instruction” (p. 215). To ensure that this is happening, some school districts have adopted criteria to determine the appropriateness of instruction for EL students. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District has developed an Access to Grade Level Content Observation Checklist using the principles of Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE). This checklist is used to ensure that EL students are afforded appropriate exposure to, and direct instruction in, grade level content with opportunities for making connections to prior knowledge. This checklist is scored to determine the amount of evidence available in determining the effectiveness of instruction (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2005). Orosco (2010) discusses the importance of considering the social-cultural context of learning for ELs. Instruction must recognize students’ cultural and linguistic heritage and incorporate appropriate activities.

**Reduction of Special Education Assessment Referrals**

The above stated benefits of the RtI approach for the general education population suggest that it may also ultimately lead to an overall reduction in special education referrals. Often referrals for special education are inappropriate as teachers fail to look at previous instruction or primary language. By requiring early, *appropriate* intervention outside of special education (and prior to consideration for special education services),
students receive direct interventions, targeting their needs as ELs, earlier (Ortiz et al., 2011). The students who respond to this effective early intervention may not need special education services later on, which may prevent English Learners from being inappropriately classified as learning disabled (Kamps et al., 2007). Additionally, students who do not respond to specialized interventions may be identified as learning disabled earlier, which may allow for more time to be spent addressing the students’ more intensive needs (Xu & Drame, 2007). Also, identifying learning disabilities earlier in a student’s education may lessen the impact of the disability by keeping the achievement gap as narrow as possible (Haager, 2007).

**Ecologically Valid Assessment Data**

Not only does the RtI approach have the potential to reduce special education referrals, it also offers the potential for ecologically valid information to be used in the assessment process with EL students. The term “ecological validity” refers to assessment that includes the consideration of a student’s abilities within their personal contexts and circumstances. Progress monitoring data within an RtI model provides information about whether a student is struggling academically but does not in and of itself provide information as to why the student is at risk (NJCLD, 2005). Xu & Drame (2007) see potential for considering context within RtI: “RtI places emphasis on curriculum-based-assessment, classroom observations and authentic/ecologically valid assessment. Unlike nationally standardized assessments, student output is analyzed within their immediate context” (p. 306). However, it is also important to remember that these measures are
usually validated with state standardized assessments that are discriminatory toward English Learners (Ortiz, 1977).

Data collected within a RtI model must be considered in the context of the student’s daily interpersonal experiences and his or her environmental interactions that may impact achievement. This is especially important for students with diverse backgrounds whose manner of interaction may vary significantly from one setting to another (Orosco, 2010). These students may have difficulty meeting the differing expectations for behavior at home versus school, or have difficulty connecting school based concepts to their own life experiences. These difficulties may in turn prevent a student from making adequate progress in the classroom (Xu & Drame, 2007). This type of information provides vital diagnostic data that may be helpful in the assessment process for a student who does not respond to an intervention (Rinaldi & Samson, 2008). The unique circumstances of each student should be considered in determining whether or not a student is not progressing at an appropriate or expected rate (Saenz, 2008).

The RtI approach also provides progress monitoring data, most commonly using curriculum-based-measurement (CBM). CBM typically focus on the acquisition of early critical skills, such as phonological awareness in reading. CBMs are useful in monitoring a student’s progress due to their ecological validity and their sensitivity to growth over short periods of time. CBM also has the ability to distinguish between ineffective instruction and inadequate individual learning by constantly comparing student’s progress to peers in their same environment (Gilbertson et al., 2007).
Challenges for ELs Within a RtI Model

Although RtI may appear as the “end all, be all” solution to address problems with assessing EL students, there are significant challenges to the successful implementation of this model with the EL population. Such challenges include considering the validity of using RtI with ELs, defining “appropriate instruction” for ELs, and determining how to collect and use progress monitoring data to effectively inform educational staff about an EL’s “response” or progress toward meeting goals.

Problems with Progress Monitoring

Within the RtI model, general outcome measures (GOM) are the most common method used when monitoring students’ progress and response to academic interventions (Barrera & Liu, 2010). GOMs are defined as a “standardized method of assessment for determining academic progress by repeated measurement of student academic achievement outcomes; outcomes being further defined as what a student has learned, or should have learned, within a particular basic skill domain” (Barrera & Liu, 2010, p. 274). GOMs, more commonly referred to as curriculum based measures (CBM), are designed to assess critical school learning skills that include basic reading, mathematics computation, writing fluency and accuracy, or spelling (Barrera & Liu, 2010).

Utilizing CBM in the assessment of ELs poses significant challenges. First, CBM assesses static knowledge about a student’s academic content or skills at one point in time (Barrera & Liu, 2010). Similar to other types of standardized tests, CBM reflects a student’s behavior or skill at a given point in time, which is likely influenced by a multitude of outside factors (e.g., fatigue, motivation, attention, etc.). Thus, a student’s
performance on CBM can often be reflective of outside factors rather than a student’s knowledge in the academic subject. Additionally, static assessments typically involve an examiner merely scoring and recording the student’s responses. This type of interaction does not provide the student with information about how to improve his/her future performance (Tzuriel, 2001).

Second, CBM often fails to consider several factors that aid in pinpointing why a student is experiencing difficulty with an academic subject. For example, while CBM for reading can provide educators with information on students’ accuracy and fluency in reading, the results are less useful when attempting to determine if a student has a learning disability. Simply knowing students’ reading fluency and accuracy scores does not aid educators in determining whether students’ scores are the result of a lack of reading experience, language proficiency, experience and/or exposure to the academic content, or a suspected learning disability. Thus, the use of CBM does not provide educators with an explanation regarding the EL student’s learning difficulties (Barrera & Liu, 2010).

Third, CBM may lack content validity for the academic area that is being assessed. Content validity refers to the extent to which a measurement tool appropriately captures all aspects of a construct. When looking at reading, for example, CBM provides educators with information regarding students’ accuracy and fluency in reading. When thinking about the skill of reading, however, accuracy and fluency are not the only components involved. Skills such as visual processing, auditory processing, working memory, phonological processing, and comprehension are also critical in a student’s
ability to successfully read (Christo et al., 2009). Thus, CBM may fall short in examining the individual components of an academic skill, and determining how a student’s strengths or weaknesses with such components may affect their overall achievement in a given academic subject.

Lastly, research investigating the use of CBM has primarily focused on younger learners (Barrera & Liu, 2010). As a result, there is limited information available that pertains to its application and usefulness when working with secondary students. Moreover, most research examining the efficacy of CBM within a RtI model focuses on reading fluency. Thus, there are gaps in the literature regarding the appropriateness of using CBM when assessing other academic subjects, such as math calculation, reading comprehension, or spelling.

**Defining appropriate expectations for English Learners.** Creating goals and setting expectations for EL students is also a multi-faceted process that poses unique challenges. First, expectations for academic growth or progress must also take the EL student’s language status and cultural context into account (Barrera & Liu, 2010). Expectations should differ based on the student’s English proficiency as well as the level of acculturation the student is experiencing. Second, there is a tendency to compare language proficiency of ELs with their English Only (EO) peers (Barrera & Liu, 2010). This is problematic for several reasons. Most obviously, EL students demonstrate language and cultural factors unique to their population compared to their EO peers. Moreover, as one might expect, EL students tend to demonstrate academic growth rates that are different when compared to their EO peers. In 2007, Linan-Thompson and
colleagues noted that “relatively few EL students met end-of-year criteria, partially due to the stringency of the criteria established with a large non-EL population and low levels of language proficiency of the ELs included in the study” (p. 216). For example, Linan-Thompson and colleagues found that the slope for EL’s growth may be the same as their EO peers; however, the growth is at a lower level (Linan-Thompson et al., 2007). Thus, although ELs make academic gains, they may not reach the same level of proficiency as their EO peers when given the same amount of time to demonstrate a “response” to intervention.

Questions regarding the predictive validity of CBM with ELs have also been discussed in recent literature. In 2010, Yeo investigated the relationship between CBM and its ability to predict performance on state assessments of reading. Results indicated that the predictive strength of CBM and performance on statewide assessments of reading was inversely related to the number of ELs. Thus, the larger the amount of ELs included in the study, the lower the predictability. In addition, Klein and Jimerson (2005) cautioned educators against using CBM to predict EL’s performance on statewide assessments of reading. Doing so will “result in systematic errors”, as their study found that “Hispanic students whose home language is Spanish will be under-identified, and Caucasian students whose home language is English will be over-identified” (p. 47).

**Data-based decision making using CBM for English learners.** As previously mentioned, current literature has raised significant concerns regarding using CBMs to aid in predicting EL students’ future reading performance. Recently, Klein and Jimerson (2005) have suggested that oral reading fluency probes (a common measure of CBM)
hold potential bias against EL students. Klein and Jimerson explain that oral reading fluency probes have expanded beyond their original function of progress monitoring, and are now used during “all stages of special education service delivery, including eligibility decisions” (p. 24). In 1999, Kranzler and colleagues examined ethnic bias in oral reading fluency probes. Results indicated that African Americans students’ reading comprehension was over-predicted and Caucasian students’ reading comprehension was under-predicted. The authors concluded that “CBM fails as an unbiased indicator of current reading comprehension” (p. 26). Moreover, Klein and Jimerson (2005) highlighted the importance of investigating potential bias in oral reading fluency probes among Hispanic students given the increasing proportion of Hispanic students in the United States. The authors conclude that, “if reading probes are intended to be used as early indicators of future reading problems, they should be demonstrated as an unbiased predictor of future reading achievement” (Klein & Jimerson, 2005, p. 28).

Haager (2007) agreed with the previously mentioned authors, indicating that using CBM to make decisions regarding special education eligibility for ELs is problematic. She writes, “Given that these assessments are conducted in English and in the early grades when ELLs are at the beginning stages of acquiring English competency, one might wonder about the validity of using screening tools that have not included ELLs adequately in norming samples and development procedures” (p. 215). Haager further expanded, “It is important to be cautious about over-reliance on such measures for making high-stakes decisions (i.e., labeling students ‘at-risk’ or ‘disabled,’ or trapping them into a remedial track that is difficult to escape” (p. 215).
To ensure that high-stakes decisions are made in an unbiased manner, it is essential that special education eligibility decisions are based on multiple sources of data (e.g., work samples, teacher reports, results of psychological processing tests). Haager (2007) argues that using research-based approaches that are valid for both EL and non-EL populations would be the most practical solution for diverse schools.

**Heterogeneity among English Learners**

Another issue in examining the EL population is centered on the groups’ heterogeneous nature. The United States EL population encompasses over 400 different languages (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). Aside from differences in native language, factors such as acculturation, exposure to English, previous schooling, family factors, and time spent in the United States also further diversify the EL population. Variation among members of the EL population makes it challenging to make “straightforward comparisons of ELLs by using standardized assessments, which are based on comparisons across a multitude of populations” (Barrera & Liu, 2010, p. 277). Since it is the nature of assessments investigating the presence of a learning disability to compare how a given student differs from his/her peers, it is vital that the EL student is compared with peers at the same stage of language proficiency and with similar academic competency. Although it seems like a logical solution to compare ELs with one another, the task isn’t quite that simple. English learners come from different cultural backgrounds, demonstrate varying levels of English proficiency, have been exposed to English for varying amounts of time, and have been exposed to schooling in English for
varying amounts of time. Thus, determining an appropriate comparison group for ELs is difficult, even when educators limit the group to the EL population.

Since selecting an appropriate comparison group may be challenging for school psychologists and educators, it is important to include accurate and current language acquisition assessment, as well as a measure of acculturation, in any pre-referral or referral assessment to provide a thorough picture of the student (Barrera & Liu, 2010). Garcia and Ortiz (2004) propose that it is important to account for “language level and knowledge base of students, their home background, community experience, and the relationship of these with the characteristics of teachers, their instruction, curriculum, and the school environment” (p. 277).

Summary

Due to the expanding presence of EL students in public schools within the United States, it is critical that educators and school personnel address and support their unique needs. RtI is a model of assessment that has the potential to provide EL students with quality, research-based effective academic instruction, early academic intervention, and systematic monitoring of progress. Additionally, the use of RtI has the ability to eliminate the “wait to fail” model that requires our students to fall years behind in school prior to demonstrating a “discrepancy” between their cognitive ability and academic achievement. Within a RtI model, students at-risk for academic failure are identified earlier and educational decisions are made based upon data. Of course there are inherent challenges in implementing a successful RtI model to assist school psychologists and educators in making special education eligibility determinations for EL students (e.g.,
setting appropriate goals and determining appropriate progress, variability among the EL population, mixed reviews of the predictive validity of CBM etc.). However, RtI has the potential to provide EL students with better educational outcomes when it is implemented with the unique needs of ELs in mind. Site-based decision-making teams can achieve better outcomes by demonstrating an awareness of the unique challenges involved in assessing EL students, and developing a processes to address these issues throughout the pre-referral and referral process. Specifically, educators can be more effective when they have an awareness of the time and exposure required to acquire a second language (BICS & CALPS), a knowledge of the variables that affect a student’s progress in language learning (age, acculturation, attitude and motivation, first language proficiency and learning style), and by having an awareness of the frequently observed characteristics of language learners (Interference, Interlanguage, Language Loss, Code Switching). Understanding the Response to Intervention model and the unique characteristics and needs of English Learner students is a daunting and lengthy process; however, it is absolutely critical in ensuring that EL students are provided the appropriate instruction, intervention, and progress monitoring that is necessary for them to experience success in school.
Chapter 3

METHODS

Research

In the process of researching this project, several techniques were utilized. The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and EBSCO host databases were searched for journal articles using a variety of search terms. The key words “English Learner,” were used in combination with other terms, such as response to intervention, assessment, and special education referrals. Additional searches were conducted using words such as effective instruction, language acquisition, and demographics. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) website was also searched for effective instructional strategies and methods, and their position statement. To provide up to date definitions of federal educational terms (e.g., English Learner, primary language, dominant language, etc.), the California Department of Education and U.S. Department of Education were also researched. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were reviewed.

In addition to resources available electronically, books focused on English Learners and Response to Intervention were used, including Dynamic Assessment of Young Children (Tzuriel, 2001), Bilingualism and Learning Disabilities (Willig & Greenberg, 1986), Minority Students in Special and Gifted Education (Donovan & Cross, 2002), Bilingualism and Special Education: Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy (Cummins, 1994), and Implementing Response-to-Intervention to Address the Needs of English-Language Learners: Instructional Strategies and Assessment Tools for School
Psychologists (Hudspath-Niemi & Conroy, 2013). Books used in graduate courses and in professional practice were also utilized as resources, such as Response to Intervention, Second Edition: Principles and Strategies for Effective Practice (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2008), The ABC’s of CBM: A Practical Guide to Curriculum-Based Measurement (Hosp, Hosp, & Howell, 2007), Assessing Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students: A Practical Guide (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005) and Best Practices in School Psychology, Fifth Edition: Volume 5 (Thomas & Grimes, 2008). References cited within articles and books were also examined for additional information. The articles were then grouped into categories to create an initial outline for the literature review. The outline was then modified to conform to the research gathered. Each author was assigned particular topics of the outline to write sections of the literature review.

Development of the Presentation

The training workshop presentation was developed to provide participants with knowledge of research on the issues with assessing English Learners for special education, the benefits of utilizing a Response to Intervention approach when evaluating ELs, and appropriate and effective instructional strategies for teaching ELs. The main points of the literature review were summarized in the presentations to provide schools a basis for teaching and assessing ELs based on best practices. The training workshop provides an overview of EL demographics, issues with assessing ELs for special education, alternatives to traditional standardized assessment via RtI, and effective and appropriate instructional methods and strategies for teaching ELs. The training is designed to be presented in five hours, through the use of direct instruction and group
discussion. A brief overview of the in-service was presented to fellow school psychology graduate students and faculty members to solicit feedback. Due to the entirety of this presentation not being presented to the targeted audience prior to submission, suggestions were sought from school psychology faculty at California State University, Sacramento. The PowerPoint presentation, handouts, and notes for presenters are located in the appendices of this project. A CD containing these materials will be provided to facilitate the presentations of the training workshops, using a computer and projector.
Chapter 4

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The project, *Response to Intervention with English Learners: Implications for Appropriate Assessment and Special Education Referrals*, resulted in the creation of one PowerPoint presentation intended to further educate and inform school psychologists, administrators, and teachers on the issues associated with assessing English Learners (ELs) for special education. This included an overview of the current research, paired with alternative strategies for assessing ELs, and suggested effective instructional strategies for teaching ELs, which may reduce the percentage of ELs that are inappropriately placed in special education programs.

**Workshop Objectives**

The primary purpose of this project is to help reduce the number of inappropriate special education referrals and reduce the overrepresentation of EL students in special education by increasing school psychologists’, school site administrators’, and teachers’ awareness of the current problem. The secondary purpose is to provide school psychologists, teachers, and administrators with appropriate alternatives to addressing the needs of struggling EL students. The goal of the training workshop is to align current research with current practices in schools. During the five hour workshop, school psychologists, administrators and teachers will be provided information through interactive discussion, lecture, brainstorming, small-group discussion, handouts, and informational resources.
The presenter’s manual and workshop are contained in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively. The remaining documents include the handouts for the workshop, and can be found in Appendix C.

**Interpretation**

There are over five million students in the United States who have limited English proficiency and are classified as English Learners (Batalova & McHugh, 2010). English Learners represent the fastest growing student population, and the EL population is expected to make up one of every four students by 2025 (ED. Gov, 2006). Especially problematic, there is an overrepresentation of EL students within the special education population (Liu, Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson, & Kushner, 2008; Rueda & Windmueller, 2006). ELs are between 1.42 and 2.43 times more likely to be referred to special education and receive special education support than their monolingual English speaking peers (Spinelli, 2008). Although the overrepresentation of English Learners in special education has historically been a topic of concern, the issue continues to exist. What is agreed upon by many is three-fold: (a) English Learners are often inappropriately classified as learning disabled when their academic difficulties are in fact the result of language acquisition problems (Spinelli, 2008); (b) traditional assessment methods are biased toward English Learners and may account for the over-representation of ELs in special education (Dominguez de Ramirez & Shapiro, 2006; Sandberg & Reschly, 2011); and (c) Response to Intervention is a promising approach to reducing the amount of special education referrals for ELs and providing systematic and effective academic
interventions for ELs (Haager, 2007; Liu, Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson, Kushner; Xu & Drame, 2007).

As a result, it is suggested at this time that schools utilize a RtI approach when evaluating English Learners. It is also recommended that schools rely on research-based interventions and instructional strategies as a way of providing academic support to students. Some of these instructional strategies include: utilizing mechanical aids (e.g., overhead projectors, computers) and hands-on learning opportunities, pairing visual cues and nonverbal gesture with verbal communication, adapting materials consistent with an EL’s level of language proficiency, encouraging ELs to repeat words and use them in sentences, utilizing various types of active and interactive learning techniques, and setting high expectations and preparing ELs to meet state and national academic standards and promotion, graduation, and post-graduation requirements.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are offered as a result of the findings within this project. It is recommended that administrators, school psychologists, and educators attend the workshop in order to further their understanding of the implications of assessing EL students for special education, and become aware of current research and best practices. Through this training, it is hoped that schools will integrate additional options to address the needs specific to English Learners. In addition, it is recommended that the research community continue to evaluate the efficacy of utilizing a RtI approach when assessing English Learners. It would be beneficial to continue to monitor data regarding schools’ rates of EL evaluations for special education, the methods used in the
evaluation process, and the eligibility determinations as a result of psycho-educational evaluations. In addition, further study is recommended to pinpoint the most effective educational interventions to academically support EL students. Moreover, it may be worthy to investigate the social-emotional effects, short-term and long-term, of special education evaluations and possible changes in educational placements for English Learners. Lastly, school psychologists need to continually update their own awareness of current research surrounding this topic. This includes remaining up to date with relevant research as well as advocating for the implementation of best practices.
APPENDIX A

Presenter’s Manual
Presenter’s Manual

Created by Erin E. Crosby and Michelle E. Zozaya
Introduction

Due to the expanding presence of English Learner (EL) students in public schools within the United States, it is critical that educators and school personnel address and support their unique needs. Within the school setting, EL students face issues that may include acquiring a new language, progressing through various levels of acculturation, developing relationships with English-speaking peers and teachers, and achieving academic proficiency. Especially problematic, there is an overrepresentation of EL students within the special education population (Liu, Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson, & Kushner, 2008; Rueda & Windmueller, 2006). Although the overrepresentation of English Learners in special education has historically been a topic of concern, the issue continues to exist. Knowledge of English Learners’ learning styles, rates of language acquisition, and their unique challenges is imperative in meeting their academic needs. In addition, it is vital that appropriate methods of assessing EL’s learning and cognitive abilities are utilized according to best practices. Therefore, this manual and accompanying PowerPoint presentation is designed to help teachers, school psychologists, and school site administrators become more familiar with the research surrounding assessing EL students, and in turn, be better able to differentiate between when assessment is inappropriate versus appropriate. Additionally, teachers, school psychologists, and administrators need to be provided with appropriate alternatives and instructional strategies to address the needs of struggling EL students. The information provided in the presentations is based on a literature review performed between February and December 2012.
Nature of the Presentation

This project includes one PowerPoint presentation for school site administrators (principals, vice principals), school psychologists, and teachers. The presentation is calculated to last four hours with one 40 minute break.

Audience participation is a vital aspect of the presentation and should be targeted through the use of quality presentation techniques such as pausing for questions, demonstrating active listening, and validating audience input. To encourage participation, it is recommended that presenters and participants wear name tags which can be read from a distance. Before beginning the workshop, the presenter will need to make copies of the PowerPoint slide handouts. Materials provided to participants should include a copy of the PowerPoint presentation as well as any supplementary handouts. The handouts can be found at the end of this manual. The PowerPoint presentation is also available on a CD provided with this manual.

In preparation for giving this workshop, presenters should thoroughly read over the slides and the associated notes. Presenters may include their own names and contact information to the initial slide. Additionally, it is recommended that presenters become familiar with the information cited and referenced at the end of the presentation.

Guidance for Presenters

Each workshop is presented as a series of Microsoft PowerPoint slides. The slides are prepared with all necessary information for presenting the workshops. Presenters may use their own language when presenting; however, sample language has been provided on the notes section of each slide. Throughout the presentation, the notes sections
include the notations “sample presentation language”, “read”, “do”, “ask”, and “listen for.” The workshop is designed to include audience participation. Questions and activities are embedded throughout the slide notes. To highlight these activities, questions the presenter should ask of the audience are prefaced with the word “ask” in the notes section of the slides. Directions for activities are provided. To provide feedback to the audience following the presenters’ questions, the words “listen for” provide the content that answers the question. The presenter should place extra emphasis on words typed in all capital letters.

The presentation can be performed with one or two presenters. If there are two presenters, a natural place to transition is after the first break. There are no strict guidelines regarding presenter transitions. However, it is recommended that each presenter introduce himself/herself at the beginning of the presentation and after any transition or change in primary presenter. A recommended timeline for the training workshop follows:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Slides</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>#1-9</td>
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<tr>
<td>#10-12</td>
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<td>EL Special Education Evaluations</td>
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<tr>
<td>#61-80</td>
<td>Possible Solutions</td>
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</tbody>
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**About the Authors**

Michelle Zozaya and Erin Crosby are school psychologist interns. Erin Crosby completed her Masters degree at California State University, Sacramento and Michelle
Zozaya completed her Masters degree at University of California, Davis. This workshop was completed to satisfy part of the requirements of their Specialist in Education (Ed.S.) degrees.
APPENDIX B

Presentation Slides: School Psychologists, School Site Administrators, and Teachers

Workshop
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION WITH ENGLISH LEARNERS

IMPLICATIONS FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT AND SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRALS

ERIN CROSBY & MICHELLE ZOZAYA

Presenters should insert their names into the slide and introduce themselves to the audience.
DO: Pass out KWL chart to all participants.

Sample Presentation Language: To begin, I/we would like to do a KWL chart in order to tap your prior knowledge about the practice of assessing EL students and to think about what we want to learn in this workshop.

DO: Give group approximately 5 minutes to write on their chart.

ASK: Can I/we have a few volunteers share what they wrote?
Sample Presentation Language: Here is my/our workshop outline. I/We will be referring back to this throughout the training to keep you aware of what I/we have, and will be, covering.
AUDIENCE’S PERSONAL PERCEPTIONS:

• Discussion

Sample Presentation Language: At this time, talk to your neighbor about your perceptions of assessing English Learners. For example, when is it appropriate? What are your experiences with EL students who have been assessed?

Do: Give participants 1 minute per person to talk to their neighbor.

Ask: What did you come up with? Can I/we have some volunteers to share?

Do: List perceptions on a whiteboard, poster board, or chalkboard.
Sample Presentation Language: Now that we have an idea of some of the perceptions in your district, let’s go over what has been found in the research.
ENGLISH LEARNERS IN SCHOOLS

•According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language (NCELA, 2011):

•49.9 Million students were enrolled in US public schools grades K-8

•Of these, 5.3 Million were English Learners

•In California approximately 1.4 million English Learners were enrolled (which was more than the next 5 states combined)

•These numbers continue to increase each year…..

Sample Presentation Language: English learners (ELs; also referred to as "limited English proficient" students) are students whose English skills are so limited that they cannot profit from general education instruction provided in English without special language support (Ortiz & Kushner, 1997). These students are typically served in bilingual education or English Language Development (ELD) programs. Although ELs represent more than 400 language groups, approximately 75% of ELLs in U.S. schools are Spanish-speakers (Kindler, 2002). Here are a few current statistics and facts relevant to English Learners.

Read: All bulleted points.
ENGLISH LEARNERS IN SCHOOLS

• EL students are likely to face many issues in school, including:
  • Acquiring a new language
  • Progressing through various levels of acculturation
  • Developing relationships with English-speaking peers and teachers
  • Achieving academic proficiency

Read: All bulleted points.

Sample Presentation Language: Thus, English learners have quite a bit to manage between their home and their school lives. Life experiences, family issues, behavioral adjustment, academic performance, and the second language acquisition process are all important for teachers to consider in evaluating the current status of, and planning instruction for, ELLs. The school performance and behaviors of ELLs should be interpreted in light of their individual backgrounds (NASP, 2004).
ENGLISH LEARNERS IN SCHOOLS

• According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2011), in more than 1,300 US school districts, 76% of ELs scored below grade level of tests of English reading.

• In the age of high stakes testing, diversity among schools is not necessarily a consideration

• Reading related difficulties are one of the primary reasons EL students are referred for special education assessments.

Read: All bulleted points.
ENGLISH LEARNERS IN SCHOOLS

• There is an overrepresentation of EL students within the special education population (Liu, Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson, & Kushner, 2008; Rueda & Windmueller, 2006).

• ELs are between 1.42 and 2.43 times more likely to be referred to special education and receive special education support than their monolingual English speaking peers (Spinelli, 2008).

• Although the overrepresentation of English Learners in special education has historically been a topic of concern, the issue continues to exist.

Paraphrase all bulleted points.

Sample Presentation Language: Due to all of the previously mentioned issues that EL students face in schools, school dropout rates are often high among EL populations, and achievement gaps between EL and non-EL groups have been reported in many schools (NASP, 2004). It is imperative that school administrators, educators, and school psychologists increase their awareness regarding these statistics.
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT AND SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRALS

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

English Learners in Schools
- Over-Representation
- EL Special Education Evaluations – An Overview
- Problems with EL Assessments
- The Process of Acquiring a Second Language
  - BICS & CALPS
  - Four Stages of Language Acquisition
  - Learning Differences
- Promises of RtI
- Possible Problems with Applying RtI with ELs
- Possible Solutions
  - General awareness of the process of language acquisition
  - Training in effective EL instruction and intervention practices
  - Effective Data Collection
OVER-REPRESENTATION: REFERRAL PROCESS

- Referrals of ELs are often due to teachers perceiving that students aren’t making progress and/or teachers believing the students’ difficulty is due to a learning disability (Ortiz et al., 2011).
- Studies have indicated that there are serious shortcomings in school districts’ implementation of special education referrals for EL students (Chu & Flores, 2011; Linan-Thompson et al, 2007; Ortiz, et al., 2011).
  - Educators’ concerns and the specific nature of students’ academic problems were not clearly identified in referral documents.
  - Several students within the sample were receiving reading instruction in a bilingual special education program prior to being evaluated for a learning disability.

Read: All bulleted points.

Ask: Does anyone know the methods for referring EL students that follows best practices?

Listen for: SSTs and RtI
It is well documented that ELs are overrepresented in special education.

A clinical panel reviewing special education determinations found that 77% of the EL students did not qualify when information other than IQ achievement discrepancy was considered. (Ortiz et al., 2011)

Traditional intervention and assessment methods are a part of this problem.

**OVER-REPRESENTATION**

Sample Presentation Language: *A current pitfall with assessing English Learners is the tendency to base eligibility determinations for special education solely on test scores rather than looking at the whole child. Consideration of all factors that relate to an EL student (language acquisition, acculturation, cultural norms) is imperative when determining whether an EL student requires special education services and support.*

**Read:** All bulleted points.
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT AND SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRALS

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

English Learners in Schools
Over-Representation
EL Special Education Evaluations – An Overview
Problems with EL Assessments
The Process of Acquiring a Second Language
BICS & CALPS
Four Stages of Language Acquisition
Learning Differences
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Possible Problems with Applying RtI with ELs
Possible Solutions
General awareness of the process of language acquisition
Training in effective EL instruction and intervention practices
Effective Data Collection
BASIC OVERVIEW OF STEPS FOR ASSESSING EL STUDENTS

- Legal Requirements
- Background and Information Gathering
- Current Instruction Practices (ELD)
- Establishing Language Proficiency
- Assessment

Sample Presentation Language: When conducting an assessment for an EL student, a school psychologist and the IEP team must consider all of the following.

Read: All bullet points.
LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

• Districts are required to use specific and appropriate assessment instruments and processes.

• Exclusionary factors, including "environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage must be considered" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

• Districts must monitor the over-identification and disproportionality of racially and ethnically diverse children in special education programs.
  
  • Sec. 300.304
  • Sec. 300.173
  • Sec. 300.646

Read: First two bullet points.

Do: Distribute Minimal Requirements for the Evaluation and Determination of Eligibility under the Individuals with Disabilities Act 2004 handout.

Sample Presentation Language: These three sections speak to special education law in regards to assessment and eligibility for special education. The provided handout describes these three sections of special education law regarding identifying students with disabilities. The highlighted portions speak specifically to students with limited English proficiency. This is an introduction to the minimal requirements that are expected to be a part of a formal evaluation.
LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

California Code of Regulations:
Title 5, Section 3023:
(a) …assessments shall be administered by qualified personnel who are competent in both the oral or sign language skills and written skills of the individual’s primary language or mode of communication and have a knowledge and understanding of the cultural and ethnic background of the pupil. If it clearly is not feasible to do so, an interpreter must be used, and the assessment report shall document this condition and note that the validity of the assessment may have been affected.
(b) The normal process of second-language acquisition, as well as manifestations of dialect and sociolinguistic variance shall not be diagnosed as a disabling condition.

Sample Presentation Language: These are several of the regulations enforced in California regarding EL's that are also listed on your handout.

Read: All bullets on slide
BACKGROUND AND INFORMATION GATHERING

• Identifying basic demographics (e.g., age, gender, grade)
• Identifying primary and dominant language
• Identifying primary language proficiency
• Identifying academic exposure and history
• Identifying level of acculturation
• Identifying family and cultural views and values regarding education
• Identifying student attitudes and motivation about school and learning a second language
• To name a few…

Sample Presentation Language: Some of the first information necessary for an assessment is basic background information. Specifically, for English Learners, we need to address all of the following.

Read: All bullet points

Ask: Can anyone think of some examples that are not listed on the slide?

Sample Presentation Language: Later on in the presentation, we will revisit this topic and provide a tool for gathering this information.
CURRENT INSTRUCTION PRACTICES (ELD)

• An EL student’s prior knowledge and preferred learning modality needs to be activated and used to connect new grade level concepts and skills to previous learning.
• Meaningful, hands-on learning activities need to be appropriate to the ELD level to achieve content mastery AND to develop language skills.
• Various scaffolding strategies need to be provided to EL students:
  - Visuals
  - Clarification
  - Manipulatives
  - Increased wait time
  - Comprehension checks
  - Graphic organizers
  - Variety of questioning techniques
  - Graphic organizers
  - Appropriate to ELD level

Sample Presentation Language: In thinking about instruction provided to ELs, school psychologists, administrators, and instructors need to be mindful of the following. It is likely that the psychologist will want to observe and determine the fidelity of the ELD program for a student referred for special education assessment.

Read: All bulleted points.
CURRENT INSTRUCTION PRACTICES (ELD)

- Is the student in a culturally responsive school climate?
- Is the classroom conducive to learning and provide a supportive learning environment?
- Does the teacher motivate positive student behavior?
- Does the teacher provide intensive academic intervention when needed?
- Does the teacher have high expectations for all students?

Sample Presentation Language: Questions that need to be answered when evaluating whether a student's learning environment is meeting his/her educational needs include the following:

Read: All bulleted points
ESTABLISHING LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

- Home Language Survey
- CELDT scores (or appropriate alternative assessments)
- Language Sample
- Parent / Teacher interview
- Various alternative assessments (Exp. WJIII CALP Scoring)

**Sample Presentation Language:** A completed home language survey is required for all families within all school districts to establish the student’s primary language and languages spoken in the home. In addition, EL students are required to participate in CELDT testing every year to determine an EL’s progress in speaking, listening, writing, reading, and overall English proficiency. However, the CELDT is not the only available assessment for determining English proficiency. There are also many appropriate alternative assessments that can provide information on a student’s language development, such as the CALP scoring option on the Woodcock-Johnson III Cognitive Assessment.
ASSESSMENT

• Instruments used during assessments:
  • Must be non-discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis
  • Must be administered in the child’s native language, or other mode of communication most likely to yield accurate information
  • Need to be used for the purposes for which they are valid and reliable.
  • Must accurately reflect what they purport to measure (not sensory, manual, or speaking skill).

Sample Presentation Language: In referring to the IDEA handout that we provided, these are some of the key points in regard to selecting appropriate assessment instruments for English Learners. Next, we will speak to some of the issues that arise when using traditional assessment instruments with EL students.
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT AND SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRALS

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

English Learners in Schools
Over-Representation
EL Special Education Evaluations – An Overview

Problems with EL Assessments
The Process of Acquiring a Second Language
BICS & CALPS
Four Stages of Language Acquisition
Learning Differences
Promises of RtI
Possible Problems with Applying RtI with ELs
Possible Solutions
  General awareness of the process of language acquisition
  Training in effective EL instruction and intervention practices
  Effective Data Collection
PROBLEMS WITH TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT

Does the student understand the tasks presented?
Does the student understand the task instructions?
Does the student feel comfortable telling the examiner when he/she does not understand?
Does the student have the language proficiency to both understand and PROVIDE verbal responses?
Does the student understand the procedures and expectations of the assessment process?
Is the student represented in the norm-group?
Could the assessment be biased toward the culture of the student?

Sample Presentation Language:  We should ask ourselves the following questions prior to assessing an EL. These questions highlight and draw attention to the potential problems that are commonly associated with using traditional methods to assess EL students.

Read: All questions on slide.
PROBLEMS WITH TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT

• When ELs are referred for an evaluation, they are at high risk for misdiagnosis (Spinelli, 2008).
• Many ELs are inappropriately classified as learning disabled and are programmed to receive special education services when their school problems actually result from their language difficulties.
• Bilingual children and children with limited or no proficiency in English have special communication needs.
• Some of these children also have a speech, language, learning, or hearing disability that is not related to their use of a foreign language.

Read: All bulleted points.
PROBLEMS WITH TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT

• In many cases, EL students perform poorly on traditional test instruments and are subsequently misidentified as having a learning disability.
• In other cases, a child with a true learning disability is frequently not identified when school psychologists attempt to avoid inappropriate diagnosis and placement.
• In either case, the child is not receiving the appropriate services he/she needs.

Sample Presentation Language: Distinguishing between a language disorder and a learning impairment is a very complex assessment process.

Read: All bulleted points.
PROBLEMS WITH TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT

• According to the U.S. Department of Education (1997), problems associated with inappropriate classification and placement include the following:
  • Being denied access to the general education curriculum
  • Being placed in separate programs with more limited curriculum that may impact the student’s access to post-secondary education and employment opportunities
  • Being stigmatized as a misclassification may negatively impact students’ self-perception

Read: All bulleted points.

Sample Presentation Language: To address these potential problems of inappropriately classifying and placing EL students in special education, it is imperative that we are knowledgeable of the language acquisition process. Having familiarity with the process of language acquisition will assist school personnel in teasing apart language difficulties vs. learning impairments.
PROBLEMS WITH TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT

Traditional assessments DO NOT require the formal collection of data over time which, would provide information about a student’s rate of learning (core curriculum, ELD programs, and response to interventions) in comparison to like peers (second language learners) over time.

Without this data you cannot identify a pattern or learning. There is no clear evidence of similar, or dissimilar, error patterns between the student’s primary language and second language.

Sample Presentation Language: You will notice that in the last few slides there has been no mention of collecting data on interventions that had been tried with the student prior to their referral for special education assessment. This is because...

Read: All information on the slide.

Sample Presentation Language: Without introducing interventions and comparing a learners progress to other “like peers” how are we supposed to tell whether a students learning is merely different, or disabled? Without data on the student’s use of both languages, it is very unclear.
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT AND SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRALS

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

English Learners in Schools
Over-Representation
EL Special Education Evaluations – An Overview
Problems with EL Assessments

The Process of Acquiring a Second Language
BICS & CALPS
Four Stages of Language Acquisition
Learning Differences

Promises of RtI
Possible Problems with Applying RtI with ELs

Possible Solutions
  General awareness of the process of language acquisition
  Training in effective EL instruction and intervention practices
  Effective Data Collection
THE CASE OF MANUEL

Manuel is a 7-year-old boy who immigrated from Mexico 2 years ago after the death of his mother. He lives with his father and grandmother who speak Spanish only. He is not learning as quickly as his younger sister who is in Kindergarten and is far behind his peers academically.

Is it because:

- He has a language disorder?
- He is depressed about the loss of his mother?
- He does not want to be in the US?
- He is finding English difficult to learn?
- He has limited literacy in his first language?
- He has limited schooling in his first language?
- He has a learning disability?
- He is not yet adjusted to living in this country?

Do: Distribute Case Study of Manuel handout.

Read: The case study and list of possible reasons.

Sample Presentation Language: Turn to 2-3 people sitting close to you. Given what you know about English learners, generate some other possible reasons that Manuel could be falling behind his peers academically with the people around you. Just take one minute and then we will share.

Ask: Which reason do you believe to be most likely?
Research regarding the process of acquiring a second language proposed that there are two types of language proficiency:

1) **Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)**
   - Used during informal, social, conversation.

2) **Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)**
   - Used during formal, academic, school work.

**Read:** All information on slide.

**Sample Presentation Language:** *BICS are the language proficiency that English learners master first. This is the informal, social, conversational type of language. This is the type of language that a person would use to carry on a conversation with another person in an informal setting. So, regarding our students, this would mean conversations between peers on the playground or cafeteria, and conversations with teachers outside of instructional times.*

**Ask:** Can anyone think of some other places or situations in which a student would use Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills?

**Listen for:** grocery store clerk, playground aide, community helpers etc.

**Ask:** How long do you think it takes a person to reach the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills proficiency?

**Listen for:** research indicates that it usually takes between 2 or 3 years to acquire BICS.

**Sample Presentation Language:** *The second type of language proficiency is called Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency or CALP. This is the type of language an individual uses in formal or academic settings. This is the type of language skill that is needed to successfully complete schoolwork. So regarding our students, this is the*
language proficiency that they will need to attain in order to access the teacher’s delivery of the general education curriculum.

**Ask:** How long do you think it takes a person to reach the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)?

**Listen for:** Research indicates that it takes between 5 and 7 years to acquire CALP.

**Ask:** So think in regards to our students, if an individual came to us in the second grade speaking no English, in what grade could we expect that student to access the general education curriculum and produce work with a proficiency comparable to his mono-language peers?

**Listen for:** Between the 7th and 9th grade.
According to linguistic research, students learning a second language go through four stages of acquisition (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005):

1. Preproduction
2. Early Production
3. Speech Emergence
4. Intermediate Fluency

**Read:** First paragraph.

**Sample Presentation Language:** *I/We will go through each of the four stages of language acquisition and talk about what each of the stages looks like.*

**Read:** Each stage name.
LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: STAGE 1

Preproduction Stage

Time period: First 3 months of exposure to English

Characterized by: A period of silence. The individual is typically focused on comprehension.

Typical Response Patterns: “yes/no” responses, one-word answers, drawing, copying, pointing, choosing among items, matching, circling.

Read: All bullets on slide.
LANGUAGE ACQUISITION:
STAGE 2

Early Production
Time Period: 3-6 months

Characterized by: Continued focus on comprehension, limited speech. May follow routines/formulas.

Typical Response Patterns: 1-3 word phrases, beginning to label items, answer simple questions, participation in choral responding, sentence completion, grouping items, miming or acting-out responses.

Read: All bullets on slide.

Sample Presentation Language: An example of following routines/formulas would be responding to “gimme five” or following song hand movements.
**LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: STAGE 3**

**Speech Emergence**

*Time Period:* 6 months-2 years

*Characterized by:* Increased comprehension and expansion of vocabulary with frequent grammatical errors.

*Typical Response Patterns:* Use of simple sentences, carrying on basic dialogue, recalling, retelling information, describing/explaining, comparing, beginning writing responses, demonstrating, role playing, cooperative group tasks.

**Read:** All bullets on slide.
LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: STAGE 4

Intermediate Fluency

Time Period: 2-3 years

Characterized by: Improved comprehension and conversational abilities. Expanded vocabulary. Students appear to be conversationally proficient and make fewer grammatical mistakes.

Typical Response Patterns: Predicting, narrating, summarizing, giving opinions, debating/defending, writing stories, essay summaries, comprehensible written tests, cooperative group work.

Read: All bullets on slide.
LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Moving through these four stages typically takes a language learner between 2-3 years.

This type of language proficiency is called?
BASIC INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The type of language proficiency the student would still be working to reach is called?
COGNITIVE ACADEMIC LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

**Read:** All bullets on slide.
THE CASE OF MANUEL

Manuel is a 7-year-old boy who immigrated from Mexico 2 years ago after the death of his mother. He lives with his father and grandmother who speak Spanish only. He is not learning as quickly as his younger sister who is in Kindergarten and is far behind his peers academically.

Manuel’s teacher, Mrs. Smith, has noticed frequent errors in Manuel’s school work. In his journal, Manuel wrote about going to McDonald’s. He stated, “My dad said take a seat because he had hungry.” On another worksheet, Manuel wrote “the motorcycle red goed fast.” When speaking to Manuel, he does not make as many of these errors. Mrs. Smith also noticed that when Manuel is speaking to some of his Spanish speaking friends, he will begin a statement in English and finish it in Spanish.

Read: The second paragraph of the case study.

Ask: How many people here currently have English learners in their class?
Ask: What type or errors, if any, have you noticed these students making? Do any of these types of errors sound similar?
## LEARNING DIFFERENCES

English learners often exhibit a number of differences from their English-only peers that are misconstrued as deficiencies when they are actually considered normal processes of second language acquisition.

- Interlanguage
- Code Switching
- Interference
- Language Loss

**Read:** The first paragraph.

**Sample Presentation Language:** The biggest challenge we face when making decisions about English learners is differentiating learning differences from learning disabilities. These are four learning differences that are very common behaviors exhibited by English learners that are often assumed to be deficits. Hopefully, by understanding that these are DIFFERENCES and not necessarily DEFICITS we can help teachers, psychologists, speech pathologists, and other school personnel understand the learning process and not AUTOMATICALLY assume that the learner is disabled. This is not to say that no English learner has a learning disability. The distinction here is to recognize the types of errors these individuals frequently make and keeping in mind that this is a normal learning process, NOT a disability.
LEARNING DIFFERENCES: INTERLANGUAGE

A new language system that incorporates part of the students native language system with part of the new language system. Extending rules of grammar and sentence structure.

Examples commonly observed among Spanish speakers:
- Adjective comes after the noun (The house green)
- Double negatives (I don’t want no more)
- Drop superlatives (My dog is more big)

Read: The first line.

Sample Presentation Language: Interlanguage is much like a set of hypotheses that an individual forms about a new language. As they are learning they are attempting to extend some of the rules of their first language system into the second. Some common examples observed among Spanish speakers include:

Read: Examples.

Ask: In the case of Manuel, can anyone identify a possible example of Interlanguage? Listen for: “the motorcycle red”
LEARNING DIFFERENCES:
CODE SWITCHING

The process of shifting from one language to another within the same conversation. At times this may occur within the same sentence.

Example: One student speaking to another on the playground exclaims:
“I have a dog too! He es mas grande que me hermana!”

Read: The first two sentences.

Sample Presentation Language: In regards to Spanish speakers, you may have heard of the term “spanglish.” This is formally titled code switching and it is often misinterpreted as a deficit in language development or use. Actually this is a high-level language skill that requires meaningful communication and is very natural and useful when learning a second language.

Read: The example

Ask: In regards to Manuel, can anyone identify whether he is engaging in code switching?
Listen for: Manuel switches between language when speaking to his friends on the playground.
LEARNING DIFFERENCES: INTERFERENCE

When the communication style of the first language interferes with the expression in the second language. This is more likely to occur in formal speech (such as school work) than informal speech (on the playground).

Examples in Spanish:
- “Tome una silla” translates to “take a seat” rather than “have a seat”
- “Tengo hambre” translates to “I have hunger” rather than “I am hungry”

Read: The first two sentences.

Sample Presentation Language: These are commonly seen in situations where the student makes literal translations.

Read: Examples

Ask: In regards to Manuel, can anyone identify an example of Interference?
Listen for: His father said “take a seat, I have hungry”
LEARNING DIFFERENCES: LANGUAGE LOSS

When the increased focus on learning the new language results in the weakening or loss of the primary language.

In the case of Manuel, How might this affect his test scores if he is referred for a formal language evaluation?

---

Read: The first sentence and the question.

Listen for: At some point within the process of acquiring English, it is possible that Manuel will score low in both languages. This may make his look like he has some true language deficits when it is just part of the language acquisition process. This may especially be an issue for students who do not receive any native-language instruction in school.
THE CASE OF MANUEL

Manuel's teacher, Mrs. Smith, is worried about Manuel's slow academic progress. She has asked him about his life in Mexico. Manuel explained that he went to school as much as he could but they move often so his father can find work. Manuel expressed that he misses some of his other family members in Mexico. During many of Mrs. Smith's lessons, she has observed Manuel to be fiddling with things in his desk and staring around the room. During tests, Manuel often "borrows" answers from his classmates. When Mrs. Smith asked Manuel to do the best he could on his own, he became upset and put his head on his desk. He would not complete the test.

Read: Case study.
VARIABLES OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

1. An individual will more readily gain proficiency in a second language if they begin the process at an earlier age.
2. The greater the proficiency an individual demonstrates in their first language, the stronger the facility for learning a second language.
3. If the student's learning style is aligned with a teacher's style of teaching they will make greater progress in a second language.
4. An individual's attitude and motivation will greatly affect their progress in a second language.
5. The stronger the academic background of an individual the more readily they will be able to transfer that knowledge to English.

**Read:** Each bullet point, followed by the corresponding sample presentation language.

**Sample Presentation Language:**

1 – It is a common belief that young children learn a second language easier and faster than adults. This is not necessarily true. Younger people do not necessarily have a larger facility for learning a language, but they do have LESS to learn in order to catch up to the proficiency of their peers. Therefore in the case of Manuel, the fact that his younger sister is learning English faster than he is, is not necessarily surprising. She is being compared to the language proficiency of kindergarteners.

2 – An individual’s proficiency in their first language acts as the foundation for learning the second language. If the student has good, rich language exposure in their first language they are more likely to be successful in their second language. Therefore, at home it is important to encourage parents to speak to their children in whichever language they can demonstrate the best communication. Sticking to “English only” is not necessarily a helpful strategy for English learners.

3 – This is were things like cultural norms of the role of student and teacher may come into play.

4 – Obviously, if a student is highly motivated to communicate in the second language they will demonstrate a greater effort in learning it.

5 – Student’s who have had exposure to quality instruction in their first language will be better able to close the gap between themselves and their peers. Remember many
immigrant families may have had interrupted or inadequate schooling in their first language.
**VARIABLES OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

How might this apply to Manuel?

1. Age / Grade?
2. Language proficiency in primary language?
3. Teaching style?
4. Attitude / Motivation?
5. Academic background?

*Remember these are only a few of the many variables that may affect a student's academic progress.*

---

**Read:** Each bullet point, followed by the corresponding sample presentation language.

**Sample Presentation Language:**

1. -- *Remember Manuel is a second grader (7 years old).*
2. -- *Is it possible that Manuel’s social-economic status is low? Does this possibly affect his language proficiency?*
3. -- *Does Manuel understand his teacher’s teaching style? Does it fit his cultural expectations of a teacher?*
4. -- *What might be affecting Manuel’s attitude or motivation around learning English?*
5. -- *What about Manuel’s academic background? Remember he said he attended school “sometimes.”*
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT AND SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRALS

WORKSHOP OUTLINE
English Learners in Schools
Over-Representation
EL Special Education Evaluations – An Overview
Problems with EL Assessments
The Process of Acquiring a Second Language
  BICS & CALPS
  Four Stages of Language Acquisition
  Learning Differences
Promises of RtI
  Possible Problems with Applying RtI with ELs
Possible Solutions
  General awareness of the process of language acquisition
  Training in effective EL instruction and intervention practices
  Effective Data Collection
AUDIENCES’ PERSONAL PERCEPTIONS: RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Discussion:

Sample Presentation Language: At this time, talk to your neighbor about your perceptions of RtI (Response to Intervention). For example, what is it? What does its implementation look like? What is your experience with implementing RtI? How can it be useful?

Do: Give participants 1 minute per person to talk to their neighbor.

Ask: What did you come up with? Can I/we have some volunteers to share?

Do: List perceptions on a whiteboard, poster board, or chalkboard.
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

• RtI is a way of looking at the case-effect relationship(s) between academic intervention and the student’s response to intervention.

• RtI is a systematic and data-based method of identifying, defining, and resolving students’ academic difficulties.

• While RtI data can be used as part of the process in identifying a specific learning disability, RtI activities are fundamentally part of general education instruction (Brown-Chidsey & Steele, 2010).

Sample Presentation Language: RtI is an approach to understanding and addressing students’ school difficulties.

Read: All bulleted points.
Sample Presentation Language: This is a visual that describes the tiers incorporated in a Response to Intervention model. As you can see, Tier 1 includes 80-90% of the student population, and includes all school-wide interventions. Tier 2 includes 5-10% of the student population and focuses on targeted interventions for students that need additional support outside of the school-wide interventions that all students in general education receive. Lastly, Tier 3 includes 1-5% of the student population and focuses on intensive interventions for students that are not responding to the targeted interventions included in Tier 2. Tier 3 typically involves the referral and assessment of students for possible learning disabilities, and may result in special education services and supports.
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: TIER 1

• Tier 1 is comprehensive and universal.
• Tier 1 activities are selected on the basis of effectiveness demonstrated in scientific studies.
• About 80-90% of students are able to be successful with Tier 1 intervention alone.
• For the approximately 10-20% of students who are not successful with Tier 1 alone, Tier 2 interventions are added.

Sample Presentation Language: *Tier 1 reflects general education curriculum and is delivered to ALL students in each grade level.*

Read: All bulleted points.
**RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: TIER 2**

- For EL students, Tier 2 interventions are provided in addition to, not in lieu of, ELD programming.
- When selecting an appropriate intervention, the individual needs of the student must be considered.
- This is especially important for English Learners whose needs may be more unique and intense than the English Only population.

**Examples:**
- More time to learn the material (additional reading groups)
- More access to the teacher (smaller student: teacher ratio)
- More targeted skill instruction (phonemic awareness instruction)

**Sample Presentation Language:** *Tier 2 is provided IN ADDITION to Tier 1 for those students who require more instruction to obtain their learning goals.*

**Read:** All bulleted points.

**Ask:** *Can anyone think of other examples of Tier 2 interventions?*

**Listen For:** Differentiated reading groups, leveled reading groups, cross-aged peer buddies, short-term discrete practice interventions, formal intervention groups such as Read Naturally.
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: TIER 2

• Once students are placed in appropriate intervention groups, assessments may be used for the purpose of progress monitoring to determine whether or not a student is “responding” to the intervention.

• Examples of assessments used to monitor student progress include: embedded assessments, basic skills assessment and fluency based measurements (Christo, 2005).

• Performance on these measures may provide teachers with information about whether a goal needs to be modified, if the intervention needs to be changed, or if making a referral for a full academic evaluation is appropriate.

Sample Presentation Language: The second key component to implementing RtI is strategic assessment and data-based decision making.

Read: First two bulleted points.

Sample Presentation Language: Embedded assessments refer to measurements that directly assess what is being taught in a given curriculum. These assessments identify a sequential set of skills on which the student must demonstrate mastery. Basic skills assessments refer to measurements that assess basic key skills needed for adequate progress in a given area. For example, the Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation is used to identify students who need targeted instruction in phonemic awareness. Fluency based measurements refer to Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) or Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). These measurement tools are formed using curriculum as test materials and frequently emphasize fluency. These measures, commonly called probes, may be used repeatedly and frequently to measure progress over time.

Read: Last bulleted point.
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: TIER 2

• Determining a student’s response to intervention can be achieved by setting goals using end-of-year benchmarks, using a normative comparison group, or using an intra-individual framework (Hosp, Hosp, & Howell, 2007).
• However, there are challenges to each of these methods when applying them to the English Learner population.
• Research suggests it may be more effective to calculate the effect size when determining a student’s responsiveness to an intervention.

Sample Presentation Language: The way that data is interpreted plays a large role in a RtI model. The emphasis on data-based decision making places great importance on effectively determining whether or not a student is adequately responding to an intervention.

Read: First two bullet points.

Sample Presentation Language: We will discuss specific challenges to using these methods while determining an EL’s “response” to intervention at a later point in the presentation.

Read: Last bullet point.
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION:
TIER 2

• Calculating an effect size does not require the use of norm-groups, which may be biased against ELs, or grade-level standards that may require unrealistic growth.

• Traditionally an effect size of 0.3 and below is considered small, 0.4-0.6 is considered moderate, and 0.7-0.9 is considered large (Leitner & Brock, 2012).

• Taking this information into account, the interventions that yield large effect sizes for individual EL students could be identified and continued while less effective interventions could be discontinued.

Read: All bulleted points.
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: TIER 3

• Tier 3 activities include comprehensive evaluation to identify whether a student has a specific disability and/or meets the criteria for special education.

• Sometimes a student's data demonstrates partial success with Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions, but the amount of time needed each day to achieve this level of success is so large (e.g., more than 2 hours per day per subject area), that Tier 3 instruction becomes advisable (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010).

• At this point, it would be important to reflect on a student's background information, their level of language acquisition, the appropriateness and effectiveness of interventions prior to making a special education referral.

Sample Presentation Language: Tier 3 interventions are reserved for the small percentage of students (roughly 1-5%) who do not respond well enough to the interventions provided in Tiers 1 and Tiers 2 to succeed in reaching educational goals.

Read: All bulleted points.
PROMISES OF RTI

• RtI may eliminate the discrepancy (“wait to fail”) model (Haager, 2007).

• RtI places emphasis on curriculum-based-measures (CBM), classroom observations, and work samples in determining the effectiveness of instructional delivery.

• RtI may improve the quality of instruction at all tiers by increasing the responsibility and accountability of the greater educational team in providing students with differentiated and appropriate access to the curriculum (Orosco, 2010).

Sample Presentation Language: RtI is a promising approach to address the previously mentioned pitfalls of inappropriate referrals and assessments of EL students.

Read: All bulleted points.
PROMISES OF RTI

• RtI may lead to an overall reduction in special education referrals.

• RtI offers the potential for ecologically valid information to be used in the assessment process with EL students:
  • Consideration of a student’s abilities within their personal contexts and circumstances.
  • Data collected within a RtI model must be considered in the context of the student’s daily interpersonal experiences and environmental interactions that may impact achievement.

Read: All bulleted points.
Sample Presentation Language: Although RtI is a promising model to apply when assessing the EL population, there are also possible problems that need to be considered.

Read: All bulleted points.
Utilizing CBM in the assessment of ELs poses significant challenges:

- CBM assesses static knowledge about a student’s academic content or skills at one point in time.
- CBM often fails to consider several factors that aid in pinpointing why a student is experiencing difficulty with an academic subject.
- CBM may fall short in examining the individual components of an academic skill.
- The use of CBM has primarily focused on younger learners.

**Read:** All bullet points.
Creating goals and setting expectations poses challenges:

- Expectations for academic growth or progress must also take the EL student’s language status and cultural context into account.
- There is a tendency to compare language proficiency of ELs with their English Only (EO) peers.
- As one might expect, EL students tend to demonstrate growth rates that are different when compared to their EO peers.
- Although ELs make academic gains, they may not reach the same level of proficiency as their EO peers when given the same amount of time to demonstrate a “response” to intervention.

Sample Presentation Language: Another potential problem pertains to creating goals and setting expectations for English Learners.

Read: All bulleted points.
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT AND SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRALS

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

English Learners in Schools
Over-Representation
EL Special Education Evaluations – An Overview
Problems with EL Assessments
The Process of Acquiring a Second Language
BICS & CALPS
Four Stages of Language Acquisition
Learning Differences
Promises of RtI
Possible Problems with Applying RtI with ELs

Possible Solutions
General awareness of the process of language acquisition
Training in effective EL instruction and intervention practices
Effective Data Collection
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

General awareness of the process of acquiring a second language:

- The amount of time that it takes to become proficient.
- The characteristics demonstrated by individuals at different stages of learning.
- Common error patterns demonstrated by English Learners.
- Variables that may affect an individual's progress through stages of learning.

Sample Presentation Language: The true purpose of today's in-service is to heavily address this first solution. Much of the information that I/we have provided today is reviewed here.

Read: Everything on the slide.

Sample Presentation Language: This information may help us to understand the differences between learning differences and learning disabilities because we will know what to look for, and what questions to ask when we have concerns about the progress of an English Learner.
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Training in effective EL instruction and intervention practices (RtI):

The core curriculum is often misaligned for English learners, leading to poor academic achievement which may eventually result in a special education placement due to presumed deficits.

This may be due to a lack of continual professional development concentrating on how to differentiate instruction for EL students and build upon EL students’ contextual experiences.

Read: All information on the slide.

Sample Presentation Language: Now that we know and understand a little more about the process of language acquisition, we have the background to build continued professional development for effective teaching practices that will meet the needs of these students. Effective instruction for EL students is a need that must to be FORMALLY developed for teachers to provide these students with effective core instruction, and to deliver ELD services with fidelity. Remember these are the requirements within an RtI model for the Tier 1 level.
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Effective Instruction Continued…
1. Understanding the language acquisition process.
2. Explicit and Direct Instruction techniques.
3. Validation of students’ cultural and linguistic knowledge and building upon contextual experience when teaching.
4. Explaining, modeling, scaffolding, and contextual application

Read: Each bullet point followed by the corresponding number under Sample Presentation Language.

Sample Presentation Language: Continued professional development would need to concentrate on some of the following skills. We have touched on several of these skills today, however, you will notice that there are more that will require continued development beyond today’s in-service. For example,
1– This is a skill we have covered in detail today
2– EL students need an explicit and direct teaching at a higher frequency than their English only peers.
3– Learning does not happen in a vacuum. By connecting new information to students’ immediate context and experience the learning becomes more meaningful.
4—These are some techniques that would require more formal training to implement with EL students.

Do: Distribute English Learner Intervention/Instruction Strategies and Resources handout.

Sample Presentation Language: The following is a handout that briefly touches on Instruction and Intervention strategies that are known to be effective for English learners. You will notice that some of the strategies are simple and self-explanatory, while others appear to require more information and formal training. Because going through all of
the effective strategies is beyond the scope of today’s in-service you will notice that we also attached a list of resources where you can find more information about how to deliver effective instruction and interventions for EL students.
Sample Presentation Language: The following few slides are two different interactions between a teacher and a group of EL students. The first sample that we will read is an example from a teacher who has not received any formal training in strategies for instruction with English learners. The second sample is an example from a teacher who has had formal training in effective EL instruction. This is only an example, but it will allow us to have a conversation about some of the things to keep in mind when providing instruction for this particular population.
Mrs. Abbot: I want to share with you one of my favorite childhood stories. This was read to me by my teachers and parents; it teaches us about the environment*. (Mrs. Abbot is holding up the book titled *The Lorax.*) What do you think this book is about? (Students do not respond.) Well, that is okay, we will learn what *The Lorax* is about together,** (Mrs. Abbot begins reading). “At the far end of town where Grickle-grass grows and the wind smells slow-and sour when it blows and no birds ever sign excepting old crows…is the Street of the Lifted Lorax. It’s not. So…Catch! Calls the Once-ler” (students are getting fidgety, not paying attention) “He let something fall, it’s a truffula seed, it’s the last one of all! Your in charge of the last of the truffula seeds, and truffula trees are what everyone needs.” (Students continue to fidget)***

Mrs. Abbot: Now it’s your turn to tell me what the story is about?

Luis: A…a Lorax!

Mrs. Abbot: Good, what was the Lorax trying to do?

Luis: fly!

(Orsco, 2010)

**Read:** All text on slide, pausing at asterisk to make the following comments.

**Sample Presentation Language:**

*Notice that she did not explicitly provide pre-teaching for the term environment.*

**Again notice that she missed an opportunity to provide explicit pre-teaching about the vocabulary and topic of the book.*

***Notice that Mrs. Abbot is not providing any student teacher interaction.*

**Ask:** Why do you think the students are becoming fidgety?
INTERACTION #1 CONT...

Mrs. Abbot: No I don’t think so. Who was the Onceler?
(no students reply...the teacher pauses...no students reply)
Mrs. Abbot: Has anyone read another book that is similar to this one?
(no students reply...Mrs. Abbot is hesitant, gives a frustrated grin, doesn’t know what to say and eventually transitions to another activity)

(Orosco, 2010)

Read: All text on slide.

Ask: Why do you think the students cannot answer these questions?

Listen For: Mrs. Abbot assumed that her learners had encountered a similar cultural experience to understand the story, however the story is quite abstract, different or unusual for her particular group of students. It did not connect to their background knowledge, provide vocabulary development, or foster oral language development.
INTERACTION #2

Mrs. Roberts: Today we are going to learn about The Pot That Juan Built. What do you think the book is about.

Carlos: A man? Cowboy?

Mrs. Roberts: Close, this story is about a man and his pot. The man's name is Juan (points to the man and the pot). Juan makes pottery. Pottery is an art. Does anyone know what the word art means?

Lucy: It's like Arte!

Mrs. Roberts: Yes, art is arte in Spanish, nice job Lucy! Pottery is an art...arte. When you make something like a pot it can become an art...arte. (Mrs. Roberts clearly writes the target word on the board. Under the word labeled English vocabulary word and arte under the word labeled Spanish vocabulary word.)

Mrs. Roberts: Juan makes pottery. Pottery is an art. Juan is an artist or artista.

(Below the word art, she writes the word artist in the English column and artista in the Spanish column.)

(Orosco, 2010)

Sample Presentation Language: In this interaction Mrs. Roberts has been given EL professional development and training. As I read, notice the differences in her teacher-student interaction.

Read: All text on slide.

Sample Presentation Language: Notice that the teacher immediately provides an opportunity to orient the students toward the topic before beginning the story. Also she corrects the student and provides explicit information about the topic. She also provides explicit vocabulary development.
Mrs. Roberts: Today we are going to preview this book and look for the pictures that describe the word art/arte or artist/artista. Preview means to go over the book, it means to look at the pictures and think or talk about what the book may be about. (Mrs. Roberts points to pictures of Juan holding a pot and overlooking the desert plains with adobe houses.)

Mrs. Roberts: Where do you think he lives? (no student reply) Has anyone seen these types of houses? (points to pictures of adobe houses).

Lucy: In Mexico.

(Mrs. Roberts goes on to preview every pages. The pictures on the book are eye catching. The students are excited to point to the pictures as if familiar with the setting.)

(Orosco, 2010)

**Read:** All text on slide.

**Sample Presentation Language:** *Notice that Mrs. Roberts continued to provide explicit vocabulary teaching. She allows the students to connect their social and cultural experiences with new instructional content. She activates students engagement and motivation by incorporating familiar cultural context. Also, the book that she selected was not abstract. It provided concrete information to encourage vocabulary development and comprehension.*
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

• Background and Current Information Collection:
  • Identifying basic demographics (e.g., age, gender, grade)
  • Identifying primary and dominant language
  • Identifying primary language proficiency
  • Identifying academic exposure and history
  • Identifying level of acculturation
  • Identifying family and cultural views and values regarding education
  • Identifying student attitudes and motivation about school and learning a second language.

Do: Distribute English Learner Background Information Questionnaire.

Sample Presentation Language: The current handout we are distributing includes information that would need to be gathered prior to initiating any form of assessment. As you will be able to see on the handout, the variables of acquiring a second language and some of the frequent learning differences that we have discussed, are addressed, as well as a history of interventions. This is meant to be used as a data collection tool for our students that would help us address all of the variables we have discussed today. This handout is also meant to be used as a tool to open discussion between teachers, psychologists, and administrators to communicate the needs and progress of EL students.
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Implement effective data collection practices for making appropriate special education referrals (RtI):

- Collecting background information.
- Connecting with families about patterns of learning at home, attitudes toward education, acculturation etc.
- Establishing and monitoring language proficiency.
- Tracking patterns of errors.
- Tracking history of access to core curriculum and appropriate ELD instruction.
- Tracking history of interventions with explicit data regarding rate of learning in comparison to like peers.

Sample Presentation Language: The final solution that we will discuss today relates to the requirement in a Response to Intervention model to make decisions based on data. By collecting and keeping a record of the following information we can make sure that we are addressing the necessary variables to make an appropriate EL referral for special education assessment. Without these pieces of information as a minimum, it is very likely that we are not meeting the needs of our EL students or our legal obligations in assessing them appropriately.
Sample Presentation Language: To get your minds reflecting on all of the information presented today, I/we would you to take a quick quiz on today’s topic.

Do: Distribute the Quick Quiz handout. Provide participants with 3-5 minutes to complete the quiz.

Ask: How did you do? Were any of the answers surprising to you?
Sample Presentation Language: Let’s discuss the answers to the quiz you just completed. At this point, we will review each answer and discuss any questions that may have come up when thinking about these questions.

Read: Each answer, one by one. Allow 10-20 second pauses in between each answer.

Ask: Does anyone need clarification on the rationale behind the answers to this quiz?
Sample Presentation Language: The goal of this presentation was to help you become more familiar with the research surrounding assessing EL students. It is hoped that this will better equip you with the knowledge necessary to differentiate between inappropriate and appropriate EL referrals and special education evaluations. As a concluding activity, I/we would like you to complete the “Learn” column of your KWL chart.

Do: Give participants 2 minutes to complete this activity.
Sample Presentation Language: Thank you so much for your participation in this workshop. At this point, I/we would be happy to answer any questions you might have.
REFERENCES


Christo, C. (2002). CBM: To know it is to use it. CASP Today, 51, 1-6.


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


APPENDIX C

Handouts
## KWL Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I <strong>Know</strong> About Assessing ELs</th>
<th>What I <strong>Want</strong> to Know About Assessing ELs</th>
<th>What I <strong>Learned</strong> About Assessing ELs</th>
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Minimal Requirements for the Evaluation and Determination of Eligibility under the Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004 (Sec. 300.304):

(b) In conducting the evaluation, the public agency must –

(1) Use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information about the child, including information provided by the parent, that may assist in determining –

(i) Whether the child is a child with a disability under Sec. 300.8; and
(ii) The content of the child’s IEP, including information related to enabling the child to be involved in and progress in the general education curriculum.

(2) Not use any single measure or assessment as the sole criterion for determining whether a child is a child with a disability and for determining an appropriate educational program for the child; and

(3) Use technically sound instruments that may assess the relative contribution of cognitive and behavioral factors, in addition to physical or developmental factors.

c) In conducting other evaluation procedures, each public agency must ensure that –

(1) Assessments and other evaluation materials used to assess a child under this part,

(i) Are selected and administered so as not to be discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis;
(ii) Are provided and administered in the child’s native language or other mode of communication and in the form most likely to yield accurate information on what the child knows and can do academically, developmentally, and functionally, unless it is clearly not feasible to so provide or administer;
(iii) Are used for the purposes for which the assessments or measures are valid and reliable;
(iv) Are administered by trained and knowledgeable personnel; and
(v) Are administered in accordance with any instructions provided by the producer of the assessments.

(2) Assessment and other evaluation materials include those tailored to assess specific areas of educational need and not merely those that are designed to provide a single general intelligence quotient.

(3) Assessments are selected and administered so as best to ensure that if an assessment is administered to a child with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills, the assessment results accurately reflect the child’s aptitude or achievement level or whatever other factors the test purports to measure,
rather than reflecting the child’s impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills (unless those skills are the factors that the test purports to measure).

4) The child is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability, including, if appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities;

5) Assessments of children with disabilities who transfer from one public agency to another public agency in the same school year are coordinated with those children’s prior and subsequent schools, as necessary and as expeditiously as possible, consistent with Sec. 300.301 (d)(2) and (e), to ensure prompt completion of full evaluations.

6) In evaluating each child with a disability under Sec. 300.304 through 300.306, the evaluation is sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the child’s special education and related services needs, whether or not commonly linked to the disability category in which the child has been classified.

7) Assessment tools and strategies that provide relevant information that directly assists persons in determining the educational needs of the child are provided.

**IDEA, 2004 Over-identification and Disproportionality**

**Sec. 300.173**

The State must have in effect, consistent with the purpose of this part and with section 618(d) of the Act, policies and procedures designed to prevent the inappropriate over-identification or disproportionate representation by race and ethnicity of children as children with disabilities, including children with disabilities with a particular impairment described in Sec. 300.8.

**Sec. 300.646**

(a) General. Each State that receives assistance under Part B of the Act, and the Secretary of the Interior, must provide for the collection and examination of data to determine if significant disproportionality based on race and ethnicity is occurring in the State and the LEAs of the State with respect to –

(1) The identification of children as children with disabilities, including the identification of children as children with disabilities in accordance with a particular impairment described in section 602(3) of the Act;

(2) The placement in particular educational settings of these children; and

(3) The incidence, duration, and type of disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions.
(b) Review and revision of policies, practices, and procedures. In the case of a determination of significant disproportionality with respect to the identification of children as children with disabilities, or the placement in particular educational settings of these children, in accordance with paragraph (a) of this section, the State or the Secretary of the Interior must—

(1) Provide for the review and, if appropriate revision of the policies, procedures, and practices used in the identification or placement to ensure that the policies, procedures, and practices comply with the requirements of the Act.

(2) Require any LEA identified under paragraph (a) of this section to reserve the maximum amount of funds under section 613 (f) of the Act to provide comprehensive coordinated early intervening services to serve children in the LEA, particularly, but no exclusively, children in those groups that were significantly overidentified under paragraph (a) of this section; and

(3) Require the LEA to publicly report the revision of policies, practices, and procedures described under paragraph (b)(1) of this section.

California Code of Regulations:

Title 5, Section 3023:

(a) In addition to provisions of Education Code sections 56320, assessments shall be administered by qualified personnel who are competent in both the oral or sign language skills and written skills of the individual’s primary language or mode of communication and have a knowledge and understanding of the cultural and ethnic background of the pupil. If it clearly is not feasible to do so, an interpreter must be used, and the assessment report shall document this condition and note that the validity of the assessment may have been affected.

(b) The normal process of second-language acquisition, as well as manifestations of dialect and sociolinguistic variance shall not be diagnosed as a disabling condition.
The Case of Manuel

Manuel is a 7-year-old boy who emigrated from Mexico 2 years ago after the death of his mother. He lives with his father and grandmother who speak Spanish only. He is not learning as quickly as his younger sister who is in Kindergarten and is far behind his peers academically.

Why is this? List some possible reasons:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Manuel’s teacher, Mrs. Smith, has noticed frequent errors in Manuel’s school work. In his journal, Manuel wrote about going to McDonald’s. He stated, “My dad said take a seat because he had hungry.” On another worksheet Manuel wrote “the motorcycle red goed fast.” When speaking to Manuel he does not make as many of these errors. Mrs. Smith also noticed that when Manuel is speaking to some of his Spanish speaking friends he will begin a statement in English and finish it in Spanish.

What types of Learning Differences are demonstrated here?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Manuel’s teacher, Mrs. Smith, is worried about Manuel’s slow academic progress. She has asked him about his life in Mexico. Manuel explained that he went to school sometimes, but they moved often so his father could work. Manuel expressed that he misses some of his other family members in Mexico. During many of Mrs. Smith’s lessons, she has observed Manuel to be fiddling with things in his desk and staring around the room. During tests, Manuel often “borrows” answers from his classmates. When Mrs. Smith asks Manuel to do the best he can on his own, he becomes upset and puts his head on his desk. He usually does not complete tests.
How might each of the following variables apply to Manuel?

Age / Grade:
Language Proficiency in first language:
Teaching style:
Attitude and Motivation:
Academic background:

What are some other variables that could be impacting Manuel’s academic progress?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
**English Learner Intervention/Instruction Strategies and Resources**

The following is a compilation of general recommendations for providing comprehensible instruction and meeting the needs of English Learner students. The sources, from which these were complied, as well as other useful resources, are included.

**General Strategies for All School Staff:**
- Learn as much as possible about the cultural and language background of EL students by studying, attending courses, and speaking with linguistically and culturally diverse groups.
- Ask the student by what name they would like to be addressed and how to pronounce it correctly.
- Teach survival English first (e.g. bathroom, cafeteria, book, pencil), and label common objects in the school environment in English.
- Make English directions short and concise. Avoid jargon.
- Observe to see if ELs understand what they are to do. Repetition may be needed.
- Support their participation in extracurricular activities.
- Teach the rules and behavioral expectations of the school environment directly.
- Facilitate parent involvement. Invite the parents to actively participate in their child’s education. Call the family if they do not respond to notes sent home or use social workers to make home visits, and communicate with parents in their native language whenever possible. The use of interpreters or bilingual school staff can often facilitate this.

**Strategies for Administrators:**
- Provide native language instructional support while students are learning English whenever possible.
- Encourage homework hotlines and homework support activities staffed by bilingual teachers, aides, and volunteers.
- Encourage an inquiry-based, collaborative problem-solving team process to address issues related to their instruction and adjustment.
- Organize and encourage consistent data collection and information gathering prior to initiating full special education assessments.

**Strategies for Teachers:**
- Pair a new EL student with a bilingual student who preferably can speak the same language and who can be a buddy.
- Use, and teach how to use, a dictionary that contains translations from English to the child’s native language and vice versa.
• Seek help from other professionals such as school psychologists, social workers, and counselors if a student exhibits academic or behavior problems that appear unusual or extreme in comparison to other EL students.
• Pair visual cues and nonverbal gestures with verbal communication in the classroom.
• Encourage natural and purposeful communication in the classroom involving extensive practice in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
• Use mechanical aides such as language masters, tape recorders, overhead projectors, and computers as well as real objects, music, art, games, and hands-on experiences to reinforce learning.
• Adapt materials consistent with their levels of language proficiency, highlighting key points and using, for instance, outlines, lists, diagrams, or demonstrations. Reduce the language demands, not the conceptual demands, of tasks.
• Use cooperative learning groups, role-playing, dialogue journals, and other forms of active and interactive learning.
• Enhance self-image, motivation, and cultural pride by using culturally relevant materials and encouraging presentations and activities highlighting their cultural and linguistic heritage.
• Set high expectations and prepare EL students to meet state and national academic standards and promotion, graduation, and post-graduation requirements.
• Encourage EL students to repeat words and use them in sentences.
• Prompt/provide appropriate language for EL’s to respond to questions.
• Provide graphic organizers, frames, outlines and skeletons for writing.
• Paraphrase EL’s responses and model academic language.
• Introduce key vocabulary needed to understand a particular unit of instruction.
Helpful Resources

Books:


Websites:


ERIC Clearinghouse of Language and Linguistics: [www.cal.org/ericcll](http://www.cal.org/ericcll)

National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE): [www.nabe.org](http://www.nabe.org)

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs: [www.ncela.gwu.edu](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu)

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL): [www.tesol.org](http://www.tesol.org)
English Learner Background Information Questionnaire

**Directions:** Teacher and other student study team members complete the information sheet to help determine appropriate instruction / intervention strategies, and whether a special education referral may, or may not be, appropriate.

Teacher: _________________________ Date of Referral: ___/___/______

Student: _________________________ DOB: ___/___/______ Age: _______ Grade: ______

**LANGUAGE**

Primary Language: ______________________________________________________________

Which Language is primarily spoken in the home: _____________________________________

At what age was the student first exposed to English? _________________________________

How many years has the student been speaking English? _______________________________

**IMMEDIATE RELATIONSHIPS & ENVIRONMENT**

Home Address: _________________________________________________________________

Parent: _____________________________ Occupation: ________________________________

Parent: _____________________________ Occupation: ________________________________

Who lives in the home? List names, ages, and relationship to the student:

________________________________     ________________________________

________________________________     ________________________________

________________________________     ________________________________

How does the student get along with his siblings/family? Please describe:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

**EDUCATION**

At what age did the student first begin attending school? ______________________________

How many schools has the student attended? Please list school names and locations.

1)________________________________     ________________________________
2) ________________________________  ________________________________
3) ________________________________  ________________________________
4) ________________________________  ________________________________
5) ________________________________  ________________________________
6) ________________________________  ________________________________

How consistently did the student attend school before beginning in the US? (circle one)
   Never, Sometimes, Intermittent, Consistently

How does the parent describe the quality of the schooling the student received? (circle one)
   Poor, Fair, Good, Excellent

When did the student begin attending school in the US? ___/___/______

How consistently has the student attended school? (circle one)
   Never, Sometimes, Intermittent, Consistently

   Total Number of Absences: ________
   Total Number of Tardies: ________

**LOCAL COMMUNITY & CULTURE**

Is the student involved in extracurricular activities? Please list:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Is the student involved in any community groups (e.g. church, youth groups, recreation centers)?
Please list:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

How does the student get along with his peers? Please describe:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
INSTRUCTION/INTERVENTION

Has the student received appropriate core curriculum instruction (Tier 1) that is appropriate for EL students such as: collaborative learning opportunities, scaffolding, connections to sociocultural knowledge etc? (circle one)  YES, NO

Please describe instruction strategies used, and any accommodations or modifications made for the student:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Has the student received intensive interventions using appropriate materials and strategies designed for EL students implemented with fidelity over time (recommended 6 months to 1 year) and demonstrated little or no progress? (circle one)  YES, NO

Please list all benchmarking data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Skill/Subject</th>
<th>Student Score</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exp: K</td>
<td>Reading/Letter ID</td>
<td>3/26</td>
<td>15/26</td>
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</table>
Please list each intervention, the period of time it was implemented, the duration of time it was implemented, and pre/post measuring data available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Period of time</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Pre/Post Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Exp: 2nd | REACH level 2 | Mr. Smith | 30 minutes, 2x per week | 10 weeks | Pre: 25 wpm, 87%  
Post: 50 wpm, 94% |

If available, compare the student’s average rate of growth to other like peers (other EL students). Does this data support that the difficulties are most likely due to a disability versus a language difference? (circle one) YES, NO

Are the error patterns seen in the student’s primary language similar to the patterns seen in English? (utilize language samples or other comparative tools). Please Describe:

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
Other Known Information:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

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*Please attach a copy of: Home Language Survey, All CELDT scores

Quick Quiz! Please circle one: True/False

1. There is an over-representation of EL students within the special education population.
   True/False

2. If a student receives academic instruction in English, then we should only test him/her in English.
   True/False

3. Many ELs are inappropriately classified as learning disabled when their school problems actually result from their language difficulties.
   True/False

4. Students learning a second language go through four stages of acquisition before acquiring BICS.
   True/False

5. Acquiring Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) typically takes a language learner between 2-3 years.
   True/False

6. Once an EL acquires BICS, we can expect he/she to demonstrate all academic knowledge in English, and perform to his/her capacity on all tests administered in English.
   True/False

7. Best practices dictates that we should utilize traditional assessment methods when assessing ELs.
   True/False

8. RtI is a systematic and data-based method of identifying, defining, and resolving students’ academic difficulties.
   True/False

9. When determining an EL’s “response” to intervention, we should compare their progress with that of an English-Only peer.
   True/False

10. RtI offers the potential for ecologically valid information to be used in the assessment process with EL students.
    True/False

11. Tier 2 of the RtI model includes providing students with interventions in place of the curriculum and interventions provided in Tier 1.
    True/False
12. The greater the proficiency an individual demonstrates in their first language, the stronger the facility for learning a second language.
   True/False

13. Differences in a student’s learning style and an educator’s teaching style do not affect an EL’s progress in acquiring a second language.
   True/False

14. It is beneficial for teachers to paraphrase EL’s responses and model academic language.
   True/False

15. Teachers should not set unattainable high expectations in an attempt to prepare EL students to meet state and national academic standards.
   True/False
References


