

English Learners and Special Education

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The Elephant in the Room

- ▶ What are your questions, concerns, challenges in determining special education eligibility for English Learners?



Commonly used acronyms

LEP--Limited English Proficient

term used in state and federal laws to describe students; can be viewed as a negative description of what students *cannot* do

EL/EL--English language learner

A more positive term that is gradually replacing LEP in many schools (2010 referred to as English Learners)

ESL--English as a Second Language

An instructional program provided to EL

L1--First Language

The language first spoken by a student; the home language

L2--Second language

The second language learned by a student; English is commonly referred to as L2 even though it actually be the student's 3rd or 4th language

Four Stages of Acculturation

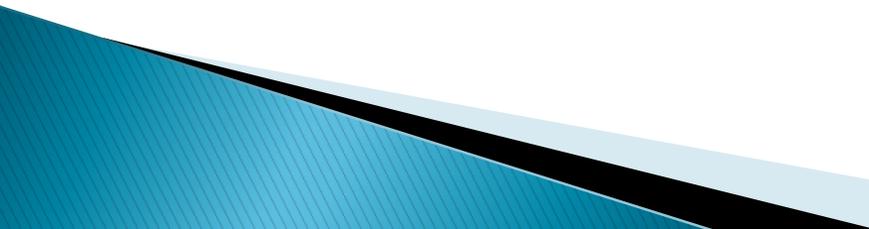
ELs require a period of adjustment to the new and baffling ways of saying and doing things that they encounter every day. Four successive stages that each student will pass through on the road to acculturation have been identified:

1. **Honeymoon**
2. **Hostility**
3. **Humor**
4. **Home**



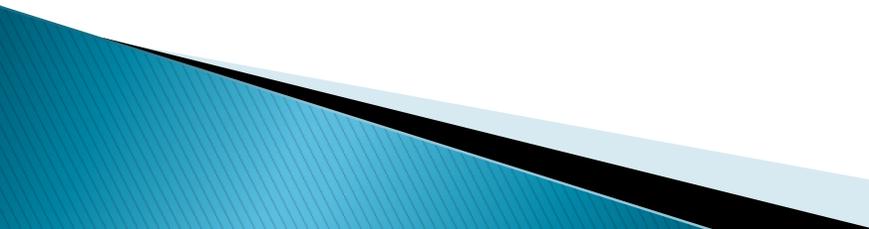
Trifonovitch, G. J. (1977). Culture Learning/Culture Teaching.

Four Stages of Acculturation

- ▶ **Honeymoon**—there may be a sense of excitement at the sense of novelty of life in a new culture
 - ▶ **Hostility**— As time goes by and the newness wears thin, students may find that their cultural mannerisms are misunderstood and/or that they struggle to understand their new culture. In this phase, students often feel impatient, anxious, frustrated or even angry.
 - ▶ **Humor**— Students begin to reshape their cultural identity as they begin to understand more about their new culture and how they fit into that culture
 - ▶ **Home**— Students at this phase "value and celebrate their own bicultural and bilingual identity". They feel at ease in the second culture
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BICS & CALP

▶ **Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills**

- Language skills needed in social situations
 - day-to-day language needed to interact socially with other people.
 - English language learners (ELs) employ BIC skills when they are on the playground, in the lunch room, on the school bus, at parties, playing sports and talking on the telephone.
 - Social interactions are usually context embedded. They occur in a meaningful social context.
 - They are not very demanding cognitively.
 - The language required is not specialized.
 - These language skills usually develop within six months to two years after arrival in the U.S.
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BICS & CALP

▶ **Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency**

- CALP refers to formal academic learning. This includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing about subject area content material.
- This level of language learning is essential for students to succeed in school.
- Students need time and support to become proficient in academic areas. This usually takes from five to seven years.
- Research has shown that if an EL has no prior schooling or has no support in native language development, it may take seven to ten years to catch up to peers.

Stages of Second Language Acquisition

LEVEL 1 – Entering

This is the silent period.

English language learners may have up to 500 words in their receptive vocabulary but they are not yet speaking.

Some students will, however, repeat every thing you say. They are not really producing language but are parroting.



Stages of Second Language Acquisition

Level 2: Emerging

This stage may last up to six months and students will develop a receptive and active vocabulary of about 1000 words.

During this stage, students can usually speak in one- or two-word phrases.

They can use short language chunks that have been memorized although these chunks may not always be used correctly.



Stages of Second Language Acquisition

Level 3: Developing

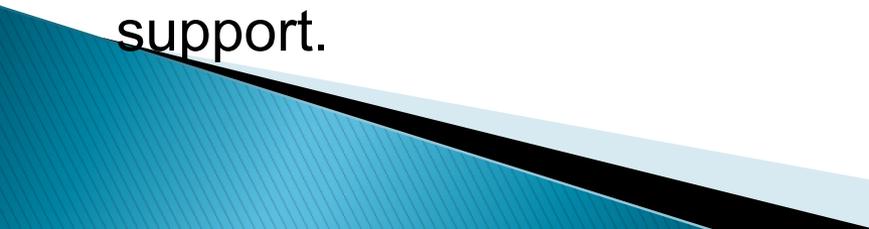
Students have developed a vocabulary of about 3,000 words and can communicate with simple phrases and sentences.

They will ask simple questions, that may or may not be grammatically correct, such as “May I go to bathroom? ”

ELs will also initiate short conversations with classmates.

They will understand easy stories read in class with the support of pictures.

They will also be able to do some content work with teacher support.



Stages of Second Language Acquisition

Level 4: Expanding

English language learners at the intermediate fluency stage have a vocabulary of 6000 active words.

They are beginning to use more complex sentences when speaking and writing and are willing to express opinions and share their thoughts.

They will ask questions to clarify what they are learning in class. These English language learners will be able to work in grade level math and science classes with some teacher support.

Comprehension of English literature and social studies content is increasing.

At this stage, students will use strategies from their native language to learn content in English.

Stages of Second Language Acquisition

Level 5: Bridging

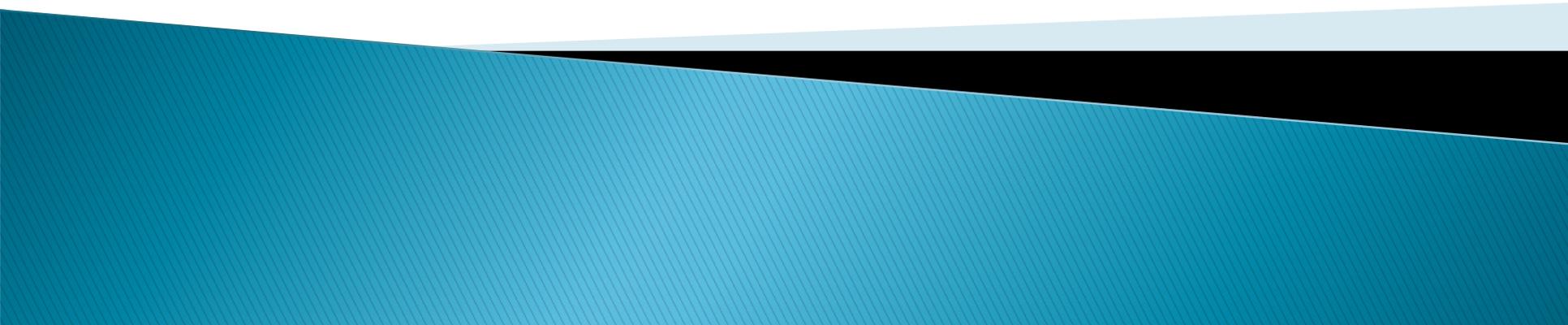
It takes students from 4-10 years to achieve cognitive academic language proficiency in a second language.

Student at this stage will be near-native in their ability to perform in content area learning.

Most ELs at this stage have been exited from ESL and other support programs.

At the beginning of this stage, however, they will need continued support from classroom teachers especially in content areas such as history/social studies and in writing.

Can-Do Descriptors



So....Language Acquisition or Language/Learning Disability?

- ▶ In general:
 - If a student is making academic progress at a rate comparable to other ELs with similar backgrounds, he/she is not likely to have a learning or language disability.



However....

- ▶ If the student is progressing much slower than ELs with similar backgrounds or requires repeated instruction when other ELs with similar backgrounds do not....
- ▶ *IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO TAKE SOME INITIAL STEPS TO INVESTIGATE IF THE STUDENT MAY HAVE A DISABILITY.*



Behaviors Frequently Demonstrated by ELs

- ▶ The following are behaviors that could signal a learning disability. However, they are also common behaviors of ELs.
 - Speaks excessively
 - Speaks infrequently
 - Uses gestures
 - Speaks in single words or phrases
 - Refuses to answer questions
 - Does not volunteer information
 - Comments inappropriately
 - Poor recall
 - Poor comprehension
 - Difficulty sequencing ideas and events
 - Unable to tell or retell stories
 - Confuses similar sounding words
 - Poor syntax/grammar

From: Ortiz, A.A. & Madlono-Color, E. (1986)

Language Difference or Disorder ?

- ▶ A language disorder is present when listening and/or speaking behavior is defective to such an extent that it interferes with one's ability to understand and/or to convey messages clearly and effectively during interaction with community members who speak the same language and dialect.

Interruptive Factors in Language Development

- ▶ Factors that may contribute to interruption of *native language* development must be identified.
- ▶ Examples include instructional program placement and school attendance records, individual and family medical history, educational values, and home environment.
- ▶ SLIFE—Students with limited interrupted formal education

Indicators of a Language Difference

- ▶ Language loss
 - ELs in bilingual and ESL programs may experience a decrease in their first language proficiency. This happens when opportunities to hear and use the first language are withdrawn (i.e., they aren't taught much in their L1). Test scores in L1 may be similar to those of ELs who have a language disorder.

Indicators of a Language Difference

- ▶ Codeswitching
 - Switching back and forth between two languages when speaking isn't necessarily an indicator of language confusion or a disorder. Many fluent speakers of English and Spanish do this.

Indicators of Possible Special Education Referral:

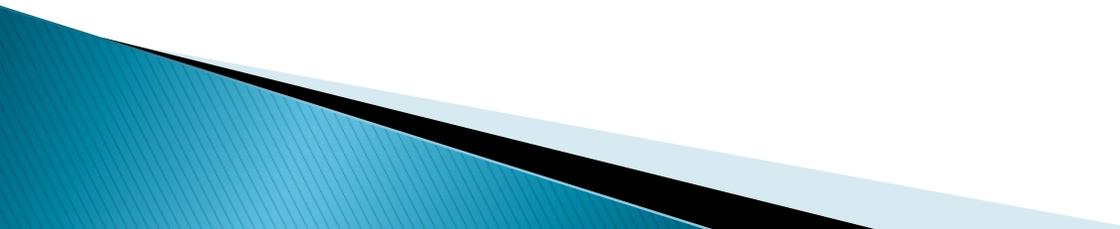
- ▶ Documentation shows no progress or change resulting from instructional strategies, alternative instruction, or interventions. An interpreter who speaks the student's native language should participate in interventions whenever possible.
 - ▶ The student has attended a U.S. school for at least one year. Documentation of the student's school record should include previous school experience, the location of previous schools, and length of time at each school.
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Questions to consider...

▶ Pre referral

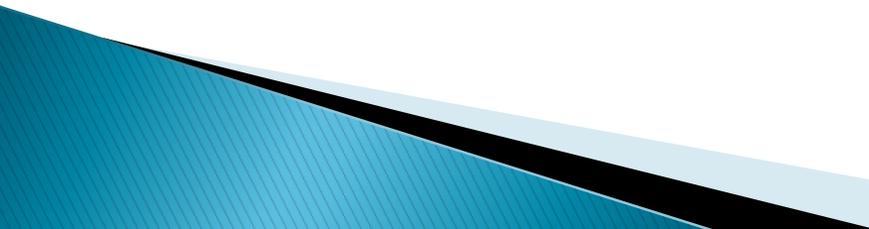
- *Have classroom teachers as well as ESL teachers and other support staff tried appropriate interventions and accommodations?*
- **VOCABULARY and BACKGROUND INFORMATION!!!**

Indicators of Possible Special Education Referral:

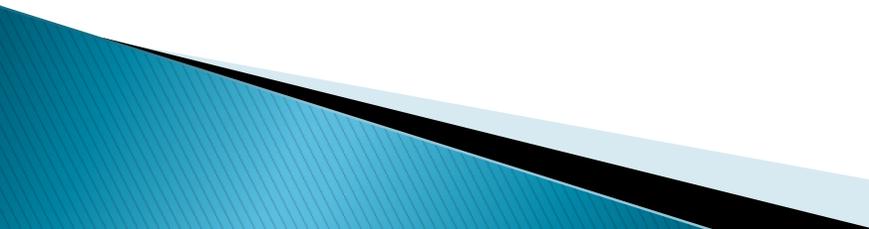
- ▶ ESL staff support the position that the student is performing differently than his/her cultural peers.
 - ▶ Parents have been contacted and attended an assessment planning meeting and agree with the decision to assess.
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Guiding Questions for EL Evaluations

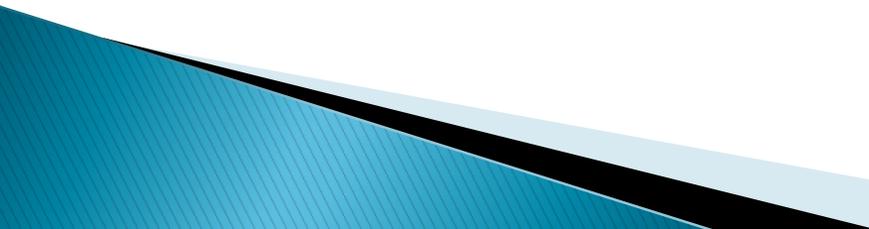
Questions to consider...

- ▶ If the student's education has been interrupted or the student has minimal prior education, how has he/she responded to instruction while in our school?
 - ▶ Has the student had prior instruction in the native language or in the home culture? Were learning problems identified?
 - ▶ Were learning problems identified in prior English-language schools attended in the U.S.?
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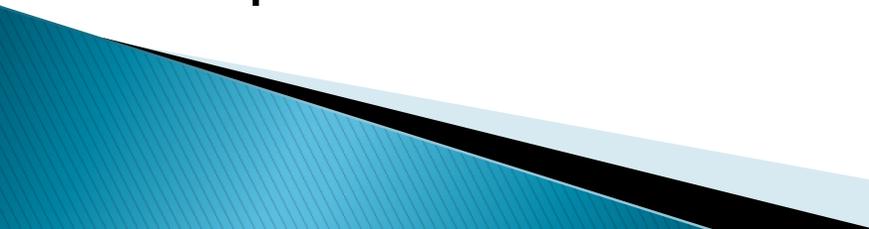
Questions to consider...

- ▶ If the concerns have been identified by a classroom or content area teacher, are the student's English skills adequate to participate in classroom listening and speaking activities? In reading and writing activities? How much overlap is there between the student's level of English proficiency and the classroom demands?
 - ▶ Is the student's rate and manner of learning English substantially different from peers of similar background?
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Questions to consider...

- ▶ Did the parents notice anything different when this child learned his/her native language?
 - ▶ Can the student express his/her basic needs in the native language (BICS)?
 - ▶ Can the student use his/her native language for more complex purposes (CALP), in listening/speaking or in reading/writing?
 - ▶ Does the student have any current or prior health problems?
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Questions to consider...

- ▶ Was the student and/or family in a refugee camp or in a war situation?
 - ▶ Has the student gotten assistance to learn about the climate and expectations of this school?
 - ▶ Do the parents or caregivers feel that this student has problems in school? at home?
 - ▶ Does the student seem depressed, anxious or show other signs of stress related to acculturation or signs of a mental health problem?
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Special Education Evaluation of ELs

- ▶ **Standardized Testing**
 - Key Decision: Can traditional evaluation procedures be used or does the team need to adapt procedures given the student's background? If so, how should procedures be adapted?

Use of existing assessment data...

- ▶ State and district achievement tests
 - ▶ WIDA assessments
 - ▶ Tests and measures given by ESL teacher
 - ▶ Progress monitoring data
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Special Education Evaluation of ELs

▶ Working with Interpreters

- Prior to the evaluation session, the person who will conduct the assessment should contact the interpreter and brief him/her about the purpose of assessment and materials that will be used.
 - If the interpreter has little or no prior experience with the assessment materials, the examiner is advised to meet with the interpreter in person prior to the session to review the purpose, materials, and procedures.
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Special Education Evaluation of ELs

▶ Working with Interpreters

- If a different interpreter will be used for the assessment than was involved in the prereferral, he/she should have an opportunity to review the home/family interview and other background information.
- If the examiner has questions about individual items on the test, he/she may discuss these items with the interpreter either before or after administration.
- Consider utilizing an ESL teacher/cultural liaison to carry out a structured observation of the student's behavior while interacting with *same-language peers* (depending on the areas being evaluated).