Discovering Root Causes of Academic Challenges of English Learners with Special Needs

A Bilingual Special Education Professional Learning Series
Presented by the NYS/NYC Regional Bilingual Resource Network at Fordham University & Regional Bilingual Special Education Technical Assistance Center
Second language learners will acquire academic English faster if their parents speak English at home.

**MYTH** - Research shows it is much better for parents to speak in their home language to their children. The home language will be richer and more complex and will support the transfer of language skills to English.
Federal law and state regulations are clear about students receiving the services they require to succeed academically. A child can receive Special Education services and English as a Second Language services at the same time.

TRUTH – Federal law and state regulations are clear about students receiving the services they require to succeed academically.
Many English Language Learners have learning disabilities. They speak English just fine, but they are still failing academically.

**MYTH -** It takes about 2 years to develop the ability to communicate socially in a second language, but it takes 5-7 years to develop age-appropriate academic language.
Regulations mandate that a school must wait 1 year before referring an ELL for an evaluation to special education.

**MYTH** – There is no regulatory mandate to wait any length of time. You refer when you have evidence that suggests the student has a disability.
Driving Questions...

1. How do we discover the root causes of learning difficulties for ELLs with special needs using a problem solving protocol?

2. What can we learn about the role of Executive Function in Learning and how can we use this knowledge to support LDs?

3. What classroom-based accommodations, modifications and interventions can we implement to address academic needs?
Who are our ELLs?
NYC total = 14%
Languages = 159
- Free/Reduced Lunch = 85%
- Foreign-born and Newcomers (61%)
- SIFE (Students w/ Interrupted Formal Education, 9%)
- US-born ELLs (51% in NYC)
- Long-term ELLs (6+ years designated as ELLs, 13%)
- ELLs with strong home language, literacy and academic skills
- Former ELLs (eligible for 2 more years of transitional services)
- ELLs with Disabilities and Special Needs (23%)
- Top 5 Languages: Spanish, Chinese, Bengali, Arabic, Haitian Creole
Top Ten ELL Home Languages

• Spanish (61.8%)
• Chinese (14.2%)
• Bengali (4.2%)
• Arabic (4.2%)
• Haitian-Creole (2.3%)
• Russian (2.1%)
• Urdu (1.9%)
• French (1.5%)
• Uzbek (0.8%)
• Punjabi (0.7%)

Spanish-speaking ELLs:
• United States and territories (59.8%)
• Dominican Republic (27.1%)
• Ecuador (3.6%)
• Mexico (3.0%)
• Honduras (1.4%).
Distribution of ELLs by Program Service Type: Citywide (SY2013-14)

- ESL: 79.2%
- Dual: 4.5%
- TBE: 15.4%
- Not Served: 0.8%
- Missing information: 0.1%
NYS Levels of English Proficiency

- Entering
- Transitioning
- Emerging
- Expanding
- Commanding
What is Part 154?

Part 154:
- Identifies required units of study for Entering, Emerging, Transitioning, Expanding, Commanding.
- Programs: Transitional Bilingual Education, Dual Language ESL (Integrated or Stand-Alone).
- Explains how students “exit” ESL/Bilingual programs including new alternate exit criteria!
- Describes Supports Including Testing Accommodations for ELLs with IEPs on NYSITELL/NYSESLAT Supports for Former ELLs.
- Prohibits the CSE from making a determination of ELL Status.

How English Language Learners are identified:
- Home Language Identification Survey
- NYSITELL (former LAB-R)
- NYSESLAT

What kind of services all ELLs receive and from whom (qualifications of providers):
What is Special Education?
The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) … Specially Designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, providing a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

Special Education is a SERVICE, not a place.
§300.101 Free Appropriate Public Education … all children residing in NYS between the ages of 3 and 21, including children who have been suspended or expelled from school (at no cost to the family)…

§300.114 Least Restrictive Environment … to the maximum extent appropriate - children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled, and removal from the regular education setting occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.
Number the Continuum of Services in Order of the Least Restrictive Environment

- Home or Hospital Instruction
- General Education with Related Services (Speech, Counseling, OT)
- General Education Part Time & Special Class Support Part Time
- Collaborative (Integrated) Team Teaching
- Special Class Full Time in Specialized Public Schools
- General Education with Special Education Teacher Support
- State Supported, Operated or Approved Non-Public School
- Special Class Full Time in Community Schools
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- State Supported, Operated or Approved Non-Public School
- Home or Hospital Instruction
Specially Designed Instruction for Students with Disabilities

- Adapting to the needs of the child
- the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction
- to address the unique needs resulting from the child's disability
- ensure access to the general curriculum
- so that the student can meet the state educational standards.

What do you want Special Education teachers to know and understand about ELLs?
What is Part 200?

How Students with Disabilities (SWDs) are identified:
- Referral Procedures
- Evaluation Procedures

Development of the IEP that identifies strengths, needs and services SWDs will receive and from whom (qualifications of providers)

Due Process, Roles and Responsibilities of Committee Members, Parents and Student

Continuum of Services with the goal of providing services in the Least Restrictive Environment

Goals and Objectives
Testing Accommodations
Modifications
Assistive Technology

Reevaluation and Program Review
Declassification

Prohibits eligibility for students with limited proficiency in English or lack of appropriate instruction
A Tale of Two Regulations

Part 154 & Part 200

1. One is not more “important” or more “powerful” than the other.
2. They work together to govern the education of bilingual students with disabilities.
3. We must provide services to the student that abide by both regulations.
Part 200 Definition of LD

Learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which manifests itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations...

...Does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor disabilities, of an intellectual disability, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.
What are Some Common Manifestations of LD?

• Reading (**Dyslexia**)  
  • Phonological awareness, vocabulary, comprehension

• Mathematics (**Dyscalculia**)  
  • Calculation, math facts and concepts, problem-solving, word problems, math anxiety

• Writing and Written Expression (**Dysgraphia**)  
  • Handwriting, spelling, written expression

• Expressive and Receptive Language (**Dyspraxia**)  
  • Speaking, listening, understanding, following directions  
  • Form, Content and Use
IDEA Disability Categories

ELL’s are disproportionately classified with LD, Speech or Emotional Disturbance. What characteristics of a disability might impact second language acquisition?

• Autism
• Learning Disability
• Speech-Language Impairment
• Emotional Disturbance
• Intellectual Disability
• Traumatic Brain Injury
• Orthopedic Impairment
• Other Health Impairment
• Multiple Disabilities

• Hearing Impairment
  • Deafness
  • Visual Impairment
  • Deaf-Blindness
How Might a Disability Affect Language Acquisition?

- Affects ability to obtain undistorted input for acquisition.
- Challenged ability to construct & retain essential connections between conceptual & linguistic representation.
- Difficulties processing or constructing meaning through language.
- Difficulty engaging in learning activities & isolation could impede development in L2.
- May lack necessary control to coordinate production of target language.

Common Characteristics of Learning Disabilities

**Social-Emotional Behavior**
- Disruptive
- Withdrawn
- Difficulty adapting to new environments
- Frequent absences from school
- Poor social skills
- Depressed/Anxious
- Low self esteem
- Low motivation

**Low Academic Achievement**
- Math
- Language
- Spelling
- Writing
- Reading
- Handwriting
- Finding appropriate word when needed
- Problems with grammar

**Attention, Memory & Perception**
- Memory
- Attention
- Hyperactivity
- Distractibility
- Listening
- Difficulty remembering directions or facts
- Difficulty in generalizing information

**Thinking and Reasoning Abilities**
- Lacks learning strategies
- Needs to learn how to learn
- Does not self-regulate while learning
- Lacks organizational skills

*Students may exhibit one or more of these characteristics (Mercer and Mercer, 2001 pp.7-8 and Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2000 pp. 80-83)*
• The brain **processes information** differently.

• Certain kinds of information (visual, sensory, auditory) may get stuck, lost or misinterpreted while traveling through the brain of the student with LD.

• Information processing refers to how your brain:
  • Perceives or takes in information,
  • Applies or uses information,
  • Stores the information in memory (long/short term),
  • Recalls or retrieves the information from memory,
  • Expresses the information (retell, summarize, interpret)
Heels
Flats
Sandals
Slippers
Athletic Shoes
Boots:
    Boots: Rain
    Riding
    Cowboy
    Steel-toe
    Ankle
    Snow
    Army
Pop Quiz:
Who was the first President of the United States?
What is Executive Function?
Executive Functioning is like the conductor of an orchestra because...
What is Executive Function?

Focus & Attend
Plan & Solve Problems
Organize
Recall
Self-Regulate
What Executive Function skills did Sully use during Flight 1549?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Tbkbx4Hz8Q
Lunch Break?
When Students struggle with Executive Function

- Memory
- Self-monitoring
- Attention and Focus
- Planning and Problem Solving
- Organization
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poster Activity</th>
<th>What skills are needed?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Functions</td>
<td>Attention and Focus:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working Memory:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abilities that enable</td>
<td>Planning and Problem-solving:</td>
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<td>goal-oriented behavior, such</td>
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## Executive Functions

Abilities that enable goal-oriented behavior, such as the ability to plan, and execute a goal.

<table>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Attention and Focus</strong></td>
<td>the ability to withstand distraction, and internal urges.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Working Memory</strong></td>
<td>the capacity to hold and manipulate information in real time.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Planning and Problem-solving</strong></td>
<td>identifying the problem, generate solutions and decide on the best option.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organization and Sequencing</strong></td>
<td>the ability to break down complex actions into manageable units and prioritize them in the right order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-regulation</strong></td>
<td>the ability to identify and manage one’s own emotions for good performance.</td>
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Poster Activity
What Does Executive Function Look Like?
In small groups, sort descriptions of executive function behaviors into these categories:

- Focus and Attention
- Planning and Problem Solving
- Organization
- Memory
- Self-regulation
Developing Classroom Interventions when students struggle with Executive Functioning

Accommodations or Modifications?
FOR A FAIR SELECTION EVERYBODY HAS TO TAKE THE SAME EXAM! PLEASE CLIMB THAT TREE.
Accommodations and Modifications

**Accommodations**
- Focus on the HOW
- Provide multiple means and opportunities for students to demonstrate
- Provide equal access to instruction or assessment
- Reduce or eliminate the impact of the student’s disability
- Maintain the rigor of the content being taught
- Maintain achievement expectations

**Modifications**
- Focus on the WHAT
- Change the core content standard or the performance expectation
- Are not designed to move students to independent mastery of the standards
Carousel Activity
Brainstorm Solutions for Executive Function Challenges

• On Post-it Notes, write down your ideas for an *accommodation* for each area of Executive Function and post them on the charts.
• Include details, steps or materials needed.
• Be sure to add ideas to each chart.
When an ELL shows signs of struggling, first observe the student in the classroom during instruction.

– Is instruction appropriate for the student’s level of English proficiency and learning needs?
– Is the teacher implementing appropriate research-based practices with fidelity?
  • If the teacher is modifying practices, for what reasons?
– Is the classroom environment conducive to learning?
• If instruction seems appropriate and most ELLs in the class are thriving, the next step should be to collect student data:

– Has consideration been given to the child’s **cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and experiential** background?
– Have authentic assessments been used in addition to progress monitoring?
– What tasks **can** the student perform and in what contexts?
– Does the student differ from true peers in rate and level of learning?
– Have the child’s parents been asked for their input?
The Five Whys Method

Diagnosing problems at the root cause to find solutions.

The more precise the diagnosis, the better the chances of providing the most effective support.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-M3YlA2KDG
Jose’s Case Study
Apply The 5 Why’s Strategy
Reflections

• Considering that Executive Function difficulties can be a root cause of academic difficulties for ELLs, what strategies will you implement in your practice?

• What can you try tomorrow?

• For the next session, what evidence or artifacts can you bring back to share with the group about supporting students with Executive Function difficulties?

• Please fill out a feedback form!
Resources

• Causes & Cures in the Classroom, 2013, Searle, M. ASCD.
• Getting to Got It: Helping Struggling Students Learn How to Learn, 2007, Garner, B. ASCD

Websites:
www.Understood.org
www.Ldonline.org
www.childmind.org
www.developingchild.harvard.edu

On the Web: NYC RBE-RN at Fordham University