Distinguishing Language Acquisition and Learning Disability in English Language Learners to Combat Disproportionality

by

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Abstract

Research shows that ELLs are disproportionately represented in special education, inherently interfering with their access to appropriate education. Therefore, the overarching research question presented in this capstone explores factors which contribute to disproportionality of ELLs in special education and how teachers can better distinguish language acquisition from learning disability to combat disproportionality. This capstone presents a professional development designed for educators who work with ELLs. The PD is designed to inform participants on disproportionality of ELLs in special education and its causes. Participants will receive training and tools to distinguish characteristics of disability and language acquisition. The goal is to help educators implement strategies and gather documentation before referring ELLs to special education evaluation. The research analysis and PD reveal the need for more research and training to explore the intersection of language learning and disability in the classroom. This capstone aims to mitigate confusion among educators to address the issue of disproportionality of ELLs in special education.

Keywords: English language learners (ELL), special education, disability, disproportionality, language acquisition, teacher preparation

Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

In my time as an educator, I have witnessed many students struggle for a variety of reasons. In my opinion, one of the most important roles of a teacher is to pinpoint causes of a student's difficulties in the classroom. If identification of disabilities is done correctly, the proper supports can be put in place to safeguard student success. When diagnostic measures are not put in place to assess and modify instruction students can face a negative academic journey. When various learner classifications which affect the way a student learns are at play, identifying the source of a student's frustration in the classroom can become muddied. This confusion is a common occurrence with English language learners and disability identification. In my experience, I have seen multiple students who are learning English and receive inadequate or inappropriate support due to this confusion. Therefore, in this capstone project, the overarching research question I am presenting is: What are the underlying causes in schools leading to disproportionality of English language learners in special education and how can teachers work to combat these causes to accurately distinguish second language acquisition from disability in students?

It is well-known among educators that English language learners are some of the most neglected students in the American education system. According to Brown and Ault (2015), less than 24% of preservice teachers are explicitly taught strategies for meeting the needs of ELLs in their preparation programs. Nationally, the performance of ELLs on standardized assessments consistently falls in the lowest categories of student populations. In 2015, 87%, or more, of ELL students fell below proficiency in ELA and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In the United States, approximately 13% of students are involved in special education

programming. Percentages of ELLs in special education are usually higher, climbing to 20% or higher in some districts. Consequently, graduation rates among ELLs are dismal. Graduation data from the United States Department of Education (2018) shows that in the 2015-2016 school year, only 67% of ELLs graduation from high school across the country compared to 85% of non-ELLs. When considering graduation rates, the academic needs of ELLs in the United States are not being met in a way to lead them towards educational success.

Some terms used throughout this capstone are stages of language acquisition, English language learner (ELL), disabilities, language one (L1) and language two (L2). Stages of language acquisition refers to the steps each student goes throughout when learning English as a speaker of another language. This includes the entering, emerging, transitioning, expanding, and commanding. L1 refers to a student's first language and L2 refers to an additional language being acquired by the student. For the purposes of this capstone, the term disability is used to refer to any learning disability as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act:

> a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2018, Sec. 330.8 [c] [10])

Significance of Problem

The issue that I will address in this capstone and consequent professional development is difficulties in distinguishing between characteristics of English language learners through the stages of language acquisition and possible indicators of learning disabilities. There is evidence

that this task continues to baffle educators and has now produced a pattern of both over- and under-representation of ELLs in special education referrals and programming (Brown & Ault, 2015; Burr et al., 2015). The ability to differentiate obstacles expected in stages of language acquisition from those typical of disabilities needs to be explicitly presented to teachers in order to improve understanding of language acquisition and signs of additional special education needs.

The confusion surrounding language learning and learning disabilities impacts both students and teachers in numerous ways. The linguistic development of ELLs is hindered when their needs are not being met appropriately (Klingner & Hoover, 2014). If students do not receive academic support that is designed for their individual needs, they will not progress adequately in their language learning. Culturally, certain negative stereotypes and attitudes towards ELLs develop when they are so often identified as struggling learners. Confusion between language acquisition and disability creates an issue with appropriate assessment also. In many cases, ELLs are evaluated using tools that are not designed with their language abilities in mind. This leads to unreliable and invalid data because teachers are unknowingly measuring student language abilities instead of their intended objective. Furthermore, standardized language assessments are given to students to determine a continuation in or exit from ESL services. If a student has an unidentified, underlying disability, they may struggle to perform well on this assessment and become stuck in English as a second language (ESL) classes regardless of their language acquisition progress (Farnsworth, 2016). This is another example of why increased education and professional development among educators is needed to successfully support ELLs in the classroom.

Purpose

The purpose of this capstone and professional development (PD) seminar is to aid teachers in distinguishing between the characteristics of language acquisition and possible disabilities when working with ELLs. The seminar will be presented to any teacher who works with ELLs in two separate sessions, each 2.5 hours long. During the PD, research will be presented to teachers to demonstrate why this is an issue of concern in schools around the country. They will learn more about characteristics of each stage of language development and common disabilities. Then they will be guided through a basic introductory process for determining whether a student's academic difficulties can be contributed to language learning or the possibility of a disability. This process will culminate in the use of tools that teachers will follow and use whenever they are working to pinpoint the source of a student's academic struggles. Additionally, the guiding tools will help educators implement strategies and collect data to support further action if a disability is suspected.

Summary

The problem explored in this paper is the confusion faced by teachers working to differentiate characteristics stemming from language acquisition and difficulties that indicate a possible disability. It is important for teachers to be able to determine the cause of a student's academic struggles so that they can provide individualized support and instruction. The capability of teachers to meet the unique needs of each student is a critical factor in student success. The professional development is designed to mitigate the issue of disproportionality of ELLs in special education by increasing awareness among educators and providing school professionals with the tools and knowledge needed to evaluate a student's performance with confidence. By the conclusion of the PD, participants will be able to better distinguish

characteristics of language acquisition and indicators of a possible disability in students learning English. Participants will also feel comfortable determining next steps for a student whether they suspect a disability or determine the need for instructional modification to meet language needs. This professional development will help to reduce the number of students misidentified with disabilities or overlooked due to their ELL status.

In chapter 2, a review of literature and research relevant to this issue will be discussed. In chapter 3, I will present the professional development designed to mitigate this problem along with commentary on how and why this product was developed. Chapter 4 is a conclusion of this capstone which includes implications of this project on students and teachers. In addition, I include appendices with materials for use in the professional development.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review will explore three main topics: the existence of disproportionality among ELLs in special education, the causes of this disproportionality, and possible solutions. Thorough investigation of these topics will provide answers to this capstone's overarching research question of how educators can better distinguish between the characteristics of language acquisition and possible disabilities when working with ELLs. In order to address this problem, disproportionality and its causes must also be understood. This review will outline studies done on all three topics and provide relevant information and conclusions drawn from research.

Disproportionality of ELLs in Special Education

Throughout the United States, disproportionality of ELLs in special education is a clear and documented issue. In 2011, Sullivan conducted research to explore this problem. The study investigated the extent to which ELLs are disproportionately represented in special education, the extent to which these students are placed in the least restrictive environment, as well as the extent to which one can predict these phenomena based on characteristics of a school district. An analysis of existing data was performed, focusing on four major disability categories: specific learning disability, mild mental retardation, emotional disturbance, and specific learning disability. Sullivan concluded that both underrepresentation and overrepresentation were common among ELLs in these disability categories. Additionally, it was noted that an increased percentage of ELLs in a district's population was predictive of decreased disproportionality among special education placements. This work depicts the magnitude of the problem of disproportionality of ELLs in special education. Teachers and school professionals must be educated on this issue and given tools to reduce confusion leading to this disproportionality.

Research on disproportionality in recent years presents many ideas and conclusions. A study completed by Morgan et al. (2015) complicates the work done to understand the misrepresentation of ELLs in special education. This work investigated a similar question of whether racial, ethnic, and language minority students are overrepresented or underrepresented students identified with disabilities. The extent was also explored. Morgan et al. analyzed a nationally representation sample of children who entered kindergarten in 1998. Data was collected from parents, teachers, and students from kindergarten to eighth grade. Morgan et al. boldly concluded that language minority students were significantly less likely to be identified as having a learning disability or speech and language impairments. Even further, no evidence was found of overrepresentation throughout the entire study. These statements stood in stark contrast to a mountain of research depicting overrepresentation of ELLs in special education in the United States (Sullivan, 2011; Waitoller et al., 2010). The overarching determinations made by Morgan et al. further support the idea that there is excessive confusion confounding the field of ELLs with disabilities. Though the conclusion derived from this work named only underrepresentation as an issue, the core of the problem is that the representation of ELLs in special education is not accurate.

In response to the overarching statements made in the study by Morgan et al. (2015), Skiba et al. (2016) published work to refute the claims. Skiba et al. shares that the rates of disabilities referred to by Morgan et al. differ from those in the enrollment information directly shared by the United States Department of Education. Furthermore, Skiba et al. asserts that overrepresentation is not a universal issue. The patterns created by disproportionality of ELLs in special education are complex and not easily deciphered. Disproportionality cannot be discussed as a binary matter. Instead, disproportionality of ELLs in special education is a

multidimensional puzzle that should continue to be studied and unraveled. The research suggests that appropriate and accurate identification of ELLs with disabilities an important topic that teachers and other school professionals must be aware of. To best serve students learning English, the effects of disproportionality need to be considered and combated by educational professionals.

Causes of Misidentification of ELLs for Special Education

The literature suggests that disproportionality of ELLs in special education is a current issue in schools throughout the United States. Thankfully, the educational community is also working to better understand why this disproportionality exists, whether underrepresentation or overrepresentation. Samson and Lesaux (2009) studied both the existence of disproportionality and the circumstances that led to ELLs being identified at students with disabilities. A thorough analysis of the same nationally representative data used by Morgan et al. (2015) was done by Samson and Lesaux (2009) to find trends in identification of ELLs for special education. Many conclusions were drawn from this study. First, it was clear that ELLs are being identified for special education later than non-ELL peers. English language learners were underrepresented in special education data through kindergarten and first grade, then overrepresented in third grade. Samson and Lesaux (2009) report that ELL status, teacher ratings, and reading proficiency were all significant predictors for placement of ELLs in special education. In addition, teacher ratings were identified at the single most influential indicator for special education placement. It was clarified that ELLs with learning disabilities and without learning disabilities performed similarly on assessments throughout all three years.

Therefore, the question remained of what exactly causes ELLs to be identified with disabilities later than their non-ELL peers. Samson and Lesaux provide two overarching

explanations. The federal government mandates that placement in special education cannot be attributed to language or environmental factors. This mandate causes reluctance in teachers to make referrals to special educations until the student has developed proficiency in English. Moreover, teachers do not have the confidence to make identifications of learning disabilities in students who are still acquiring English. Samson and Lesaux conclude that there is a need for increased use of response to intervention (RTI) and early intervention methods to prevent ELLs from being referred to special education much later than their non-ELL peers. This study evidenced the need for increased teacher education on the recognition of disabilities in students who are learning English. Proper education and training would increase teacher confidence and ability. This would likely lead to earlier referral of ELLs with disabilities allowing for appropriate supports to be implemented sooner. Quick identification may be the key to success for many ELLs with learning disabilities.

Educator Beliefs about ELLs and Special Education

Park (2020) explores a similar question by investigating educator beliefs about special education referral for ELLs and how those beliefs influence their decisions to refer students to special education. This research was a multi-level project looking at the special education identification process in two urban elementaries for the 2015-2016 school year. Analysis was done on data collected at the student, school, district, and federal level.

Two defining themes emerged from this study regarding beliefs of school professionals. Some professionals believed that the sooner ELLs were placed special education, the better it would be for their progress. Others felt that it was most important to wait until the referral could be done with certainty. Of the participants in this study, most believed in the first notion. Many of these school professionals insisted that they had a gut feeling and students would only fall

further behind without special education services. These same professionals were consistently resistant of early interventions for the same reasons. There was a small group of professionals who felt it best to be certain before special education referral. This group consisted mostly of administrators at one school and a few teachers at the other school.

Park suggests that educators internalized beliefs are crucial to understanding the issue of disproportionality in ELLs in special education. Further, Park argues that widespread views of special education are seriously flawed, prescribing to the idea that special education is either detrimental or a quick fix to student problems. These views lead to students with disabilities being otherized and ELLs being positioned as inherently failing.

Looking at this research, the way that educational professionals approach and view the special education referral system must be changed. Increased education and understanding are necessary for teachers to approach the referral process properly. Additionally, the referral process must be made more collaborative to avoid strong teacher beliefs controlling the fate of ELLs who may have disabilities.

Educational professionals have strong beliefs about special education and often feel that they know best. The question remains if teachers truly have the knowledge and ability to identify students correctly for special education services. According to Lopes-Murphy and Murphy (2020), a study has never been done to explore whether school professionals possess the understanding that the characteristics of second language acquisition and learning disabilities mimic one another.

In 2020, Lopes-Murphy and Murphy investigated if educational professionals possess the knowledge and understanding that certain behaviors cannot distinguish language acquisition from learning disability. The four behaviors addressed in this study were following directions,

inappropriate behavior, inattention, and difficulty with comprehension. Concurrently, Lopes-Murphy and Murphy also observed whether training in ESL education of special education affected ability to assess these behaviors. Over 300 school professionals including general education teachers, special education teachers, English as a second language teachers, staff, and administrators were given a paper survey. The survey asked about experience, training in special education or ESL, and perceptions of the four aforementioned behaviors in students.

In the findings, less than one-third, or exactly 30.9%, of participants correctly identified that none of the behaviors can distinguish between language acquisition and learning disability. Increased training in special education did not have a notable effect on responses. The only specified group that seemed to have an advantage was teachers with less than 12 years of experience that had additional training in ESL education.

Lopes-Murphy and Murphy concluded that most school professionals are unaware that common behaviors of ELLs mimic behaviors associated with learning disability, and many make premature judgements about learning disabilities in students without exploring other factors. Furthermore, the only category of training that had a clear positive effect was current ESL training, within the last 12 years. This study clearly demonstrates the necessity for increased teacher professional development detailing the intersection of behaviors in language learning and learning disability. It also shows the importance of current ESL training for all educational professionals. These gaps in knowledge are a clear explanation for why teachers struggle to distinguish between expected characteristics of students learning English and students with disabilities.

Identifying Disabilities in ELLs

Accurately identifying ELLs who should be referred to special education is a clear challenge for educators confounded by many factors including uncertainty in identifying disabilities in ELLs, strong beliefs about the special education system, and confusion regarding commonalities of language learning and disability. Another factor contributing to this challenge is the lack of clear guidance from states regarding this issue.

In 2014, Scott et al. studied how state documents, regulations, and criteria address the issue of special education eligibility for English language learners. In addition, the study looked at procedures or guidance states suggest for struggling ELLs that may have disabilities. Scott et al. performed a qualitative content analysis and comparison of the websites for all fifty states. After, it was reported that most states, exactly thirty-six, did not specifically address English language learners beyond the language of regulations from the federal government. The states that did expand upon federal regulations discussed the importance of informal assessments, ESL and bilingual representation in the RTI process, and often reminded that ELL instruction is not an intervention, but rather part of the core curriculum. Though a few states did provide specific guidance and recommendations pertaining to achievement of ELLs, most did not. This reveals a massive hole in resources for educators struggling to meet needs of ELLs. Additionally, many states disagree on how to best approach ELLs in the prereferral and referral process for special education.

Evidently, there are no proven methods to appropriately address ELL needs in the special education process and in most states, educators are expected to figure it out on their own. This contributes to the confusion experienced by teachers beginning the process of referring an ELL to special education. Furthermore, these findings support the notion that additional professional

development must be provided for educators to build upon their knowledge of language acquisition and English language learners. Increased education and understanding among professionals who work with ELLs can work to remedy the confusion surrounding identification of disabilities in ELLs and the disproportionality caused by this confusion.

The inability of educational professionals to distinguish between language acquisition clearly a contributing factor to the disproportionate representation of English language learners in special education. However, there seems to be no clear guidance as to how to identify disabilities in ELLs. Consequently, the question remains as to if it is even possible to pinpoint a learning disability in ELLs. Swanson et al. (2020), set out to answer this question. This research focused on whether ELLs at risk for learning disabilities could be recognized among peers and whether this recognition could be foreseen by specific cognitive measures.

Swanson et al. studied almost four-hundred ELLs in dual-language programs at large urban schools. The students were given assessments in L1 and L2 to measure ability in vocabulary, reading, math, fluid intelligence and attention, phonological storage, and executive processing. Swanson et al. found that ELLs at risk for reading disabilities had poor performance on assessments measuring phonological storage and executive processing. By extension, a conclusion is drawn that ELLs with reading disabilities comprise an identifiable group among peers, both monolingual students with reading disabilities and ELLs who do not. This is an important conclusion because it confirms that the recognition of ELLs with learning disabilities is feasible. Further, it names phonological storage and executive processing as two cognitive processes that could functions as indicators of a possible disability.

Distinguishing Disability and Language Acquisition

It is possible to identify a learning disability in English language learners, however, it is clear that this identification is not occurring in a justifiable and valid manner. The issue of disproportionality and the clear confusion among educators indicates that there are complications in identifying disabilities in ELLs. Wilkinson et al. (2006) explore missteps often taken by educators in the referral process for ELLs and possible remedies for these oversights. The research done by Wilkinson et al. aimed to develop profiles of ELLs who have a learning disability and have received instruction in their first language. This was a substudy of a longitudinal study done which collected data on Spanish speaking ELLs with diagnosed learning disabilities from 1999 to 2002. An expert panel studies the students included in this study and identified any who were wrongly labeled with a learning disability.

Ultimately the panel found a group of students who, in reality, did not qualify for any special education services at all. Among these students who were incorrectly placed in special education, several reasons or causes were pinpointed. Multiple students received inadequate early intervention efforts and had documentation of these efforts missing or incomplete. Some of these students did not receive intervention specific to the difficulties named by teachers as cause for referral. For a couple of the students, data indicated that the general education interventions implemented were successful. Some students had missed significant portions of the school year, making accurate assessment of their growth and abilities impossible. Last, there were students whose achievement levels did not strongly contrast those of their peers. Obviously, methods in which teacher bypass the prereferral process, either knowingly or unknowingly vary. There is also evidence of unfounded conclusions being drawn about student by teams making referrals to special education.

In short, many mistakes are being made along the way to English language learners being placed in special education. The causes and reasons for misidentification are varied. Consequently, there are many recommendations that can be made to resolve these problems. Wilkinson et al. (2006) does include recommendations for improving practice surround the identification of ELLs with learning disabilities. Early intervention must be done with fidelity and documented appropriately. The referral process needs to become more streamlined in identifying and obtaining necessary data. Last, assessments need to be carefully selected, administered in L1 and L2, include formal and informal measures, and family input should be gathered. The process of identifying and referring ELLs to special education is wrought with issues. To create a system that serves students successfully, many changes must be made.

RTI As a Solution

One recurring theme throughout the research regarding identifying English language learners with disabilities is the value of the response to intervention process. Response to intervention or RTI is a multitiered approach to preventing student failure in schools (Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Students are presented with increasingly intensive interventions at each level to support them in meeting learning goals. In research, RTI is named frequently as a possible remedy to the issue of disproportionality and misidentification of ELLs in special education (Burr et al., 2015; Rinaldi & Samson, 2008; Samson & Lesaux, 2009). However, RTI must be executed carefully and properly to successfully serve students with disabilities, especially ELLs in that category.

In 2010, Orosco and Klingner detailed a study in which they explored how educational professionals implemented RTI with Latino ELLs that experienced difficulties in reading. They also studied how beliefs, professional developement, training and other factors affected the

implementation of RTI. A qualitative case study approach was used in a large, urban district with an ELL population entirely from Latin America. Orosco and Klingner collected data from eight different school professionals: six teachers, one principal, and one school psychologist.

The conclusion reached was that the RTI process had developed through a deficits-based lens influenced by four overall themes. The first theme was misalignment of assessment and instruction. Educational professionals did not utilize knowledge of language acquisition in designing instruction and assessment which resulted in increased special education referrals. Instead of evaluating their own instructional methods or assessments, teachers assumed that students possessed intrinsic weaknesses even though instruction was not appropriate for students at the corresponding level of language acquisition. The second theme was a negative schooling culture which was characterized by educators blaming internal deficits or lack of support from home for struggling students. During RTI discussions, cultural or linguistic factors were not mentioned as possible causes for academic difficulties. The third theme was inadequate teacher preparation. Educators were confused between challenges associated with language acquisition and characteristics of learning disabilities. In general, teachers were unprepared to modify instruction and provide accommodations for ELLs in the classroom. The final theme identified by Orosco and Klingner as contributing to the deficits based RTI process was a lack of resources. Teachers did not have access to resources to assist them in supporting ELLs in the classroom and assess them appropriately.

The overall result of these factors was an RTI model that was not meeting student needs. Students were being pushed through the levels of RTI based on difficulties caused by insufficient instruction, weak professional development, and limited resources. There are two conclusions about RTI to be drawn from this study. First, the RTI process must be developed by districts in a

culturally responsive way. Instruction, assessments, and interventions should be chosen to address sociocultural factors that influence student achievement. Second, teachers must be trained, educated, and given resources to successfully implement the RTI process. Teachers should be given professional development on research-based practices that work with English language learners in the classroom to ensure that they are receiving high-quality instruction that is appropriate for their level of language acquisition.

Clearly, the RTI process needs to be well-planned and designed to push students towards success. This need becomes even more crucial when referring to English language learners. Students who are learning English must receive appropriate support and intervention to ensure they have adequate opportunity to make progress before being referred to special education.

In 2014, Klingner and Hoover dove into this topic and determined challenges specific to ELLs in RTI. This is information that all teachers and educators should be equipped with to better understand the RTI process as it relates to ELLs. In order to better serve ELLs through RTI, tier one interventions should work to meet their needs. Instruction universally designed to address cultural and linguistic factors which influence ELL performance will allow students who are working to acquire English meet their potential without additional interventions. It is helpful to educators if reading norms for ELLs are established. Further, teachers should be aware that learning gaps between ELLs and non-ELLs are normal. Students who are acquiring English will require extra time and support to be successful in the general education classroom, and this should be expected and accepted by teachers.

According to Klingner and Hoover (2014), there are several suggested actions to ensure that RTI can be efficacious for ELLs. Educators who are experts in English as a second language should always be involved in the RTI process. For those who are not experts in ESL,

there should be professional development provided to inform about ELLs and common issues they face in RTI. The school's process and requirements need to be clearly outlined for teacher, progress monitoring must be commonly understood, and data should be collected from as many sources as possible.

The literature is clear in detailing that RTI, when implemented thoughtfully and knowledgeable can be an excellent way to ensure that ELLs are not misidentifying with disabilities. However, this necessitates ongoing planning, collaboration and professional development for all professionals involved in the RTI process.

Role of Bilingual Professionals

Though response to intervention seems to be a promising avenue for reducing the number of ELLs misidentified for special education, another recurring idea in literature is the argument for involvement of bilingual professionals. Ortiz et al. (2011) investigated this possible solution with a study focused on the role of bilingual educators, in RTI and beyond, and how it could work to prevent inappropriate referral of ELLs to special education. The findings reaffirmed the idea that there are serious problems with referral, assessment, determination of eligibility, and place of ELLs in the special education system. Congruent with previously discussed findings, Ortiz et al. (2011) determined that teachers were not providing appropriate universal instruction for ELLs and instead, they were being pushed through the RTI process with little to no evidence of early intervention. Ortiz et al. found that one of the most effective ways to combat this issue was giving bilingual professionals a voice throughout the process.

In 2015, Brown and Ault had similar findings when they set out to better understand how bilingual special education professionals influence practice with ELLs. This case study examined bilingual special education professionals and their effect through interviews,

observations, and data. In the findings, Brown and Ault determined that bilingual special education professionals had powerful voices and were helpful in distinguishing learning acquisition from learning disability in students learning English. The value of bilingual special education voices was made clear as this school's data on English proficiency showed more rapid development than surrounding schools with similar populations. Whether in the RTI process or not, teacher, administrators, and other educational professionals should collaborate bilingual colleagues whenever possible. Bilingual professionals' unique expertise makes them invaluable in combatting misidentification of ELLs for special education and decreasing disproportionality. Teachers should take time to identify these professionals in their buildings and utilize them whenever possible to best serve the needs of the ELLs in their classrooms.

Characteristics of Literacy Development

Research has shown that response to intervention techniques and involvement of bilingual professionals are both approaches that have favorable effects on appropriate identification of possible disabilities in ELLs. Still, the professionals that are most likely to play an instrumental role in this identification are general education teachers. General education teachers often have access to the RTI process and bilingual professionals; however, these are not givens. For this reason, it is critical that general educations teachers have extensive knowledge on classroom indicators that are commonly linked to language learning so that they are not confused with a disability. Often, these characteristics have to do with literacy development, since this is the area of learning that is most impacted by ELL status.

Chiappe et al. (2002) observed students in Kindergarten through first grade to better understand how children's basic literacy skills differ with proficiency in English. The sample consisted of ELLs and non-ELLs from diverse backgrounds who were living in the same

community. The research showed that in many areas of literacy development, ELLs and non-ELLs performed similarly, especially after a year of instruction. This indicates that quality instruction can help to close most gaps that may exist due to language differences.

However, Chiappe et al. did find that even after being provided with focused instruction ELLs did not catch up in areas of syntactic awareness and working memory. In fact, the gap increased in these categories. This revealed that students learning English commonly struggle with manipulating and interpreting oral language. A student's verbal memory is impeded by their status as an English language learner. These are all weaknesses that may become apparent to general education teachers as they work with ELLs. It is important that they are aware of these common discrepancy in literacy development between ELLs and non-ELLs so as not to confuse them with signs of a learning disability.

In 2003, Lesaux and Siegel had similar results in their study of patterns in ELLs and non-ELLs who struggle with reading. Like Chiappe et al. (2002), Lesaux and Siegel (2003) determined that in many areas, differences in ELLs and non-ELLs was not notable. Furthermore, they reaffirmed that oral language is where ELLs are most likely to experience marked disparities. ELLs have clear difficulty with manipulating and remembering English in early years of literacy development.

Interestingly, Lesaux and Siegel concluded that the performance profile of ELLs greatly resembled that of a non-ELL student with a reading disability in many ways. This provides additional support for the claim that learning disabilities and language acquisition mirror one another (Lopes-Murphy & Murphy, 2020). Consequentially, this finding also reinforces the importance of professional development for educators to help them better understand the ways in which these two learning factors can present similarly in the classroom.

In conclusion, the research shows that though there are characteristics of literacy development that coincide with ELL status, often these characteristics are the same or like those that indicate possible disabilities. This heightens the need for educators who understand these similarities and are trained to distinguish and take steps to ensure that students who are acquiring English are not wrongly thrown into the special education referral process.

Indicators in the Classroom

One theme is consistent among all presented literature of the issue of disproportionality of ELLs in special education; despite increased attention, there is continued and widespread confusion. It is important to point out that there is no existing method that has been proven to accurately identify learning disabilities in English language learners (Burr et al., 2015). There are many similarities in the presentation of learning disabilities and language acquisition in the classroom.

The literature shows that there are many methods and approaches that can help to facilitate more appropriate evaluation of ELLs with possible disabilities. Disabilities and language acquisition may appear similar to educational professionals. Burr et al. (2015) suggest some questions that may help teachers to distinguish between the two. Teachers should explore whether the student in question is receiving quality instruction capable of supporting student growth in language and academic areas. The progress of the student in question should be compared to the expected rate of progress based on peer from similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It should be determined whether the behaviors noticed can be attributed to the student's cultural background or the fact that they are adapting to a new cultural environment. Other factors such as socioeconomic status, educational background, first language skills, attitude towards school, and personality should all be explored and considered in reference to the

concerns presented by the teacher. These suggestions are a starting point for teachers. The process of identifying and evaluating a student with a possible disability is arduous. It becomes even more rigorous when the student in question is an English language learner.

Conclusion

This literature review has drawn a handful of important conclusions regarding the topic of disabilities in English language learners. First, disproportionality of ELLs in special education is a complicated but certain problem in the United States. Second, there are many factors contributing to this disproportionality encompassing individual teachers, schools, districts, and even state agencies. Third, though there is not one proven method to distinguishing language acquisition from learning disability, there are many methods that aid this differentiation, including RTI, inclusion of bilingual professionals, and increased teacher awareness of similarities between the two learning conditions. One notion remains clear through all of these conclusions. The need for increased professional development among educators regarding the aforementioned topics is becoming more urgent as the population of English language learners grows in districts across the country. Following this literature review, chapter 3 will present professional development designed for educators who work with ELLs. This professional development will discuss the overarching themes of the literature review and provide guidance to professionals in order to help them better differentiate between language acquisition and disabilities in ELLs.

Chapter 3: Professional Development

This professional development was designed to address the overarching issue presented in this capstone: How can educators distinguish learning disability from language acquisition to reduce disproportionality of ELLs in special education? The PD is divided into two sessions. Each session is 2.5 hours long and they will be presented 2 weeks apart. The first session will focus on educating professionals on disproportionality and causes of disproportionality of ELLs in special educations. In the second session, educators will work to distinguish learning disability from language acquisition and work to establish guidelines when differentiating between the two in their classrooms. At the end of the PD participants will be knowledgeable on disproportionality of ELLs in special education, understand causes that lead to disproportionality, distinguish characteristics of disability and language acquisition, and feel better prepared to gather necessary information before referring an English language learner to special education evaluation.

Session One

The first professional development session will occur afterschool, on a weekday, and will last 2.5 hours. Table 1 outlines the agenda for session one.

Table 1

Session One Agenda

15 minutes	Icebreaker Activity and Norms for Session
30 minutes	Data Analysis and Discussion on Disproportionality
15 minutes	Brainstorming and Discussion on Causes of Disproportionality
30 minutes	Gallery Walk of Effective Strategies for ELLs
15 minutes	Survey and Discussion of Research by Lopes-Murphy and Murphy (2020)

30 minutes	Comparing and Contrasting Characteristics of Learning Disabilities and the Stages of Language Acquisition
15 minutes	Session Debrief and Closing

Participants do not need to do any activities prior to the session and need only to bring a writing utensil. This session will begin with an icebreaker activity to ensure participants are comfortable and get them into a reflective mindset before starting to learn. The icebreaker requires participants to split into small groups which can be determined in whatever way is easiest. Once groups are together, each will receive a brown paper bag filled with random objects: paperclips, rubber bands, a cup, plastic silverware, eraser, any objects that facilitator can easily collect to distribute. Each group will also receive markers and a piece of chart paper. Groups will be directed to design a product using the objects in their paper bags and create an advertisement for it on their chart paper. They will have five minutes to complete the task. However, they are not allowed to speak at all during the activity. The facilitator will answer any questions then start a five-minute timer and allow groups to work. Once time is up, groups will each share their invention, advertisement, and any challenges they faced while working together.

The facilitator will explain that the feelings experienced during this activity are a common occurrence for English language learners in the classroom. Often, they have ideas and want to participate, but struggle to do so effectively because of language barriers. This activity will remind educators of the many challenges that ELLs must overcome to be successful learners. The facilitator will wrap up this introduction by displaying norms for the sessions. These will serve to create a respectful, productive, and professional environment for learning to occur.

Next, the facilitator will move to the next activity and introduce the topic of disproportionality of ELLs in special education. A slide will be displayed with the definition of disproportionality and some questions to guide participants in observation and discussion. Each participant will get a copy of two different documents published by the U.S. Department of Education (see Appendix A). The first document is a fact sheet with various data measures concerning students with disabilities who are English learners. The second document provides data specific to the percentage differences between ELLs and ELLs with disabilities. Educators will have ten minutes to look over these documents on their own and make observations with the guiding questions in mind. After, participants will have ten minutes to discuss their observations with their groups. Then, the last ten minutes will be time for groups to share out their takeaways from the activity.

As discussed in chapter two, disproportionality of ELLs in special education is a widespread issue in the United States. According to Sullivan (2011), both under-representation and over-representation are common in schools. Additionally, Skiba et al. (2016) shows how the identification of ELLs with disabilities is a complex, multidimensional issue is and states that it is dangerous to oversimplify the problem. In order to move towards a solution, educators must be presented with this information and given time to reflect on how it may affect their students. This portion of the PD is designed to give educators that time to learn and analyze the issue of disproportionality of ELLs in special education.

After presenting the issue of disproportionality of ELLs in special education, focus will shift to the causes of disproportionality which is the next activity on the agenda. The facilitator will pose and display the following question: Thinking about your own experiences and observations as educators, what factors might play a role in the existence of under- and over-

representation of ELLs in special education? What may cause this disproportionality? Participants will have 10 minutes to discuss possible causes. Then the facilitator will ask people to share any common ideas from each discussion. The facilitator will display a list of causes linked to disproportionality through research and point out any that were not brought up in discussion (see Appendix B). The causes included in the list are lack of training is ESL practices for teachers, insufficient universal instruction, underdeveloped referral and RTI processes, unclear or nonexistent state and federal guidelines, teacher's personal beliefs, and confusion between stages of language acquisition and disabilities.

A common theme throughout the research presented in chapter two was the lack of ESL training for teachers. Lopes-Murphy and Murphy (2020) concluded that the absence of PD in ESL is one of the largest contributing factors to teachers' misunderstandings about language acquisition in the classroom. This also leads to insufficient support to for ELLs in the general education classroom which can often result in misidentification of ELLs for special education (Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Chapter two addressed the problem of referral and RTI processes that have not been adequately developed and designed for ELLs through the work of Burr et al. (2015). This is another cause of disproportionality that educators must be made aware of. According to Scott et al. (2014), many states do not specifically address ELLs in their guidance for special education decisions. Further, there is no national consensus of how to meet the needs of ELLs in the special education identification process. This is yet another obstacle that contributes to under- and over-representation. Park (2020) found that teacher's personal beliefs about special education and ELLs play a role in disproportionality of ELLs in special education.

Last, the overarching issue of this capstone, confusion between language acquisition and learning disability, is largely discussed throughout chapter two. According to Burr (2015), no

proven method exists to identify learning disabilities in students learning English. Additionally, Lopes-Murphy and Murphy (2020) explain that a majority of educational professionals are unaware of mirrored behaviors in language acquisition and learning disability which feeds the struggle of distinguishing between them. Clearly, research supports that all of these factors play a part in the issue of disproportionality of ELLs in special education. It is crucial that educators are presented with this research and are conscious of these causes. This portion of the PD aims to create that mindfulness and lead into an activity which specifically addresses one of these factors.

Next, the PD facilitator will transition into the gallery walk activity by posing a question: Can you influence all of these factors? Which of these factors do you have control over? Participants will recognize that there are two major factors which they are directly involved in: providing appropriate classroom instruction and distinguishing between language acquisition and learning disability. The first of these factors is something that educators have attended professional development for already. This will be an opportunity to review and share ideas before moving onto the factor which will be the focus for the remainder of the PD.

Educators will complete the gallery walk activity to demonstrate and share their knowledge on serving ELLs through differentiated classroom instruction. There will be six large posters hung up around the conference room with the following titles: Classroom Environment, Building Relationships, Literacy Instruction (Reading & Writing), Content Instruction (All Other Subjects), Assessment, and Miscellaneous. Participants will have 10 minutes to add their own strategies and ideas for meeting the needs of ELLs in each of these areas. Once everyone has added to the posters, the facilitator will ask for a volunteer to read each out loud. As approaches are read aloud, participants will be directed to give a thumbs up if they also use a strategy in their

practice. Posters will remain up until the end of the session when participants will have the chance to take pictures for future reference. The facilitator will display a slide that reminds educators that this should always be the first step when a student is struggling. Educators must reflect on their own practice and ensure that students needs are being met before moving onto more involved steps to determine the cause. This may lead some educators to a realization that they need to revisit best practices for ELLs in their classrooms.

As discussed in chapter two, Burr et al. (2015) provides a reminder that educators must ask themselves if they are providing quality instruction capable of supporting the progress of ELLs. This should be the first question asked when a teacher identifies a student who is struggling to grow in the classroom. Further, Klingner and Hoover (2014) stress that educators must remember that ELLs do need extra time and help in the classroom to advance. Part of an educator's professional responsibility is to make sure that instruction is differentiated to meet the learning needs of students learning English. This activity will give educators the opportunity to reflect on their own expertise and learn from their professional peers to build upon their strategies to supports ELLs in school.

The facilitator will circle back to the other factor which participants identified as being in their control: the ability to distinguish characteristics of language acquisition from indicators of a learning disability. This factor will be the main learning focus in the professional development. The facilitator will ask educators to rank from 1 to 5 on their fingers how confident they are in identifying learning disabilities in students who are learning English.

The next activity will be a survey and related discussion. Each participant will complete a quick survey which will remain completely confidential (see Appendix C). The survey will ask educators to identify whether characteristics are indicative of language acquisition, a learning

disability, or neither and they would need to information to determine. Participants will have five minutes to complete the survey.

The facilitator will share correct responses revealing that none of the characteristics can distinguish between language acquisition and learning disability. For each, more information would need to be gathered to determine the underlying cause. The facilitator will share data from the study by Lopes-Murphy and Murphy (2020) to demonstrate that a majority of educators are unaware of these mirrored behaviors in language acquisition and learning disability. The facilitator will share the goal for the rest of the first session. This activity is an introduction to the primary goal of this capstone. According to Lopes-Murphy and Murphy (2020), many school professionals make premature conclusions about learning disabilities without first exploring other possible explanations. A majority of educators are also unaware that behaviors associated with language learning mimic those associated with learning disabilities. For this reason, it is imperative that PD is provided to school professionals about the intersection of behaviors characteristic of language acquisition and learning disability. This is the crux of the rest of the professional development presented in chapter three.

Teachers will transition to the activity of comparing and contrasting characteristics of learning disabilities to stages of language acquisition. All participants will have links to two documents. The first is a list of symptoms of learning disabilities from the Learning Disabilities Association of America or LDA website. This document presents behaviors present in children that may indicate a learning disability. The second is a document from the New York State Office of ENL, World Languages, and Bilingual Education which details each stage of language acquisition. This chart gives definitions, student behaviors, challenges, and teaching strategies for each of the five stages of language acquisition. Participants will be directed to read through

the document from LDA and focus of the student behaviors and challenges sections in the language acquisition chart. While reading, educators will be directed to look for similarities between the characteristics listed in each document and differences. They will have fifteen minutes to do this independently.

Then, participants will work in groups to fill in a large venn diagram on chart paper. The venn diagram will compare and contrast the characteristics presented for learning disabilities to those presented for stages of language acquisition. This will allow educators to build upon their own knowledge of how language acquisition can mirror learning disability in students.

Once finished, each group will quickly share any overarching themes and show how many similarities they found within the information in the two handouts. According to Swanson (2020), it is possible to identify ELLs with learning disabilities among their peers. However, in chapter two, it was thoroughly discussed how difficult this identification can be for educators to complete successfully. Comparing these documents is the first step presented in this professional development towards understanding the commonalities amongst language acquisition and learning disability, as well as characteristics that may be unique to either.

Session one will conclude with a debrief of what was learned. Each participant will be asked to share their biggest takeaway from the session with the group. Then the facilitator will present an activity for participants to complete before the next session. Each participant will receive a link to a collection of videos from experts on the "Colorin' Colorado" site with guiding questions (see Appendix D). Before session two, educators should choose at least five of these short videos to watch. While watching, they are expected to write down any connections, surprises, or conclusions they are left with. At the beginning of session two, they will discuss this activity and share any important information drawn from it.

At the close of session one, educators will have gathered information about disproportionality of ELLs in special education, the causes that contribute to this disproportionality, reflected upon best practices for ELLs in the classroom, and started to compare behaviors associated with language acquisition and learning disability. A base of knowledge has been created to build upon and draw from in session two. Session two will require them to synthesize all of this information to assist in distinguishing language acquisition from learning disability and creating a process to accurately identify students learning English who require further evaluation and possible referral to special education. The videos they will watch before session two will add to this wealth of information.

Session Two

The second session of this professional development will take place approximately two weeks after the first session. It will last 2.5 hours. Table 2 outlines the agenda for session two.

Table 2

Session Two Agenda

15 minutes	Icebreaker Activity and Norms for Session
15 minutes	Discussion of Videos Watched Between Sessions
30 minutes	Analysis and Discussion of T-chart
45 minutes	Discussion of IDEA and Analysis of Flowchart
30 minutes	Hypothetical Student Scenarios
15 minutes	Session Debrief and Closing

This session will begin with another quick icebreaker activity to ensure that all participants are feeling comfortable. Participants will be asked to line up in order of birthdate including month and day, starting with January and ending with December. However, they will need to complete

the activity as a group without any spoken communication. They will have only 5 minutes to do so. When time is up, participants will go down the line and say their birthdays out loud to assess the group's performance. This is another opportunity to demonstrate how difficult tasks can be when spoken language cannot be relied upon for communication. The facilitator will project the same norms from session one for educators to read and agree to. This introduction ensures that all participants feel valued, comfortable, and prepared to enter into the important learning included in this session.

The next activity will be discussion of the intersession work that educators completed. Participants were asked to watch some videos from a collection on ELLs and special education identification from the "Colorin' Colorado" website. In small groups, educators will share which videos they watched and connections, surprises, or overarching conclusions that they formed. They will have 10 minutes to share in small groups, then participants will be asked to share any important discussions they had to the whole group. This will allow everyone to shift their mindset to disproportionality, challenges ELLs face in the classroom, and possible solutions to misidentification. These discussions will also activate background knowledge from session one and beyond to support the upcoming learning in session two.

After this debrief, the facilitator will move on to the next activity by distributing the t-chart which presents common characteristics of learning disability and language acquisition (see Appendix E). This document will be incredibly important to educators in trying to distinguish between learning disability and language acquisition with students. First, participants will have time to look over the t-chart on their own. Then there will be time for educators to discuss and collaborate. Discussions will aim to resolve any confusion and share personal experiences relevant to the information presented in the chart.

The last ten minutes will be used for a whole group discussion. The facilitator will display the following questions on the board: What questions do you still have about the information on this t-chart?, What recurring explanations do you see throughout the chart?, How could you use this in your practice to help distinguish learning disability from language acquisition?. As discussed in chapter two and session one of this PD, distinguishing between language acquisition and learning disabilities in ELLs in an incredibly complex process. According to Lesaux and Siegel (2003), the performance profile of ELLs is similar to non-ELL students who have reading disabilities. Thanks to Wilkinson et al. (2006) it is known that ELLs are often incorrectly referred to special education. This misidentification is often due to confusion faced by educators about learning difficulties and the internal or external factors that may cause them. This t-chart aims to simplify this process by presenting some common learning difficulties that are similar in language acquisition and learning disabilities. After this PD, educators will be able to use this t-chart as a quick reference guide to differentiate whether behaviors are caused by language acquisition or if there is further concern about a learning disability.

The following activity will involve discussion about IDEA and analysis of the process which educators should follow to distinguish learning disability from language acquisition. The facilitator will display information about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA (2004) and what guidance it provides to teachers in reference to identification of ELLs. It is important that teachers are aware of what is required of them by law in this situation. After, each participant will receive a flowchart (see Appendix F) which presents steps to follow when trying to distinguish learning disability from language acquisition in a student.

Educators will have a few minutes to read through the steps, then the facilitator will guide the whole group through the flowchart. The next 30 minutes are devoted to whole group discussion, ideas, and questions in how to best apply each step of the flowchart to real situations in the classroom. Other resources, such as the t-chart provided earlier, should be out for reference. However, the main focus of this activity is working through each step of the flowchart to ensure all participants can follow these steps in practice. The first step is reflecting upon whether sufficient support in the classroom has been provided. The facilitator will remind participants of the posters they made containing best practices for ELLs in the classroom.

The second step is to use the t-chart to try to distinguish behaviors as characteristic of learning disability or language acquisition. The facilitator will remind educators that this differentiation may not be possible. Unless educators feel confident that they can distinguish using information from the t-chart, they should move to the next step.

The third step is to work through the question guide (see Appendix G). At this point, the facilitator will hand out question guides to everyone. This guide contains questions that the educator should ask and answer about the student to identify any factors that may explain the behaviors being witnessed in the classroom. The question guide will also serve to show that the educator has done their due diligence independently to try to identify the causes of the student's academic struggles. The whole group will read through the questions and discuss any questions or comments they have before moving on.

The fourth step is to reach out to other professionals for guidance. The facilitator will display research supporting the idea that misidentifications can be avoided when professionals who are experts in language learning are involved. The whole group will brainstorm a list of people in their building or district that they could turn to. The facilitator will explain that

educators should share the information from previous steps with these professionals to see if they can offer any varied viewpoints or suggestions regarding the student's progress.

If this is still not successful, the educator should move to step five which has two parts. First, the educator who has gone through these steps should refer the student to the child study system which their school has in place. In the meantime, the educator should work to add as many informal and formal assessment measures as they can as basis for their concerns and the steps they have already been through. After the whole group discusses the process, the facilitator will open up the discussion for questions and comments to ensure all participants feel comfortable with these steps.

This flowchart has been designed to ensure that educators exhaust all possible explanations and supports for ELLs who are struggling to make progress in the classroom before referring them to further evaluation and possible special education services. Though according to Scott et al. (2014), there is often little state and federal guidance on this subject, IDEA is federal legislation that all teachers must understand. Research from Orosco and Klingner (2010), confirms that many students are being inappropriately recommended for further intervention based on deficits caused by environment or linguistic differences. A step-by-step process for educators to follow when trying to decide whether a student learning English may have a learning disability, ensures that all other factors and possible explanations for student concerns are explored before moving towards referral. Further, this will mitigate the issue of misidentification hopefully decreasing the number of students placed in special education inappropriately. Both misidentification of learning disability and missed identification of learning disability can be extremely harmful to student progress. According to Huang et al. (2011) students inappropriately place into special education regressed in their academic progress.

Further, Farnsworth (2018) shares that educators who are quick to blame internal deficits, such as learning disabilities, only contribute to added stigmatization of ELLs. The flowchart and activity will support teachers in meeting the needs of all learners appropriately to spark success.

Once the flowchart is understood by all participants, small groups will be formed for the last learning activity with student scenarios. Each group will get 2 written hypothetical student scenarios (see Appendix H). Together, they will discuss a plan to address the concerns for each student using the resources they have collected throughout the PD. They will write down their plans of action for each student to work through determining whether or not they should be referred to the child study team for further evaluation. When complete, each group will share their ideas for one of the hypothetical student situations and receive feedback from the group. To conclude this session, the facilitator will ask each participant to share their biggest takeaway or one way they plan to implement the strategies and tool presented in their practice.

At the conclusion of this professional development, participants will have resources, knowledge, and strategies to better guide them is distinguishing whether an ELL's struggles in the classroom are characteristic of language acquisition or cause for further evaluation. Educators will feel confident in using the t-chart, flowchart, and question guide to support them through this process. Those who complete this PD will be well-informed on the issue of disproportionality of ELLs in special education, causes of under- and over-representation, and ways in which they can mitigate this issue. In session two, participants will put their knowledge to work and practice using the aforementioned resources to create an action plan for different hypothetical student scenarios. Overall, educators will leave with information and tools to be better advocates for English language learners, especially in terms of distinguishing characteristics of learning disabilities from common difficulties associated with the stages

language acquisition. In chapter four, the final conclusions, implications and recommendations resulting from this capstone will be shared and analyzed.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This capstone was designed to address a common issue faced by educational professionals who work with students learning English. When ELLs struggle in the classroom, many educators have difficulty determining whether language acquisition or an underlying disability are to blame. This confusion is a contributing factor to the disproportionality of English language learners in special education in the United States. Through research, this capstone provides evidence of over- and under-representation of ELLs in special education, presents contributing factors, and starts to analyze possible solutions for this problem. The professional development presented in chapter three provides educational professionals with the knowledge and tools necessary to better distinguish between the characteristics of language acquisition and possible disabilities when working with ELLs. The PD sessions also give educators background knowledge on the existence and causes of disproportionality of ELLs in special education and guidance on how to make sound decisions regarding special education referral for students learning English.

Conclusions

It is evident that disproportionality of ELLs in special education is widespread in districts throughout the United States. Students learning English are both over-identified and under-identified with disabilities because of their ELL status. This capstone has also presented the idea that there are many contributing factors to this issue of disproportionality. Disproportionality is multifaceted in nature and there are many causes that need to be addressed to find a solution. Many of the causes presented in the capstone are in the hands of district administrators and state or federal government. There is an obvious lack of streamlined guidance through states and the

country to assist teacher in identifying disabilities in ELLs. Referral and RTI processes in many districts need complete redesign and retraining of teachers to meet the need of diverse learners.

On the other hand, there are some factors that teachers can take control of to mitigate the problem. First, teacher can provide appropriate differentiation and accommodations to support the success of ELLs in the general education classroom. Further, districts should provide increased professional development on meeting needs of ELLs and teacher preparation programs should continue to require training on this subject. Most importantly though, educational professionals must be better informed on the commonalities in students who are learning English and students who have learning disabilities. It is clear that many educators face confusion when trying to identify disabilities in ELLs. Chapter three of this capstone is an example of how the field of education can begin to work towards a solution to this issue.

Another conclusion that can be confidently drawn from this capstone is that the intersections between disability and language acquisition are not widely known. This is an area that requires increased research and attention. The population of ELLs in schools across the United States is growing at a tremendous rate. If educational professionals want to ensure that ELL needs are being met, more effort must be put into exploring and understanding the intricacies of English language acquisition and its effect on other learning factors.

Implications for Student Learning

First, students will benefit from this capstone because it is bringing awareness to the importance of being able to recognize when difficulties faced by ELLs are expected due to language acquisition or indicative of another problem. The professional development provides participants with awareness, understanding, and methods of better supporting ELLs in their schools. Ideally, this knowledge can make a positive impact on students who are learning

English and their school experiences. Chapter two shared research by Klingner and Hoover (2014) that emphasized the importance of quality universal instruction. Especially in current times, as the population of ELLs in the United States rapidly increases, it is crucial that teachers are trained to address cultural and linguistic factors in the classroom in responsive ways that can support ELLs in being successful. The professional development presented in chapter three allows participants to review strategies to assist ELLs and evaluate their own ability to foster growth for students learning English. This awareness will lead educators to judge their current classroom practices and make changes for the better. In the end, ELLs will receive improved classroom instruction to boost their progress.

According to Ortiz et al. (2011), many schools have fallen into a pattern of allowing special education services to replace early intervention and best practices in the classroom. Chapter three aims to give educators the knowledge and tools they need to take time and work through early intervention. It is important that all students are given appropriate supports to be successful in the general education classroom before a referral to special education. Participants of the professional development will be able to use the flowchart and other resources to guide them through the process of evaluating student needs before moving into the special education evaluation process. This will benefit students, especially ELLs, in a massive way. Huang et al. (2011) found that students inappropriately placed in special education actually regressed. Unwarranted placement into special education can be incredibly harmful to students, as can overlooked disabilities in children. Regardless, students will prosper because educators are better equipped to go through early intervention stages before special education referral. Consequently, participants in the PD should be less likely to superfluously refer ELLs to special education or disregard signs of disabilities by attributing classroom challenges to language

differences. Overall, students will be appropriately supported and identified for special education referral due to the information and resources presented in this capstone.

Implications for Teaching

The implications for teaching created by this capstone are numerous. The professional development was carefully designed to meet the needs of educators who work with students learning English. Research discussed in chapter two detailed the many areas of teaching English to speakers of other languages that needed increased awareness and training among teachers. Lopes-Murphy and Murphy (2020) insist that professional development focus on teacher preparation and the intersection of behaviors in language acquisition and learning disability is necessary. The professional development presented in chapter three intends to meet that exact need. After the PD, participants will be better prepared to service ELLs in their work as professional educators. More specifically, they will be aware of the commonalities of language acquisition and learning disability and possess knowledge and tools to help them distinguish the two.

One of the most common reasons for students learning English to be misidentified as having a disability is that teachers often make premature conclusions about students without exploring all possible external factors (Lopes-Murphy & Murphy, 2020). The tools presented in chapter three help educators analyze all factors that may affect a student's growth and performance in the classroom is an organized way. Many teachers lack the time and resources to do this on their own. The professional development not only imparts information but also gives teachers a clear directions and process to work through determining whether a student learning English is also affected by a possible disability.

Throughout this capstone, the primary focus is on distinguishing stages of language acquisition from disability in students learning English. Regardless, in chapters two and three, also include information and suggestions in other areas of teaching English to speakers of other languages. Research from Orosco and Klingner (2010) urged that educators must be provided with more research-based practices to meet the needs of ELLs. In chapter three, an activity is devoted to brainstorming and sharing strategies to support ELLs. Chapter two also discussed research that educators need increased training in language acquisition and reading development of ELLs (Samson & Lesaux, 2009; Scott et al., 2014). Though the focus of the PD in chapter three is the differentiation of language acquisition and disability, participants gain knowledge about the characteristics of students who are acquiring language in the classroom. Chapter three aims to address multiple gaps in knowledge common amongst educators working with ELLs. In conclusion, this capstone yields information and resources which better equip educators to meet the needs of student learning English and confidently identify ELLs who should be evaluated for possible disabilities.

Recommendations

Researching for and writing this capstone has made it abundantly clear that educators in the United States are in dire need of increased professional development focused on English language learners. Schools and districts must make a concerted effort to provide professionals with the time, knowledge, and tools they require to sufficiently support ELLs. Logically, this is the first step in solving the issue of disproportionality of ELLs in special education. Additionally, schools should work towards ensuring that bilingual professionals are being consulted and utilized to support and identify needs in ELLs. There are many districts that do not have a large number of bilingual professionals to rely on. In these situations, focus should

turn to professionals highly qualified in teaching English to speakers of other languages. These voices will be instrumental in ensuring that ELL needs are considered in the special education referral process. Lastly, districts should invest time and resources to establishing clear and effective guidelines for the RTI or referral process in their schools. Further, these guidelines must take the needs and attributes students learning English into account.

In the field of research, there is a lot of work to be done to better understand the intersection of language acquisition and learning disabilities. Research on this topic is relatively new and scarce. As stated by Burr et al. (2015) there is not a method proven to effectively identify learning disabilities in English language learners. Though there may never be a way to easily assess disabilities in language learners, increased clarity and understanding can be attained to assist educational professionals in the process. The increasing population of ELLs in the United States makes these recommendations even more vital to the success of diverse students in schools.

Final Thoughts

The overarching goal of this capstone is to inform educational professionals about the issue of disproportionality among ELLs in special education and provide a method of working to decrease this disparity. Through research analysis in chapter two and professional development in chapter three, educators can become knowledgeable on this issue, the factors leading to disproportionality, and probable solutions. Most importantly, resources and actions are presented to support school professionals in distinguishing between language acquisition and possible disability. This capstone only addresses a small portion of the challenges that face students learning English. However, it presents a concrete way in which teachers and other educational professionals can start to combat disproportionality in their own schools.

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Appendix A

Session 1: Data on Disproportionality from U.S. Department of Education

OELA
OFFICE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

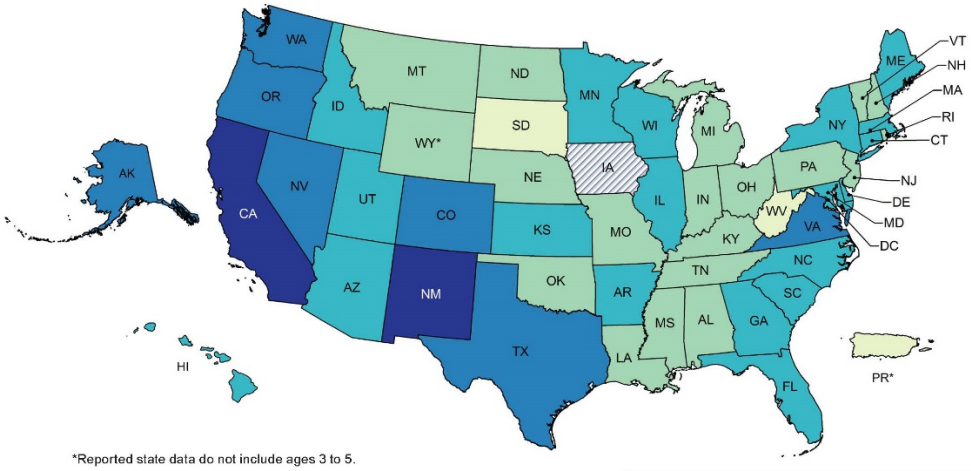
FAST FACTS

Students With Disabilities Who Are English Learners

This fact sheet uses the definitions and data for students with disabilities*, ages 3 through 21, including those who are English Learners (ELs)*, from Section 618, Part B, of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (*IDEA*). *IDEA* Section 618, Part B, requires that each state submit data about children with disabilities, ages 3 through 21, who receive special education and related services.

*For the purpose of this fact sheet, the term "students" is used in place of "children" and "English Learners" ("ELs") is used in place of "limited English proficient (LEP)".

Percentage of Students With Disabilities, Ages 3 to 21, Served Under *IDEA* Part B, Who Were ELs, by State, Including DC and Puerto Rico: SY 2013–14[1]



*Reported state data do not include ages 3 to 5.

Less than 1% (N = 3)
1% - 4.9% (N = 19)
5% - 9.9% (N = 20)
10% - 19.9% (N = 7)
20% or more (N = 2)
Data not available (N = 1)

FACT

In school year 2013–14:

- The national percentage of total students who were ELs was 8.8 percent.
- The national percentage of students with disabilities who were ELs was 9.2 percent.
- Eleven states reported percentages of students with disabilities who were also ELs higher than 9.2 percent, ranging from 9.4 percent to 30.3 percent.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Local Education Agency (School District) Universe Survey," 2013–14 v.1a; "State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey," 2013–14 v.1a, and U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts Data Warehouse (EDW): "*IDEA* Part B Child Count and Educational Environments Collection," 2013–14. Data extracted as of January 19, 2017, from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/part-b-data/child-count-and-educational-environments/bchildcountandedenvironments2013.csv

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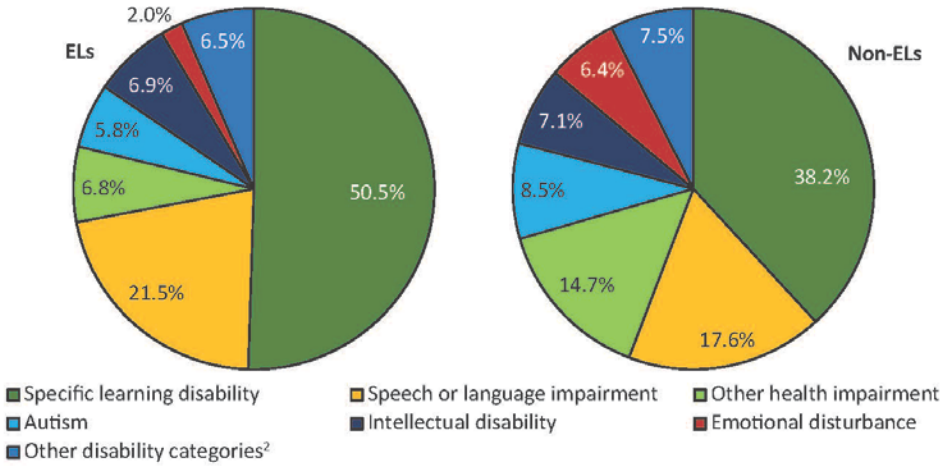
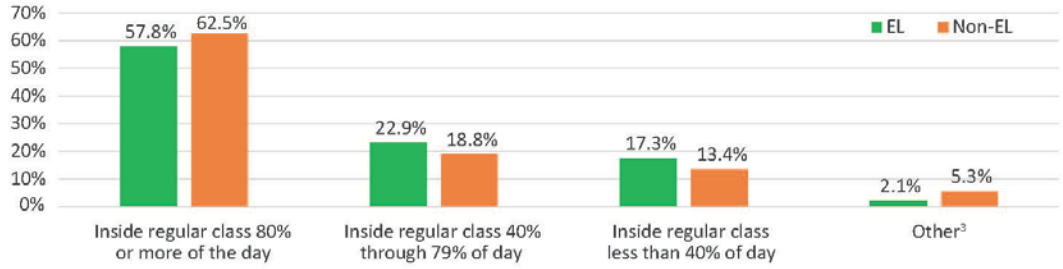
Percentage of Students With Disabilities, Ages 6 to 21, Served Under *IDEA* Part B, by EL Status and Disability Type: SY 2013–14



FACT

In school year 2013–14, the overall proportion of students who were primarily identified as having a specific learning disability was lower for non-ELs (38.2 percent) than ELs (50.5 percent).

Percentage of Students With Disabilities, Ages 6 to 21, Served Under *IDEA* Part B, by EL Status and Educational Environment: SY 2013–14

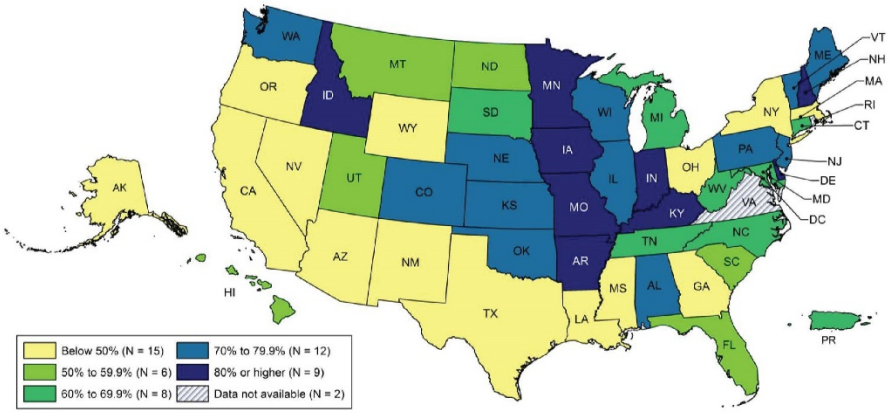


FACT

In school year 2013–14, more than half of the students with disabilities who were ELs received special education services in a regular classroom for 80 percent or more of the day.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts Data Warehouse (EDW): "*IDEA* Part B Child Count and Educational Environments Collection," 2013–14. Data extracted as of January 19, 2017, from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/part-b-data/child-count-and-educational-environments/bchildcountandedenvironments2013.csv

Percentage of Students With Disabilities, Ages 14 to 21, Served Under *IDEA* Part B, and Who Were ELs, Who Graduated With a Regular High School Diploma, by State, Including DC and Puerto Rico: SY 2013–14[1,4,5]

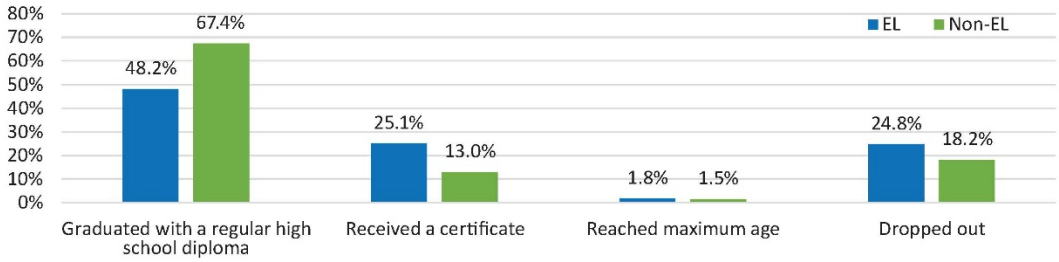


FACT

In school year 2013-2014:

- The national average of students with disabilities who were ELs and graduated with a regular high school diploma was 48.2 percent.
- Thirty-six states had graduation rates higher than the national average for students with disabilities who were ELs. In nine states, graduation rates were 80 percent or higher for this population.

Percentage of Students With Disabilities, Ages 14 to 21, Served Under *IDEA* Part B, by EL Status and Exit Reason: SY 2013–14[5]



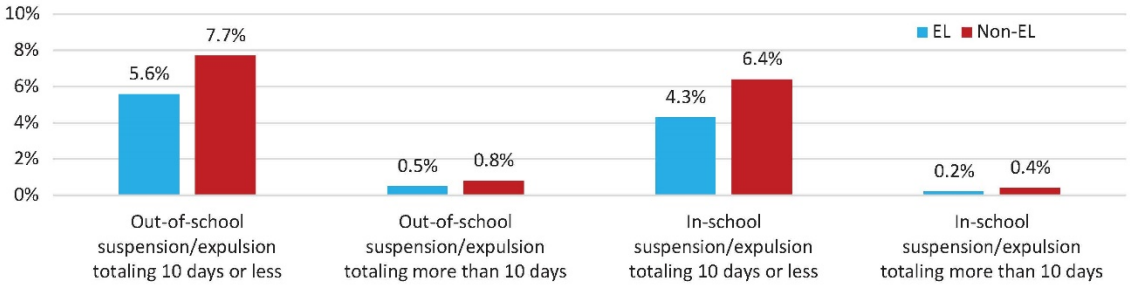
FACT

In school year 2013–14, students with disabilities who were ELs

- graduated with a regular high school diploma at a rate of 19.2 percentage points below students with disabilities who were non-ELs; and
- dropped out at a rate of 6.6 percentage points above students with disabilities who were non-ELs.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts Data Warehouse (EDW): "*IDEA* Part B Exiting Collection," 2013–14. Data extracted as of January 19, 2017, from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#be

Percentage of Students With Disabilities, Ages 3 to 21, Served Under *IDEA* Part B, Suspended/Expelled, by EL Status and Type/Length of Removal: SY 2013–14[6]



FACT

In school year 2013–14, students with disabilities who were non-ELs were given out-of-school suspension/expulsion totaling 10 days or less at a rate of 37.5 percent higher than ELs.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts Data Warehouse (EDW): "*IDEA* Part B Discipline Collection," 2013–14. Data extracted as of January 19, 2017, from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/static-tables/2013-2014/part-b/discipline/1314-bdiscipline-11.xlsx, and U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts Data Warehouse (EDW): "*IDEA* Part B Child Count and Educational Environments," 2013–14. Data extracted as of January 19, 2017, from https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/part-b-data/child-count-and-educational-environments/bchildcountandedenvironments2013.csv

Footnotes

[1] The maps include data from all 50 states, DC, and Puerto Rico; however, data totals elsewhere include the U.S. plus outlying areas and freely associated states. Numbers may also differ from data source due to rounding.

[2] "Other disability categories" include deaf-blindness, developmental delay, hearing impairment, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment combined.

[3] "Other environments" include correctional facilities, homebound/hospital, parentally placed private schools, residential facilities, and separate schools.

[4] Students with disabilities reported in the "graduated with a regular high school diploma" category represent students who exited an educational program through the receipt of a high school diploma identical to that for which students without disabilities are eligible. These students met the same standards for graduation as those for students without disabilities. As defined in 34 CFR 300.102(a)(3)(iv), "the term regular high school diploma does not include an alternative degree that is not fully aligned with the state's academic standards, such as a certificate or GED." The percentages of students who exited special education and school by graduating, as required under *IDEA* and included in this report, are not comparable to the graduation rates required for reporting in Consolidated State Performance Report (CSPR).

[5] The percentages were calculated by dividing the number of students in that school year, ages 14 through 21, served under *IDEA* Part B, either EL or non-EL, and reported in one of the four exit categories named (i.e., dropped out, graduated with a regular high school diploma, reached maximum age, or received a certificate), by the total number of students, ages 14 through 21, served under *IDEA* Part B, EL or non-EL, in all four of the categories noted for permanent exit from school.

[6] The same child may be reported under both "out-of-school" and "in-school" removal categories if a child has been subject to both types of removal in the same school year.

For additional information on students with disabilities, visit GRADS360's state profile pages: https://osep.grads360.org/#program

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LEADERSHIP
José Viana
Assistant Deputy Secretary and Director Office of English Language Acquisition

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS)

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May 2017

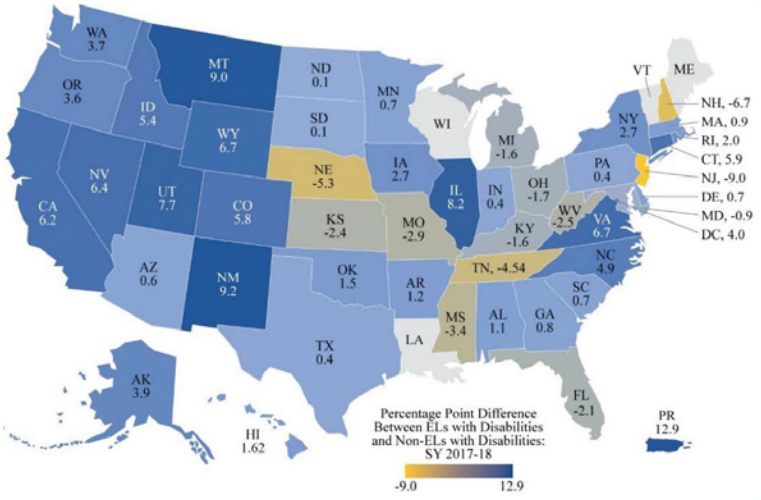
Office of English Language Acquisition

English Learners With Disabilities

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), state educational agencies (SEAs) and school districts are responsible for locating, identifying, and evaluating all students, including English learners (ELs), who have disabilities[1] and who need special education and related services[2] because of their disability.[3]

During school year (SY) 2017–18, nearly 12.0%[4] of all students ages 6 through 21 enrolled in U.S. public schools were served under IDEA Part B. Of those students, 11.2%[5] were ELs. That same year, ELs comprised 10.0%[6] of all students enrolled in K–12.

Percentage Point Difference Between English Learners and English Learners With Disabilities Ages 6 – 21 Identified and Served Under Individuals With Disabilities Education Act Part B: School Year 2017–18



Puerto Rico and three states — New Mexico, Montana, and Illinois — had the greatest disparity in rate of identification of students with disabilities between ELs and non-ELs, wherein ELs were identified at a higher rate than non-ELs (12.9, 9.2, 9.0, and 8.2 percentage point difference, respectively). The three states with the greatest disparity in rate of identification of students with disabilities between ELs and non-ELs, wherein non-ELs were identified at a higher rate than ELs were New Jersey, New Hampshire, and Nebraska (-9.0, -6.7, and -5.3 percentage point difference, respectively).

State Name	Calculation: Percentage of ELs With Disabilities,[7] Ages 6 to 21: SY 2017–18	Calculation: Percentage of Non-ELs With Disabilities,[8] Ages 6 to 21: SY 2017–18	Calculation: Percentage Point Difference[9] Between ELs With Disabilities and Non-Els With Disabilities, Ages 6 to 21: SY 2017–18
Puerto Rico	39.8%	27.0%	12.8%
New Mexico	22.2%	13.0%	9.2%
Montana	20.3%	11.3%	9.0%
Illinois	20.3%	12.0%	8.3%

Note: Includes data from the 46 states and the District of Columbia. SY 2017–18 data for Maine, Louisiana, Vermont, and Wisconsin were suppressed (not published) due to data quality concerns.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education," 1990–91 through 2017–18; and State Public Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Projection Model, 1980 through 2029. (This table was prepared December 2019.)

U.S. Department of Education, ED*Facts* Data Warehouse (EDW): "IDEA Section 618 Data Products: State Level Data Files. Child Count and Educational Environments," 2017. [Data file]. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#bccee

[1] Child with a disability means a child is evaluated in accordance with §§300.304 through 300.311 as having an intellectual disability, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), an emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, or other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services. 20 U.S.C. § 1401(3) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.8.

[2] The IDEA specifies under what conditions children are eligible to receive services, found here: https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.8.

[3] 20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(3) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.111.

Author calculations: [4] Percentage of students with disabilities = Total number of students (ELs and non-ELs) divided by total number of students enrolled in K–12.

[5] Percentage of identified ELs, 6 to 21, served under IDEA = Total number of IDEA ELs divided by total number of students served by IDEA.

[6] Percentage of identified ELs in K–12 = Total number of identified ELs in SY 2017–18 divided by total number of students enrolled in SY 2017–18.

[7] Percentage of ELs with disabilities = Number of English learner-proficient children with disabilities, ages 6 to 21, SY 2017–18, divided by total number of students.

[8] Percentage of non-ELs with disabilities = Number of non-English learner-proficient children with disabilities, ages 6 to 21, SY 2017–18, divided by total number of students.

[9] Percentage point difference = Percentage of IDEA ELs with disabilities minus percentage of IDEA non-ELs with disabilities.

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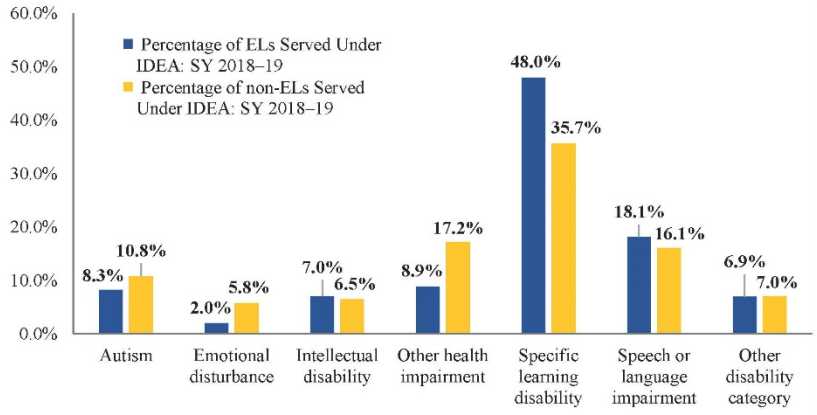
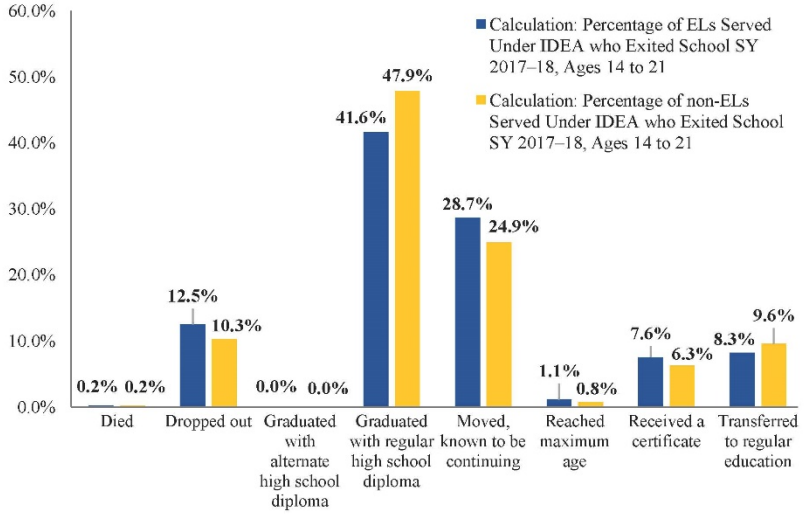
Students Ages 6 to 21 Served Under Individuals With Disabilities Education Act Part B, by Disability Category and English Learner Status: School Year 2018–19



In SY 2018–19, 714,400 ELs and 5,600,742 non-ELs were identified with one or more of 13 disability categories listed in IDEA. In three of the seven categories listed,[10] ELs were more likely than non-ELs to be served for specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, or intellectual disabilities (12.3, 2.0, 0.5 percentage points higher, respectively.)[11]

Percentage of Students Ages 14 to 21 Served Under Individuals With Disabilities Education Act Part B, by English Learner Status and Exit Reason: School Year 2017–18



Of the 632,746 total students ages 14 to 21 exiting special education services in SY 2017–18, 41,714 were ELs and 591,032 were non-ELs. In SY 2017–18, ELs ages 14 to 21 served under IDEA were less likely to graduate with a regular high school diploma compared to non-EL students with disabilities (-6.3 percentage point difference). During that same year, ELs served under IDEA were more likely to drop out of school, move (known to be continuing), or receive a certificate than non-EL students with disabilities (2.2, 3.8, and 1.3 percentage point difference, respectively).

Note: This includes the United States, outlying areas, and freely associated states. SY 2014–15 data for Iowa and Wyoming are not available; data for American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Palau, and Republic of the Marshall Islands were suppressed due to small cell size. SY 2016–17 data for Wisconsin were suppressed due to questionable data quality; Louisiana reported not serving EL students with disabilities; data for Northern Marianas and Republic of Palau were suppressed due to small cell size. SY 2017–18 data for Louisiana, Maine, Vermont, and Wisconsin were suppressed due to questionable data quality. SY 2018–19 data for Wisconsin were suppressed due to questionable data quality.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts Data Warehouse (EDW): "IDEA Section 618 Data Products: State Level Data Files. Child Count and Educational Environments," 2017. [Data file]. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#bccee
U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts Data Warehouse (EDW): "IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environments Collection," 2014–15: Data extracted as of July 2, 2015, from file specifications 002 and 089; 2015–16. Data extracted as of July 14, 2016 from file specifications 002 and 089; 2016–17. Data extracted as of July 12, 2017 from file specifications 002 and 089; 2017–18. Data extracted as of July 11, 2018, from file specifications 002 and 089; 2018–19. Data extracted as of July 10, 2019, from file specifications 002 and 089.

[10] "Other disability categories" refers to deaf-blindness, developmental delay, hearing impairment (including deafness), multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment (including blindness). For a full list of disability definitions, as written in IDEA, see https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.8
Author calculation: [11] Percent = EL/non-EL students per IDEA disability category divided by total number of EL/non-EL IDEA students, multiplied by 100.

Appendix B

Session One: Causes of Disproportionality

Factors Leading to Disproportionality of ELLs in Special Education

- Lack of Training
  - Many teachers and other educational professionals do not have enough professional development in the area of ENL

- Inadequate Classroom Instruction
  - Students learning English are not provided scaffolding and differentiation necessary for success

- Underdeveloped Referral/RTI Processes
  - Process unclear or not designed to meet needs of ELLs/ Teachers not trained in process

- State and Federal Guidelines are Inconsistent
  - Many states have not produced guidance specific to identification of ELLs with disabilities

- Teacher Personal Beliefs
  - Varying opinions on special education affect referrals

- Confusion Between Language Acquisition and Disability
  - Educators are unaware of mirrored behaviors and struggle to distinguish

Appendix C

Session One: Survey

When you observe the following behaviors in student who are learning English (ELLs), which can you assume about each behavior?

1. Difficulty in Reading Comprehension (Circle one)
    a. Characteristic of Language Acquisition
    b. Characteristic of Learning Disability
    c. Need More Information
2. Difficulty Following Instructions (Circle one)
    a. Characteristic of Language Acquisition
    b. Characteristic of Learning Disability
    c. Need More Information
3. Inappropriate Classroom Behavior (Circle one)
    a. Characteristic of Language Acquisition
    b. Characteristic of Learning Disability
    c. Need More Information
4. Inattention During Instruction (Circle one)
    a. Characteristic of Language Acquisition
    b. Characteristic of Learning Disability
    c. Need More Information

Appendix D

Session One: Intersession Learning Guide

Before the next session on _____, please watch at least five of the videos linked in this document. While watching write some notes in the space below. You will discuss with other professionals at the beginning of session two.

What connections can you make to the information shared?

What surprised you about the information shared?

What conclusions can you draw from the information shared?

Links to Colorin' Colorado videos on Youtube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYEQtvd4ZLo&list=PLoU659hwTdDZGMqlLwag0EIrv05z_AwwQ

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPIMGtcrq38&list=PLoU659hwTdDZGMqlLwag0EIrv05z_AwwQ&index=2

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvf3Phy0Vss&list=PLoU659hwTdDZGMqlLwag0EIrv05z_AwwQ&index=5

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0pPZS__G10

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTaJu-5PHTk

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpLoLxIvB-k&list=PLoU659hwTdDaTdJFYrOyF_BUPPX0JB966&index=1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyjNZh2SEDo&list=PLoU659hwTdDaTdJFYrOyF_BUPPX0JB966&index=3

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anRV3n443WQ&list=PLoU659hwTdDaTdJFYrOyF_BUPPX0JB966&index=5

https://youtu.be/bhALmodGuRA

https://youtu.be/t-J927MhZlc

https://youtu.be/7UYQvptYvf8

Appendix E

Session Two: T-chart

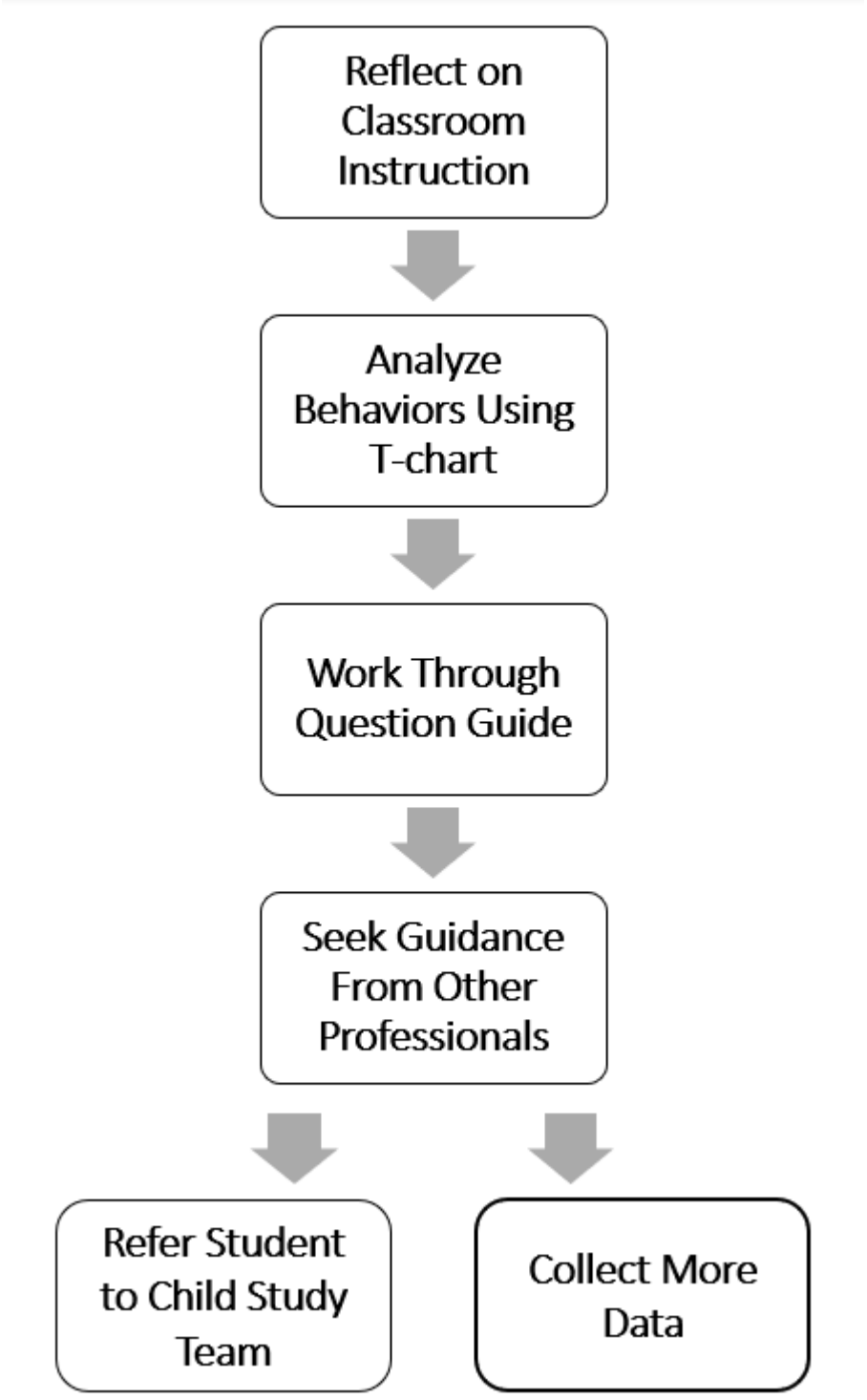
Characteristic of Learning Disabilities	Characteristic of Language Acquisition
Inappropriate and/or disruptive behavior	Inappropriate and/or disruptive behavior • *Excessive talking to clarify meaning or instructions for tasks* • *Speaking with students who have same L1*
Easily distracted, difficult concentrating	Easily distracted, difficult concentrating • *Trying to find something they can comprehend* • *Exhausting nature of language learning*
Atypical peer interactions • *Frequent fights and arguments* • *Clumsiness* • *Isolation* • *Playing with younger students*	Atypical Peer interactions • *Isolation* • *Only interacting with students form similar cultural groups*
Difficulty following directions, slow to begin tasks • *Across subject areas even when language is comprehensible*	Difficulty following directions • *Lack of comprehension* • *Challenge in remembering directions in second language* • *Unclear on how to begin task*
Difficulty with challenging language and vocabulary • *Difficulty seen in L1 and L2*	Difficulty with challenging language and vocabulary • *Vocabulary is brand new* • *Still working to learn basic academic vocabulary*
Poor auditory memory	Poor auditory memory • *Words are unfamiliar or not understood*
Easily frustrated or appears unmotivated • *Does not understand instruction in L1 or L2 across subjects*	Easily frustrated or appears unmotivated • *Does not understand instruction due to language acquisition stage* • *Does not feels successful* • *Anger or low self-esteem related to language acquisition*
Difficulty with Phonological Awareness	Difficulty with Phonological Awareness • *Student's first language(s) may not include some English sounds* • *New sounds or sounds presented in a different order may be difficult to distinguish*
Difficulty with memorizing sight words	Difficulty memorizing sight words • *Meaning is not understood*

Characteristic of Learning Disabilities	Characteristic of Language Acquisition
Difficulty with sound-symbol correspondence • *Does not remember letter sounds after follow-up instruction* • *Cannot be attributed to L1/L2 differences*	Difficulty with sound-symbol correspondence • *Confusion if sound-symbol correspondence is different from L1* • *Difficulty pronouncing sounds not in first language* • *Improvement seen over time*
Often misspells words • *May use correct beginning and end sounds but random letters in between* • *Letter reversals and sequencing errors that cannot be attributed to L1 spelling patterns*	Often misspells words • *May borrow sounds from L1* • *Patterns may align to L1* • *Spelling consistent with stage of language acquisition and improves over time*
Difficulty retelling a story in sequence • *Difficulty is present whether in L1 or L2*	Difficulty retelling a story in sequence • *Expressive language not developed enough to convey what student understands* • *Receptive skills may be stronger than expressive skills* • *May only use words/phrases depending on stage*
Confused by figurative language	Confused by figurative language, idioms, pronouns, conjunctions, and multiple-meaning words
Struggles with multi-step and/or word problems in math • *Forgets or reverses steps even with visual supports* • *Does not understand process* • *Cannot identify key terms in L1 or L2*	Struggles with multi-step and/or word problems in math • *Lacks comprehension of oral instruction* • *Does not under mathematical vocabulary in L2* • *Show improvement with visual input or support in L1*
Struggles to write sentences that are grammatically correct • *Random errors (Ex. word omissions)* • *Missing punctuation* • *Grammar errors cannot be attributed to L1*	Struggles to write sentences that are grammatically correct • *Syntax reflects L1 patterns* • *Errors typical of language acquisition stage* • *Shows improvement over time*

Created with Information from Klingner (n.d.), Farnsworth (2018), & U.S. Department of Education (2016).

Appendix F

Session Two: Flowchart



Appendix G

Session Two: Question Guide

Working to Identify Learning Disabilities in English Language Learners

1. What strengths does this student have?

2. What concerns do you have about this student's progress?

3. Is classroom instruction sufficient to enable the student to make academic progress? List examples of accommodations and differentiation in the classroom.

4. How does the student's progress compare to peers of the same age and level of English language proficiency?

5. Can any noticed behaviors be attributed to the child's cultural background or the process of acculturation they are facing?

6. How may other environmental or language factors influence the student's progress?
    a. Socioeconomic status, first language skills, previous education, personality attributes, learner characteristics, cultural variables, family dynamics, home situation, etc.

7. Does the child's family have any concerns about their progress? What additional information can the family provide about environmental factors? Conduct an informal interview with parent/guardian if you have not already.

Appendix H

Session Two: Hypothetical Student Scenarios

1. Marisol is a student in your third-grade class. Her parents are from Puerto Rico and speak mostly Spanish at home. Marisol can speak Spanish but never developed literacy skills in the language. Notes from her past teachers show that she has made excellent progress in all subjects, including her English language acquisition. However, it is now November and she seems to be regressing. She rarely speaks aloud and requires extensive support to start and complete tasks in the classroom.

What would you do? Create a plan!

2. Yousef is new to the district and a student in your fifth-grade class. There is very little information about his educational background. You know that he just recently came to the United States about 6 months ago. He is often distracted in the classroom and never seems to focus on the instruction going on. His peer interactions are often inappropriate for his age and he has been involved in many peer conflicts since the beginning of the year. He seems completely unmotivated in whole group, small group, and even one-on-one instruction, often putting his head down and ignoring the situation completely.

What would you do? Create a plan!

3. Kira is in your fourth-grade class. She moved with her family to the United States from Japan at the start of first grade. Her parents speak both Japanese and English at home. She seems to be making progression in her language acquisition. However, she seems to always be falling behind her classmates in reading and writing. She is always the last student to finish assignments and she is consistently frustrated during ELA lessons. Her parents have shared that she loves reading at home and they have been working on writing with her too.

What would you do? Create a plan!

4. Angelo is in your fifth-grade classroom. He arrived in the United States 1 year ago and joined a classroom in the middle of the year. His first language is Portuguese, and his family does not speak English at home. He is a loner and does not seem to have any friends in your classroom. You have noticed that he struggles to comprehend texts at the early elementary levels, his writing contains many spelling and grammatical errors, and he is even struggling to solve problems in math. He is always bringing books from home into the classroom. These books are written in Portuguese, and he seems to comprehend and enjoy them.

What would you do? Create a plan!