

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN TYPICALLY
DEVELOPING ENGLISH LEARNERS AND
THOSE WITH READING AND LEARNING
DIFFICULTIES

Information about Dyslexia

- Please familiarize yourself with knowledge about dyslexia.
- <http://www.ctserc.org/index.php/dyslexia/item/91-increasing-awareness-of-sld-dyslexia-webinar>

Can a student be classified as both an English Learner and a student who has dyslexia?

Yes. Dyslexia is neurobiological in origin and is therefore intrinsic to the individual. The same percentage of English learners will have these neurobiological differences as native English speakers.

“It is manifested in every language; however, the incidence, the proportion, the severity of the various deficit types, and the sources of impairment vary by language” (Linan-Thompson, 2014)

What literacy skills transfer across languages?

- Phonological awareness at the phoneme level with phonemes that exist in both languages (Raynolds, Lopez-Velasquez, Olivo-Valentin, 2016)
- Syntactic awareness, the ability to reflect on the grammatical structure of a language transfers from L1 to L2
- Knowledge of writing conventions
- Knowledge of reading comprehension strategies (Linan-Thompson, 2014)

Dyslexia Across Languages: Deep Orthography

- Dyslexia is expressed **differently** in different languages depending on that languages orthographic structure.
- In languages with a deep orthography, such as English, children often need at least three years to learn basic decoding.
 - No 1:1 correspondence between letters and sounds
- Individuals with dyslexia may have difficulties with **both** decoding accuracy and fluency

Dyslexia Across Languages: Shallow Orthography

- In languages with shallow orthographies (such as Spanish, where each letter only represents one sound) individuals with dyslexia may not have trouble with decoding accuracy, but may have trouble with automaticity, which would affect their reading fluency (Serrano & Defior, 2008).
- Interestingly, spelling of Spanish consonant clusters by Spanish-speaking children with dyslexia presents difficulties in spelling despite this structure being orthographically consistent (Serrano, & Defior 2012).

Know your student to determine reasons for your student's difficulties

- Prior Education
- Language
- First Language Development – Information from families
- Personal Characteristics
- Cultural Expectations

Prior Education

- When did the student begin to learn English?
- When did the student learn to read and write in English?
- Is the student literate in the native language?
- In what language/s is the student being instructed?
- What has the student's linguistic pathway been so far?
- History and language of prior intervention?
- Absenteeism or interrupted formal education?

Language

- What is native language?
- What is the native language proficiency?
- What is dominant language?
 - *May depend on context*
 - *Was the student exposed to both English and Spanish from birth?*
- What is English language proficiency?
 - *Have they had opportunities to develop native language?*
 - *BICS vs CALP*
 - *Have they had opportunities to learn and use Academic English?*
 - *LAS Links scores over time- Usually increases 1 level per year*

Language and Culture

- Language and culture are strongly interrelated (Bernhardt, 2000; Ovando, 2005).
- Schools may not offer a culturally responsive instruction that recognizes the knowledge the students bring.
- Can affect the students' learning

“...much of what they (the students) bring to school from their primary language is a part of the beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and values of their primary culture as well. To teach bi- and multilingual students effectively, we need knowledge and understanding of their language and culture, and the relationship between the two” (Rudell, 1993, as cited in Lipson & Wixson, 2013)

After building student profile, consider explanations for student's difficulties

- Sometimes characteristics of typical ELL reading development look similar to characteristics of students with a learning disability.
- It is important to discover the **cause** of student difficulties, so that we understand how to provide remediation!

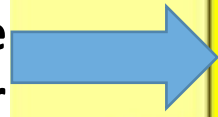
Student Difficulties Explained Through an ELL And Special Education Lens

| BEHAVIOR OBSERVED IN THE STUDENT | REASON THE DIFFICULTY MAY BE EXPERIENCED BY AN ELL | POSSIBLE SPECIAL EDUCATION EXPLANATION |
|---|---|--|
| Difficulty in reading and spelling words | Lack of exposure to English word reading and spelling; unfamiliarity with English words | Memory problems; phonological processing deficits; difficulties reading at the word-level (i.e., dyslexia) |
| Difficulty in comprehending text | Knowledge of English language skills (sentence structure, vocabulary, grammar, morphology, pragmatics) underdeveloped; lack of relevant background knowledge) | Language processing problems; sequencing problems; memory problems; difficulty drawing inferences; difficulty with connectives |
| Poor writing skills | Develops in tandem with language; student does not have the English language skills to express thinking | Organization or processing problems; memory problems; fine motor skills or motor-sequencing problems; slow processing speed; difficulty developing language skills |
| Easily distracted | Doesn't understand; requires more visual/ concrete support; is overwhelmed and exhausted by language learning process | Auditory processing difficulty; attention problems, including ADHD; processing speed difficulty |

Simple View of Reading Gough & Tunmer, 1986



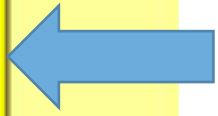
Typical Dyslexia Profile
Native English-Speaker



Good language
comprehension,
poor word
recognition

Good word
recognition,
good language
comprehension

Typical Native
English-Speaker



Word Recognition

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+

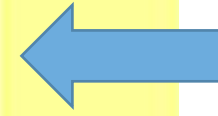
ELLs with Dyslexia



Poor word
recognition,
poor language
comprehension

Good word
recognition,
poor language
comprehension

Typical ELL profile



Language comprehension

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To assess whether your student may have dyslexia

- Need assessments which separate language proficiency from word recognition ability.
- Must ensure that student has had explicit, comprehensible, instruction in English word identification.

What does typical ELL literacy development look like?

- ALL ELLs can be expected to experience some academic difficulty.
- Adolescent ELLs may face more challenges as they learn complex academic content as well as new language.
- Steady progress is made in all languages spoken when academic support is given.
- If student begins school in English in pre-k or kindergarten, should perform similarly to peers after around 3 years.
- Word-level reading and spelling similar to peers after a few years of explicit, systematic instruction.
- Develops reading comprehension as oral language develops, but may continue to lag behind peers. Will continue to need support in vocabulary, grammar and syntax for multiple years.

ELLs with Word Level Reading Difficulties

- **Do not make the same progress as other students with similar linguistic and academic backgrounds- true peers
- Difficulties are persistent and pervasive despite consistent and targeted instruction
- Persistent problems in word reading, fluency and in spelling
- Writing is very challenging and does not reflect oral language proficiency
- Indications of academic difficulties prior to immigration (if applicable)

Components of Literacy Instruction for Typically Developing ELLs

- Decoding Instruction: Phonological Awareness, Phonics, Fluency at word and text levels,
- AS WELL AS EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION IN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT: Common and Academic Vocabulary, Syntax, Morphology and their relationship to Reading Comprehension

Phonological Processing Skills

- Underlying basic cognitive processes such as working memory, phonological short-term memory, and phonological awareness and RAN can be assessed and used to distinguish ELLs at risk for reading difficulties (Geva & Ryan, 1993).
- Typically Developing ELLs will perform similarly to native speakers on measures of phonological awareness, memory, and processing speed - with the following caveat:
 - ELL may have difficulty with non-native sounds and rhyming if rhyming structures is different in Spanish (Raynolds, Lopez-Velasquez & Olivo Valentin, 2016).

Assessing Phonological Awareness

- ELLs with possible reading difficulties may have on-going weakness in phonological awareness (e.g., inability to match sounds to letters, to replace one sound with another, to separate words into sounds, blends sounds together).
- Key predictor of dyslexia
- Can be assessed with DIBELS; IDEL; Roswell-Chall Auditory Blending Tests; Yopp-Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation; Informal phonological segmentation, matching and blending sounds.

Word Level Reading Skills

- In general, over the early elementary years, L2 children who receive adequate **exposure, support, and instruction** to language and literacy in the L2 can achieve word-reading skills that are within the average range (Lesaux & Siegel, 2003).
- Growth associated with accuracy in word and pseudoword reading over time does not differ for English monolingual and ELL students who have been exposed to adequate instruction in the L2 since the early primary grades (Lesaux & Geva, 2006).

Word Reading Skills: sight vocabulary and decoding skills

Typically Developing ELLs

- Make steady progress
- Word-level reading at par with peers after a few years
- Read **words*** with reasonable fluency
- **Text reading fluency** may be slower than monolingual peers due to down by unfamiliar vocabulary and syntax structures

*Can be assessed with Dolch word lists, reading words out of context with accuracy, sounding out unfamiliar words, or pseudowords.

Indicators of possible learning difficulty

- Word reading difficulties*
- Difficulty remembering or naming letters, sounds, and sight words
- Not progressing despite targeted instruction in word reading

Fluency and ELLs

- Fluency at the word level reflects decoding ability
- Fluency at the text level reflects both decoding ability and oral language proficiency (Crosson & Lesaux, 2009)
- ELLs in Grade 2 were able to read single words as fluently as their monolingual EL1 peers; however, EL1 peers had better text-reading fluency because of their more developed oral language proficiency and ability to access meaning more easily (Geva & Yaghoub-Zadeh, 2006)
- Fluency at the word level may be appropriate to distinguish those ELLs with word level difficulties and/or dyslexia

Fluency for students receiving bilingual literacy instruction

- Students with dyslexia **may not have trouble decoding** words in Spanish or other languages with a shallow orthography. However text reading **fluency** (rate) **in Spanish will be impaired.**
- Students with dyslexia **will have trouble decoding** single words and pseudowords in English.

Spelling: At the sound, pattern, and morpheme levels

With good instruction, ELLs:

- Make steady progress
- Learn from instruction
- Apply rules and patterns to new words
- May have errors that originate in the influence of first language
- Spell as well as native speakers with sufficient classroom instruction

Indicators of possible learning difficulty

- Persistent spelling errors
- Spelling errors which are not attributed to influence of the first language
- Difficulty remembering how common words are spelled

Vocabulary

Typically Developing ELLs

- Limited English vocabulary when entering school
- Gradual improvement over time, but attention needed to academic vocabulary
- With instruction, gradual improvement in morphological skills; able to manipulate word parts (fail, failure)

Indicators of Possible LD

- Limited vocabulary in native language when entering school
- Difficulty remembering or accessing words that have been taught
- Little progress over time
- Failure to see connections between words (medicine, medicinal) even after instruction

Assessment in Vocabulary

- Should be conducted in both languages
- Students may have home lexicon in native language (stove, broom, mailbox) and school lexicon in English (journal, cafeteria)
- Need to consider the total of both to get a true measure of vocabulary.
- Can be informally done for instruction by observation and analysis of reading and writing.
- Students need to understand 90-95% of vocabulary to comprehend a text (Nagy & Scott, 2000).

Syntactic (Grammar) Skills

Typically Developing ELLs

- Possible difficulties understanding and producing, orally and in writing, complex grammatical structures (conditionals, passive voice, complex sentences)
- Improvement over time

Indicators of a Possible Learning Difficulty

- Poor sentence structure in first language
- Uses unusual language patterns that differ from others from similar language background
- Little improvement over time

Assessing Reading through Running Records

Caveats

- When reading aloud for meaning it is natural and appropriate to produce words and phrases in the way in which they are spoken (Scarborough, 2004)
- Children who have not acquired certain tenses may not read those endings. Example: “He run to the fence.” “Yesterday he make his story”. **Should not be counted as a reading error.**
- Unknown vocabulary may affect decoding.

Reading Comprehension

Typically Developing ELLs

- Growth in reading comprehension linked to oral language and vocabulary knowledge
- Have misunderstanding due to lack of prior knowledge
- Match oral skills with reading comprehension; as oral language improves, so should reading comprehension

Indicators of a Possible Learning Difficulty

- Reading comprehension skills are lower than what would be expected based on oral language and decoding abilities.
- Failure to make progress and apply skills and strategies being taught.
- Difficulties in retelling
- Absence of evidence of problem-solving skills, higher-order thinking

Reading Comprehension and ELLs with Dyslexia

- Listening comprehension skills are commensurate with oral language proficiency.
- Decoding difficulties and fluency are impeding reading comprehension.
- Need intensive decoding instruction as well as instruction in comprehension strategies, vocabulary, and background knowledge
- Can be assessed using informal reading inventories (QRI), asking students to orally give a summary after reading, observations.

Skills needed in Writing

- Putting ideas on paper or computer in different genres (narratives, expository).
- Combines spelling, vocabulary, syntax, fine motor skills and style.
- Writing proceeds from oral language and is directly related to reading.

Writing

Typically Developing ELLs

- Writing reflects oral language development, knowledge of spelling patterns and application of writing conventions.
- Reflects development of sentence structure and grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, familiarity with genre
- As oral language syntax and vocabulary improves, so should writing when accompanied by direct instruction in needed skills

Indicators of a Possible Learning Difficulty

- Failure to apply skills used in oral language
- Struggles to get ideas on the page or pieces of writing do not increase with time.
- Obvious difficulties in spelling (e.g. same word spelled differently) and organizing thoughts
- Minimal improvement of skills taught

Resources to Determine Whether Special Ed Referral is Appropriate

- Excellent resource at the State Department of Education website:
- http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/bilingual/CAPELL_SPED_resource_guide.pdf
 - Parent/Caregiver Interview for Determining Student's Language Dominance and Past School History
 - Bilingual tests available
 - A Checklist to Determine Special Education Referral Appropriate for an English Language Learner

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