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Assessment and Intervention for English Language Learners

Translating Research into Practice

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educational needs. In some cases, that can best be done with data from record reviews, interviews, observations, and rating forms rather than with data from tests that have questionable validity for this particular child.

It is never sufficient to test English learners solely in their native language when attempting to learn about strengths and deficits in academic skills in English. Because of orthographic differences between English and other languages such as Spanish, it is not appropriate to assume that a child who decodes well in another language will decode well in English.

What Are Guidelines for Selecting Tests to Use with English Learners?

Table 3.1 gives guidelines for choosing and using tests with English learners.

Choosing and correctly interpreting tests used with English learners is one of the most challenging aspects of evaluating these students. In Chapters 5 through 10, we focus on the various specific learning disabilities and how to assess them when working with English learners. We present lists of tests that can be used and, in each chapter, we highlight standardized tests that are well known among school psychologists and that can be effectively used with English learners. Here is an example:

Table 3.1 Guidelines for Selecting and Using Tests with English Learners When using tests …

Do this	Don't do this
If you are going to use standard scores, check the demographics of the norming sample to make sure that your student is represented.	**Don't**: Report scores and make decisions on standardized scores from tests that do not represent your student.
Choose tests that provide diagnostic data that can be linked to instructional interventions. Which specific skills have been mastered and which have not?	**Don't**: Choose tests that yield little diagnostic data.
Choose tests with a sufficient number of items so you can do error analyses on the student's responses.	**Don't**: Use tests that have an insufficient number of items to adequately sample and analyze the student's specific skills.
Choose tests for the purpose of placing students in settings where they will be taught at their instructional level.	**Don't**: Choose measures which yield little information on the student's independent, instructional, and frustration levels.
Make eligibility decisions based on multiple indicators of a learning disorder: clinical signs, interview and record review data, and test-teach-test intervention results. Use norm-referenced test scores when your student was represented in the norming sample.	**Don't**: Make eligibility decisions based on discrepancies between IQ and achievement scores or on a pattern of strengths and weaknesses before the student has grade-appropriate cognitive academic language proficiency skills (CALP).
Provide English learners with the intensity of interventions needed, including special education, if appropriate.	**Don't**: Put off providing the intensity of services needed until the student has gained a certain level of English language proficiency.

Test Highlight: The *Developmental Profile-Third Edition* (DP-3)

The Developmental Profile-Third Edition (DP-3; Alpern, 2007) can be very helpful in assessing English learners, as long as they are younger than 13 years of age. The DP-3 provides standard scores in five different areas of development: physical, adaptive behavior, social-emotional, cognitive, and communication. It can be used as a screener and as a diagnostic instrument. Information is gathered through interviews and/or checklists from parents, caregivers, and teachers. The DP-3 is available in Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, and Spanish but information can be gathered in any other language through the help of an interpreter who helps with parent interviews.

What Is the Process of Intervention for English Learners?

School psychologists are proficient at collecting data. However, there is more variability among us with respect to how we were trained to use data and the experiences that we have had in using data in our practices. Routinely, data are gathered and used to develop hypotheses which lead to appropriate interventions. Data are collected to contribute to the child study team's decisions about whether students are eligible to receive special education services. In schools using a multitiered support system (MTTS) or response to intervention (RTI) service model, data are also collected and used to monitor students' progress as well as to make decisions as to whether to move students in the next tier because they need more intensive services. School consultation involves working with teachers to clarify and address problems using a problem-solving process that often involves using data to plan, implement, modify, and evaluate interventions.

The challenge of selecting an intervention to implement might seem overwhelming or mysterious when a child and the school psychologist speak and understand different languages. However, the overall process of planning and conducting interventions is not unique to educating English learners.

Assessment data should be used as part of the intervention process. The focus of this book is on the academic skills related to reading, writing, and mathematics that English learners must acquire. However, the basic assessment-intervention process (McKellar & Unruh, 2014) for academic difficulties as well as behavioral concerns is the same, the steps of which are listed in Table 3.2.

Using Evidence-Based Interventions

Interventions include effective practices that can be used in various ways; programs that are used with large groups of students; and defined procedures to use with one or a few students. Calling an intervention program "evidence based" is likely to attract users and, if the intervention must be purchased, likely to increase sales. Experienced educational professionals have encountered highly promoted intervention programs that were packaged well but less than effective when implemented.

Table 3.2 The Intervention Process

1. Refine the referral concern
2. Select the problem to start with
3. Determine what information you already have
4. Analyze the problem using hypothesis testing; gather addition information, if needed
5. Measure the skill or behavior
6. Determine whether this is a can't do or won't do problem (See Chapter 11 for instructions on a can't do/won't do assessment)
7. Get consensus among educators and, if possible, parents on the definition of the problem
8. Collect baseline data
9. Set the goal for improvement
10. Plot the aim line on a chart
11. Select an intervention
12. Develop the action plan
13. Implement the intervention
14. Monitor student progress and treatment integrity
15. Make alterations to the intervention and/or the goal as indicated by the data
16. Evaluate student progress and determine the effect size of the change (See Chapter 11 for instructions for determining the effect size of change)
17. Determine how to maintain the successful intervention
18. Evaluate the need to address additional problems

In 2003, the US Department of Education published *Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices Supported by Rigorous Evidence: A User Friendly Guide* (Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, 2003) to assist consumers of educational research and materials to make informed choices of educational interventions. The guide is an excellent review of the standards by which to judge current and yet-to-be-developed interventions as evidence based.

Published interventions rarely are validated under the same conditions or with the same populations as the situation with which the school psychologist practitioner is working. As the diversity of first languages of English learners expands, the probability of finding an intervention that has been validated with students similar to those with whom you are working decreases. As we discuss in various chapters of this book, other languages vary greatly in terms of their similarity to English, and, thus, the challenge facing the English learner varies. The concept of evidence-based *practice* is based on both evidence-based interventions and the school psychologist's use of the assessment-intervention process.

Where to Find Interventions

In some later chapters in this book, effective practices from model demonstration projects (Project ELITE, Project ESTRELLA, & Project REME, 2015) are discussed. These practices are intended to be useful in literacy instruction for English learners

in kindergarten to grade three who receive literacy instruction in English only. To encourage the integration of the practices into the existing routines of the classroom, examples of how the practices might be incorporated into the classroom are provided.

Spanish is most frequently the first language of English learners in US schools today. Some interventions that have been shown to be effective include the procedures designed to use the English learners' knowledge of Spanish to facilitate their acquisition of English. For example, Carlo and colleagues (Carlo et al., 2002) demonstrated the effectiveness of an intervention to increase the academic vocabulary knowledge and skills of fifth-grade English learners whose first language was Spanish. These English learners were given written and audiotaped versions of text in Spanish the day before the text was introduced in English. Such a procedure represents an effort to increase learners' knowledge and skills by connecting new information to what they already know. Unfortunately, the many school psychologists who are monolingual English speakers cannot implement these interventions without the assistance of a fluent Spanish speaker. For this reason, we have chosen to provide our readers with references, but not explanations, of interventions in which components are in Spanish. You will see these references at the end of each chapter in which interventions are reviewed (i.e., Chapters 5–10).

In this book, we provide information on recommended instructional strategies for English learners and on evidence-based interventions that can be used with one or a few English learners. These are interventions that can be used in schools using either a traditional or an RTI service delivery model. However, school psychologists may be involved in the process of selecting a published intervention program for use in the entire school building or district. Helpful reviews of intervention programs for use with English learners have been published by the Center on Instruction (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006; Rivera, Moughamian, Lesaux, & Francis, 2009).

What Are Recommended Classroom Instruction and Practices for English Learners?

There has been a relatively rapid increase in the population of English learners in schools. Many general education teachers were trained prior to this change in the school population. Calderón, Slavin, and Sánchez (2011) say, "Today most English learners spend their time in regular classrooms with teachers who feel that they are ill-prepared to meet their needs ... what matters most in educating English learners is the quality of instruction (p. 107)."

Both the Center on Instruction (Francis et al., 2006; Rivera et al., 2009) and What Works Clearinghouse (Baker et al., 2014) have developed guidelines for classroom instruction that is supportive of English learners. Calderón et al. (2011) identified key elements of effective instruction for English learners based on their review of long-term studies of programs and practices to improve reading and language

outcomes for English learners. School psychologists need to be familiar with these recommended practices in order to share them with teachers during consultation. Best practice recommendations include the following:

- Teach academic vocabulary words and background knowledge intensively, using varied instructional activities. Include explicit vocabulary instruction "in all subject areas before, during, and after reading" (Calderón et al., 2011, p. 110).
- Provide significant opportunities for students to engage in structured, academic talk. Use cooperative learning groups to increase the number of opportunities for English learners to talk. The most effective are "mixed-ability groups of four, have regular opportunities to teach each other after the teacher has introduced a lesson, and are recognized based on the learning of all members of the group" (Calderón et al., 2011, p. 113).
- Teach cognitive strategies. For example, a cognitive strategy for reading comprehension (Francis et al., 2006) is as follows: Begin by making predictions consciously before reading. Then ask questions during reading. Finally, summarize what you have read after you finish reading.
- Provide regular, structured opportunities for students to develop written language skills.
- Provide explicit and intensive instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, and decoding skills, as well as basic mathematics concepts and skills.
- Provide increased exposure to print. Independent reading must be structured and purposeful. Text for reading assignments should be at the English learner's independent reading level.
- Provide small-group instructional interventions, as needed, to struggling students.

Chapters 5–10 contain additional best practice recommendations that are specific to the topics of those chapters.

Teachers may welcome examples of lessons that reflect these best practice guidelines. Two excellent publications to share with classroom teachers are *Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model* (Echevarría, Vogy, & Short, 2008) and *Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School* (Baker et al., 2014).

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