

TRANSCRIPT

When an English Learner Struggles Academically: Telling the Difference between Second Language Acquisition and a Possible Learning Disability

[Slide: *When an English Learner Struggles Academically*]

ELIZABETH BURR

Hi, everyone and welcome. My name is Elizabeth Burr and I'm a researcher at REL West at WestEd. And we're thrilled to have so many of you joining us today. I wanna offer a special thanks to those of you joining us from the east coast and even from other countries.

Just a bit of background before we get started. As part of the English Learner Research Alliance we've been working with the state departments of education and developing reports, resource briefs, and webinars to improve policy and practice to support English learners in our region. We've learned that the topic today is a timely and pressing one for educators and so we're really excited to offer this presentation and discussion with Professor Julie Brown today.

[Slide: *Webinar Goals*]

As a result of your participation today our hope is that you'll learn some important things to know about your students, the process of second language acquisition and differences between typical versus atypical language development, and support and screening tools to use prior to referral.

JULIE ESPARZA BROWN

All right, with that let's get started. So, you're going to learn all of this with, within one hour. Uh, right. So what I'll tell you is you...hopefully this will be a beginning to give you the information that you need to start making some decisions and putting into place processes in your systems that will help you with this really important topic.

[Slide: *Session Outline*]

So what we're going to be doing today is, I'm going to give you a little bit of context, we're going to be looking overview of what are some big ideas in determining difference in disability, and then looking specifically at what is it that you need to know about your students—and we'll be doing this through a case study—and then how we make decisions. So here we go.

[Slide: *Is This Your Classroom Reality?*]

Is this your classroom reality? So, if you look at this cartoon you'll notice that the teacher says, "Today we're going to talk about stars," but if you look at the students each of their schema

bubbles show something different. And that is really what we're all dealing with today when we perhaps talk about a particular subject or content or even speak a certain word; we have assumptions about what the students understand that may or may not be correct anymore. We are a rapidly diversifying nation so given that, how do we ensure that language is not the key that...or the barrier for students to make progress?

[Slide: *Today's EL Students*]

On the next slide here is just a snapshot of what English learners look like today. We have...they're a very heterogeneous group. We have students that have been here long term, perhaps born in the country, with us since kindergarten, and perhaps are continuing to need English language development programs up until middle school and high school.

We have students who have also exited ELD programs and that may be on a monitoring status. We have students that come to us with all levels of educational background from wherever they have immigrated from. We have refugee groups that have had limited education and also experienced a lot of trauma in their background. And we have students that are English learners and truly have a disability. So, and within this, those ability categories there are a multitude...13 federal categories of disabilities. The one we'll really be focusing on today—there's two in particular, specific learning disability and communication disorder, because those are called high incidence disabilities. And those we...to make those eligibility decisions teams look at a body of evidence to make a professional decision or professional judgment as to who they determine is qualified to be in special ed programs.

[Slide: *Keys to Distinguishing Difference vs. Disability*]

Now for students that have deaf-blindness or a physical disability, those are certainly more evident regardless of somebody's first and second language status. So we're really looking at those where the team needs to be making decisions.

Okay, so let's look at some big ideas to keep in mind to help us make these determinations. First, it's crucial for us to understand the reason that a child's struggle occurs. So whereas English learners—you may have a group of English learners that are struggling perhaps in literacy; there may be varying reasons why. So I'm going to talk about really being able to dig down to understand a child's context to see what perhaps are the barriers to, to attaining those academic outcomes that we want. And they may be different across English learners; once again, they're a very heterogeneous group. The key here is to make appropriate comparisons to gauge whether a particular student's progress is hampered by more than just cultural and linguistic differences.

[Slide: *True Peers*]

So, therefore, we must make those appropriate comparisons, and that means that we have to compare to true peers when possible. And I'm going to define that. So this is a key concept. A true peer are those students that are of the same age and grade who have similar language proficiency in both English and the native language, same native languages, similar cultural and experiential background such as, you know, birth country or US-born. If born in the United

States, what generation, what's their experiential background, and we'll be talking about those more in depth. So here's another big concept. If, then, we are making comparisons between subgroups of English learners that are true peers and you see that groups of true peers are struggling, then that may lead you back to really wanting to look closely at the academic programs.

So when groups of similar students are struggling, what could it be within the curriculum or the instruction itself that perhaps has, perhaps has not been tailored to the specific needs of those students? But if within those same peer, true peer groups, you're seeing some students—one or two maybe—look different or progress at a different rate than their true peer group, then those are the ones that you're starting to be concerned about and you want to make sure to progress monitor those students in particular, okay; so it's making the right comparisons.

[Slide: *Student Problem Solving Profile Form*]

One of the documents provided is something that's now titled A Collaborative Problem Solving Form. I had just updated this form and we're going to go through components of it. And this form is provided to you to use as is or to adapt, but, as a system you need some way of being able to document the information that we'll be talking about today that will help you make appropriate decisions again about who needs further interventions or if it's an instructional problem versus a student problem.

And if it is a student problem, then what's all the important information that we need in order to then provide the most appropriate instruction and intervention. So we'll be referring to this form along the way.

[Slide: *Five Things to Know About Your Students*]

Okay, so we're going to be looking at learning about our students. What are the crucial factors to learn about our students? So we're going to start first with looking at this by components: language, culture, life experiences, educational experience, personal characteristics, and we're going to begin with language.

[Slide: *Language Concepts*]

So I'm going to talk you through a few concepts of language and, whereas many of you have an EL background, these terms may be familiar to you but I'd like to go over them for very specific reasons because of what I hear teams frequently say in schools. So we're going to start with primary language.

“Primary language,” then, is the student's home language; it's called, you know, first language—it's referred to by many terms—and actually we have many students now born in the United States for whom their primary language is actually...they're a bilingual first language. They may be exposed to both English and their home or heritage language at birth. It's very important to understand what the child has been exposed to hearing, what they interact with in the home. This is important because I sometimes have heard teams, particularly when discussing students with significant disabilities, say things like, “Well, the student doesn't have

language, they don't have expressive language, therefore they don't have a primary language and we can just provide services to them in English." However, that negates the fact that the student has a receptive language repertoire and we can't discard that notion of what they have been exposed to, again, in the home. So primary language—we really have to document what's been used in the home, what the child has been exposed to.

"Dominant language" now, is a term that's often referred to in the assessment literature of bilinguals. And it's very common to read articles that state, "Students should be assessed in their dominant language." Well, that's somewhat problematic because dominance can also be situational. If we have a student—let's say that they come from a Vietnamese-speaking home, and that is their stronger language but they go to an English-only school. Within the school setting their dominant language may be English because that's the language of communication at that school. So if we only assess in their dominant language within their educational context, then we're missing strengths and weaknesses that they may be able to demonstrate in their primary language. So dominance—I think we need to tread very careful around remembering that it's going to depend on the particular environment of which that child is exposed to at any time. Because in their, in their communities, perhaps in their churches and community groups, that dominant language may, in fact, be their primary language.

Language proficiency simply refers to a student's skill in a language at any point in time.

[Slide: *Home Language Experiences*]

I think we left off with understanding a child's experiences in the home—when they began to speak a language, what language that was, and if they were then exposed to a second language, at what point in the development of the first language did that occur, and remembering to ask, is there another language other than just the first and second language? And we often forget to ask that question. So we want to ask the family. So it's very important at the first signs of struggles to really do a good parent interview, and you'll find a component for that on the collaborative problem solving form.

[Slide: *Typical vs. Atypical Language Development*]

So we want to know from the parent: Was your child's language development typical as compared to siblings and peers before they entered school? So what I've heard from parents is, you know, that they do...are aware if a child has communication patterns that are different from siblings.

Sometimes I've heard things like, "Well, I've always had to translate or interpret for this child to our relatives and friends" so, or maybe "The child hasn't started, they didn't begin to speak until they were two or three." So those things are certainly red flags that need to be noted and understood early in this process, and was the child experiencing any delays in their home language; again, when did they first speak and in what language, and what were those...what was early speech like?

[Slide: *Language Knowledge/Profile*]

So we need to, again, really understand where they're at in their native language proficiency and English, and where do you get this information? Well, many of you, it seems, from the introductions, are part of an ESL or ELD department and this is a collaborative model where Gen Ed teachers, special ed teachers, reading specialists, and ELD coaches need to—or specialists—come together to share information. So that's crucial information that the ESL profession could help us understand; they'll help us also to understand, given the student's proficiency level in a, in an instructional language, then, what are appropriate teaching strategies so that we look to determine that those are in fact occurring in the classroom. And what are the ways that teachers can expect students to respond in the classroom given their current language proficiency level? And sometimes we find that our Gen Ed teachers are not very knowledgeable on that, so, again, this is a collaborative process where we need to share information across all of our groups.

[Slide: *Language Knowledge/Profile*]

So to remember that a student's language knowledge, then, is the sum of their knowledge in their first language and their second language and perhaps third language, and that often we focus on doing assessments in English but we're only understanding a portion of that child's knowledge reservoir, okay, so keep that in mind.

[Slide: *Second Language Learner: Difference; Language Disability*]

Here's a couple of slides for you that just give you some general principles of how we determine, start to think about making that difference in disabilities. So on the left-hand column, these are difficulties that we may experience, we may see children experiencing, based on their second language status. Where on the right-hand column it may be more indicative of a language-based disability.

So the first box: language performance is similar to other EL students who have comparable cultural and linguistic experiences. So once again, you're really making the comparisons to those true peers versus you'll see language patterns that are unique to a particular student and unlike others in that student's true community group. And it might manifest like this; there's a couple of ways. Sometimes students, then, are...their, their peer group might...in protecting a student knowing that they can't communicate as clearly as others, and they may speak for a child, or sometimes because communication is difficult, they may, in fact, then, not want to interact with the student so they may, you know, the student is maybe somewhat outcast from their peer group. So look for those behaviors, then, to, to try to identify if the particular student that's struggling, is their communication, then, markedly different from their true peers.

Going back to simply a difference—all English learners have limited vocabulary in English and perhaps in their native language as well. And that's going to be just opportunity to use and exposure to that home language and English versus students with language-based disability who demonstrate a limited vocabulary even though they have robust vocabulary instruction and that they've had sufficient exposure to those vocabulary words and their definitions. I mean, we know that it takes, what, at least a dozen times of really working with a particular word for

that to be fully learned, so providing the right opportunity, the multiple exposures, yet students are still not retaining those words into their lexicon. Difference—students might shift from one language to another; we call it code mixing and that’s frequently what we see in English learners but there are patterns of doing that. So, really, they maintain correct grammatical phrases or pieces in that, in each of those languages that they mix.

Now, some students with language-based disabilities, their code mixing may sound markedly different from their true peers and then that’s when, again, we have perhaps a red flag pops up that when their code mixing does not follow the typical principles of that so that, therefore, the grammatical pieces are incorrect within each of those languages. And, the bottom column here, the bottom square: “Communication may be impeded by an accent or dialect.” That’s going to be across any English learner but for those with language disabilities, we’ll see different kinds of deficits where it’s beyond accent or dialect. And there’s real different...difficulty in both expressing language and/or understanding language that interferes with communication.

[Slide: Second Language Learner: Difference; Language Disability]

Second slide—you know, I think, in the interest of time, these are here on the PowerPoint. Please go through them at your leisure but again, you’re going to be looking at what’s typical on the left-hand column for all students but what’s going to be specific to particular students that might truly be experiencing disabilities in, in language.

I’m going to...I see the question here, “What if there are no similar peers to measure speech?” So true peers...sometimes it may be down to that family level, so...and I know we say don’t compare to siblings, but sometimes that is the, the only comparison that you have. So do you see...“Do the parents share with you that a child’s language development is typical to their peers and their friends and their relatives even in their home country, or has that trajectory been different?” So, again, that’s information that you need to work with the parents on to understand.

[Slide: Progress in English Acquisition]

So, typical here...progress in language acquisition—typically we say that children grow at about a rate of a, a language level a year more or less. So if you’re seeing students who are perhaps stuck at...if, if we say that language stages are divided into one through five or one through six and we see some students that may be at a language two, level two, over a few years, then we want to look again more closely at what their individual language development has looked like.

As well, if answering the question, was their language program appropriate and robust enough that we would anticipate that they would be moving at a level of year. So, again, looking at what is the, the growth rate of their true peers.

[Slide: Language Proficiency Information]

So there’s a piece on the form here that you will see to gather that language information. The beauty about the form that I provided—it is called a Collaborative Problem Solving Form. It is

quite lengthy but it's not meant for any one teacher to complete. It is, again, a team, so the ELD, ESL specialist would be the ones to complete this information: What do we know about the children's language right now, what has their progression over their time in school, what does that look like? All right, so what I am... The ones...

[Slide: *Language Knowledge/Profile*]

Okay, so we're going to look at a student as we go through these components, and his name is Sergio. So here is a little bit about Sergio's language background.

Sergio was a, a boy who currently lives in Portland in my region, and his native languages are Kanjobal, which is a Guatemalan dialect, and Spanish. His English proficiency level is currently at an early intermediate level. He's like a level three, sort of midpoint in that language continuum. His Spanish proficiency level is at a beginning level but his proficiency in Kanjobal is unknown because we don't have anybody that speaks that in our system. At home—and this was, is, was observed during a home interview, was a home visit—that the family uses a mixture of Kanjobal and Spanish and that they frequently code switch or code mix and use both languages in their communication. Sergio, in particular, though, his English is more intelligible than his Spanish. We have trouble understanding him across any of his languages and so we're trying to determine difference or disability, but of the three languages his English is more comprehensible. We're really unsure of his level of Spanish because he may be code mixing Kanjobal and Spanish when we assume he's trying to speak Spanish.

We can't really tease that out. And we're talking, yes, oral communication. So I'm looking at the question. He is in third grade here.

[Slide: *As Compared to "True Peers": Language*]

So let's look at that true peer comparison. There are no other students who speak that particular dialect of Kanjobal except his immediate family. So he lives with...in a home with his siblings and his cousins, and they're the only speakers in this, this area that speak that dialect. So the true peer comparisons are really within his family, his siblings and cousins. So looking at the academic progress of those siblings and cousins—he has one older brother who is also in special education, but the rest of the siblings and the cousins are all really on target, are making good academic progress. So we're seeing that he's starting to stand out as looking different, okay, so that's a red flag here. There are no district interpreters who speak Kanjobal.

[Slide: *Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching...*]

Now let's look at a cult-...this child's cultural background, why is that important. Well, we know from much of the literature that it is important that students see themselves within the curriculum, and you can read the slides at your leisure for some more definition of culturally responsive instruction.

[Slide: *Culturally Responsive Teaching is...*]

But basically it is the lens from which teachers view their students and the filter through which teachers listen to their students and how they express their needs and their dreams and the way in which teachers interact with the students when delivering instruction. So this work is...it's crucial that we have linguistic alignment but also cultural alignment.

[Slide: *What Do Teachers Need to Know*]

What do you need to know about a student? Well, what we really need to ask is, what does each of our students, and particularly those that are struggling, you know, what do they know about their own culture and US culture? So in other words, you know, how acculturated is the student? We make a lot of assumpt-, assumptions within our American curriculum about sort of standard knowledge.

And that doesn't hold true for many of our English learners, so we want to ask, what is each of our students' prior experiences in school and in life? What have they been exposed to, and in which ways are they used to learning? So let's look at Sergio's cultural background.

[Slide: *Cultural Background*]

He was actually born in Portland, but both of his parents are from small villages in Guatemala. As I said, the parents' native language is Kanjobal and there are very few people in Portland from their region, so they interact with their own immediate family in their household in their Kanjobal first language and in the broader community they interact with the Spanish-speaking community, mostly with the Mexican community. And knowing, learning something about their culture, the power is very hierarchical, so they're very respectful of teachers and school and it's really a foreign concept of how we look at equality and decision making in our schools. And in particular, if we're thinking about the special ed process or perhaps going down that road, that really is a process that was brought about that system by parent advocates. So it's a foreign concept for many of our families of making decisions in partnership with us. So individuals from rural regions like this family also tend to have very limited education, as these parents do, so school is somewhat of a foreign concept to them as well.

[Slide: *Information from Parents*]

There is a page, as I alluded to earlier, on this collaborative problem solving form of a parent interview and it's asking just really important questions of the parents to help us figure out, how can the parent support their child's educational progress in the home? And even parents who don't come with high levels of literacy have many ways in which they can support their child by asking them questions, by interacting with them, by telling them family stories and tales and helping them to develop, continue to develop, their home language or languages.

Even with all the years that we have now experienced working with English learners in our systems, I still hear teachers say things like, "It would be confusing to your child if you speak to him in your native language at home. Please only speak English, please only read to them in English." But what this does is, it really models for a child perhaps non-standard English and it, it, particularly if we're in an English-only school setting, children need an opportunity to continue to develop their home language. We know that it's difficult to develop a second

language or a third language to a much higher level than a first language, so the more developed that first language foundation is, that's only going to build a better foundation for the high levels of development of languages two and, and/or three. So bring them along as our partners in language development.

[Slide: *As Compared to "True Peers": Culture*]

So when I look at Sergio and compare him to his true peers, I find that he is unfamiliar with many of the concepts within the curriculum. Even though he was born in the United States, he has not had what we might call middle class opportunities, so that we know we're going to do, have to do some background building within the curriculum for this student. So asking you the question of, how can a teacher help bridge the differences? So think about the ways that you have helped students to learn about our system and to help them become acculturated and understand our curriculum better.

[Slide: *Remember...*]

And to remember, that a wide variety of ethnically and culturally diverse example scenarios and vignettes can be used to embody and demonstrate all of the concepts and skills that we're, that are being taught.

[Slide: *Five Things to Know About Your Students*]

Okay, so looking at the next piece—educational experiences. Wow, we really need to understand, what has that child been exposed to?

[Slide: *Student's Educational Background*]

So you'll find part of the form that will help you document: Where have they gone to school? Have they gone to school in another country besides the United States? What about early intervention? Did they have early intervention services? And if so, in what language? What did that look like? So let me give you the snapshot of Sergio's educational experiences.

[Slide: *Educational Experiences*]

He received early intervention services under developmental delay and those services were only in English. In kindergarten and first grade he attended an elementary school with no bilingual education. So he did have special education services that were then dropped and when he had them in kindergarten they were in English.

In second grade he transferred to a different school and he was enrolled in a dual language program. Oops, I guess he continued to have special education services in English and Spanish. So he's now a third grade student in a dual language program. So let's stop right there. In kindergarten and first grade, one is developing those, you know, foundational literacy skills. His instruction was in English, and he was struggling somewhat. Then he transfers in second grade and was placed in a dual language program and continues to struggle. But what about exposure? Was that a good educational decision? I think we need to ask that and really ponder that because he has not had foundational skill instruction in Spanish, yet we're going to just

pop him into learning now to read in two languages in second grade. So right there it might be something that we want to look at and address from the school level, and think most carefully about the kinds of decisions that we make for kids around language or languages of instruction.

So currently he's a third grade student in a dual language program. His brother's in middle school and re-, and receives special education services for communication. The younger sister, though, is doing really well, no academic problems, so here's a place on the form to gather and collect that information.

[Slide: *Student Information*]

No, Sergio did not attend preschool, and for the most part we find that many of our English learners do not have those opportunities to attend preschool, sometimes Head Start, and if that's the case it's very important to ask about the language or languages of instruction in the Head Start program. The brother specifically has services that are for academics and he does receive, I think, twice-a-week services from a speech language specialist.

[Slide: *Progress Monitoring Data Crucial*]

So we also want to know about progress monitoring. It's crucial to understand where a child's at, what they're struggling in, and to provide interventions and monitor their response to those interventions.

[Slide: *Grade 1 Tier 2 Interventions*]

So I have some data to share. So here's in first grade, in English, Sergio received interventions that were considered Tier 2 interventions. And if you look here you'll notice at the bottom are the dates of those, of those data points and the dates range from beginning of the school year, September, to May. And the red line is the tenth percentile. So looking at the data points, we can see that he did not achieve above the tenth percentile throughout the year given those Tier 2 interventions. So was he making good progress here or not? So answer that for yourself, and now we're on to the next slide.

[Slide: *Grade 2 Tier 2 Interventions*]

Now look what happens in second grade. In second grade, even though he didn't make much progress in those Tier 2 interventions in all of first grade, look at the dates. We provide a second year of Tier 2 interventions in English and that red line again, that tenth percentile, and we note that he did not make very good progress in second grade in the interventions that were provided for literacy.

[Slide: *Grade 3 Tier 2 Interventions*]

Let's look at the next slide, grade three. They provided more Tier 2 interventions. Luckily it wasn't for all year, and at this point, then, he gets a, a referral for academic support.

[Slide: *Interventions*]

So my questions here are: did the school refer at an appropriate time, too early, or too late?

[Slide: *Caution*]

So when data suggests that a student is not making expected rate of progress as compared to true peers, do not delay a referral for a psychoeducational evaluation. And OSEP addressed this in one of their dear colleague letters—and here is the, the language of that, which again, I will let you read at your leisure—but they're very clear that when we have data to suggest that a student needs to be looked at more carefully that we don't just continue to provide interventions over years without looking more deeply into why a student is struggling.

[Slide: *Five Things to Know About Your Students*]

The fourth component of, of the big ideas, the big areas that we need to learn about our student is, what is about their own life experiences?

[Slide: *Life Experiences*]

Sergio was born, as I said, in Portland, Oregon. He lives with his parents, older brother, younger sister, and extended family. Communication by the adults is a combination of Kanjobal and Spanish but the, the students, the children themselves are now interacting in English, so we have three languages going on in his home. After school the children generally just play with each other in the home, so they don't have a lot of interaction with their neighborhood.

[Slide: *Student's Background*]

So there is a place here for some background that also includes hearing and vision, because we want to make sure to just take care of those early on, have a hearing and vision screening to make sure that those aren't the barriers to a student's academic success.

[Slide: *Five Things to Know About Your Students*]

Okay, and the last component is, you know, know something about the student themselves.

[Slide: *Personal Characteristics*]

So for this student he's really a friendly, happy boy who, who has good peer relationships although they're, they suffer somewhat because his communication in English is not clear and it's less clear in Spanish.

We recently provided him with an iPad and he's really enjoying learning apps as well as playing on it but it seems to be a good instructional tool for him. And he's good with spatial activities such as puzzles. There are no concerns in math. And, yes, he received an ESL program in both, in all of his school settings.

[Slide: *Student Interview*]

What I've also provided on the form, the last two pages, are some ideas of student interview questions at both the secondary level and the last page at the elementary level. So we do want

to get an idea about this child. How did they approach learning? What, how do they do perceive themselves within the learning context? As well as, what do they enjoy and are they risk takers? Are they, a child that's going to...you know, how engaged are they as active learners within their own setting?

[Slide: *Sergio: Difference or Disability?*]

So here the question is...so we said that Sergio had some communication issues that were identified in preschool. And here we're still hearing that he has some intelligibility issues, but what about academic support?

He's struggling. He's been provided Tier 2 and some Tier 3 interventions, but he has not been referred to special education for academic support, so at this point what would your team do? Do you think that there's enough data to refer or not refer? Forty-three percent (43%) of those of you who have responded say that you would refer. I agree. It was not in the best interest of Sergio to wait so long for the referral because we do know that the earlier that we intervene for any kind of a disability issue, then the better the outcome. So I think definitely that a referral is in order here.

[Slide: *Second Language Behaviors; Characteristics of LD; Cultural Differences*]

I have another table that gives you some ideas of what typical second language behaviors would be as compared to what may be more indicative of learning disabilities or cultural differences.

[Slide: *Concluding Comment*]

Teams often are told, you know, you have to wait two years or three years or X amount of time while a child is developing their English before we can refer them for special education.

But actually that's not the case because, ultimately, we have to find that disability in the native language. And, therefore, really, a child can come from another country yesterday and today we could identify them with a disability because again that needs to be determined within their native language. If the struggles are only evident in English, then that's a second language issue not a disability issue. And so here is a quote that I had heard from a lawyer, oh, several years ago, but it is still relevant; that "OCR prohibits policies that impose a minimum time period before a newly arrived immigrant may be referred for evaluation of special needs including speech language assessment." So this was in response to, I guess, a question posed by San Francisco Unified School District.

[Slide: *Selected Resources*]

You'll also find some links to a couple of practitioner briefs that I have authored. This one is...there's a webinar that corresponds to this brief and you can follow the link here for that.

[Slide: *Selected Resources*]

And an older brief that has some really helpful guiding questions to help teams really consider the cultural and linguistic needs of their students. And given that, I think that we are ready to take some questions.

[Slide: *Selected resources*]

And one last reference here for a journal article on a framework that my colleague here at Portland State, Amanda Sanford, and I have developed, around providing culturally evidence-based practices as a framework around current intervention programs that we're using in the schools. And we, we just received a federal grant through the Office of Special Education Programs to research this framework for the next four years up here in an Oregon school district, so please be on the lookout here for data that we gather as our project moves along.

[Slide: *Questions*]

Okay, questions. "If you can't reasonably rule out second language factors and child doing average or above in math suggests other issues possible." I'm not quite sure, that's not a real specific question, so I guess my question there would be to make sure that you're looking at the alignment of that mathematics instruction. Is it appropriately scaffolded to the student's level of proficiency in that instructional language?

"What about students who enter English-speaking schools in the later elementary years, fourth or fifth grade, did not speak English prior, and have limited education in their native language?" Yes. You know, that's always a difficult situation. Those are the-, there's, there's students with interrupted formal education, but once again, the key is, we're going to, to target an educational skill per...usually a literacy skill. So once we do a good screening and understand what their skills are in literacy, and even though they may be in fourth or fifth grade they may be needing phonemic awareness instruction or phonics instruction, and we find that we're down at that level, no matter what level we provide instruction and we progress monitor.

"Do you see that they are learning when given appropriate targeted instruction?" Monitor that for, I say, at least a quarter, you know, ten, ten weeks. Look to see the rate of progress. If they're making some progress then you might continue that for a while longer; really watch closely. If they remain kind of flat like Sergio did, then you might be looking at boosting that to a more intensive intervention, so decreasing the number of students in a group, increasing the instructional time and the frequency, and then perhaps looking at a referral if the data shows that they are not making the progress that you would expect given robust interventions.

"Do you have tools or specific tests to help with determining language proficiency when students have cognitive disabilities?" There, there was a tool that was developed in California and I believe that WIDA was developing an instrument as well for students with little expressive language, and that may be what you're referring to. So students with more significant disabilities. And those tend to be more par-, interviews with parents and teachers, those that communicate with the child, to understand most about the receptive language. Since the student is likely with significant disabilities and expressive communication issues, not able to respond, so they would be in an interview type of format.

“Is there a section on the form for the developmental milestones?” That was embedded in the parent information, but once again, this form is provided to you as an idea, as a sample, so feel free to adapt this in any way, and it could certainly have a section that’s just called developmental milestones, sure.

“How do you determine the language of intervention for a child like Sergio who’s in a dual language program?” That’s a really important question. Basically, in dual language programs my recommendation is that you look again at that student’s...trace it back to that primary language and to their stronger language. In general, if a student is...say they come from a Spanish-speaking home and they’re in an English-Spanish dual program, then I prefer to provide literacy interventions in that primary language, in Spanish.

There’s a couple of reasons for this. Obviously, it’s, in many cases a child’s stronger language. But also for children that have a weaker phonetic core so they’re struggling in literacy, since Spanish is such a consistent language or a transparent language, it’s easier to learn to break the code in that language, thereby we break the code once and then we can help them learn to transfer those skills over into English. I don’t think that it’s efficient or effective to deliver interventions in both those instructional languages. I think we really need to look at, given a particular child and their language strength, you choose one and go with that and really focus on interventions and instruction in that language. As they’re learning those skills then we’ll teach them how, then, that transfers back into English. Okay.

Bilingual school psych: “The districts state it takes five to seven years to develop CELF.” Yes, research shows that, but that is really dependent on, I think, the strength of their ESL, ELD program. And many states are now really looking for children to progress a level of year or be exited at about the five-year mark, which I think may be a little soon. But setting high bars is, is a good thing if we provide appropriate intensity of instruction for students to reach that.

“So how do we proceed with parents whose cultural background may involve stigmas or negative attitudes about disabilities?” That’s a great question. And I think that’s why I made sure to provide kind of a parent interviews component of this form that I’ve shared with you, and you may want to include more questions around that. It’s certainly crucial to understand the parent’s perceptions. There is a book that’s been on the market, it’s probably about twenty years old, and it was about a child from a Mung, Mung background living in a central valley of California. And I believe it was called *If the Spirit Catches You, You Fall Down*. It’s still a really relevant book and it, it, it very clearly highlights a cultural clash between a family who had a child with epilepsy and their cultural beliefs and the, you know, medical community and what happens, you know, when we don’t really take the time to understand each other and to find common ground from which to help in terms of intervention and treatment. So I would highly recommend that book. It’s still relevant.

Retention—I will just say that there has never been good data around the efficacy of retention. And I think what we find is children are really discouraged in their educational attempts when they’re retained, there’s a lot of self-esteem issues; it does not generally show good academic outcomes. So rather than retention, it’s really figuring out what the child needs to learn in order to be successful in the, the curriculum, and to teach them that. So that’s where it, the

RTI and MTSS systems are so beautifully aligned with children's needs, so through an MTSS model, early on really finding where the child is struggling, providing targeted instruction, monitoring their progress, and that's what's going to help children grow academically. Because often we find with retention we didn't change the instruction, and if they didn't get it the first time and we just provide the same instruction the second time, there's not a high likelihood that it's going to work better the second time. It needs to be different.

The other system, MTSS...RTI is really the, the terminology is moving more towards a multi-tiered support system and that helps us incorporate the concept of behavioral interventions as well as academic interventions. Yeah, new acronym, but it's, you know, the same multi-tiered or leveled intensity of support.

Students who don't have a good grasp of their native language or English—okay, that's a very typical profile, isn't it? So, again, it's digging down and asking those questions to help determine why does a student not have a good grasp of either one. If we find that they've been exposed... They're one of those children for whom that bilingual is really their first language, and they haven't had a good foundation in either of their two languages, then it might make sense that they're looking impaired in both. So what happens when we then focus on delivering really good language instruction? So we provide a program that provides more robust ESL and making sure that we're aligning for their language levels in the classroom and if we see their language development growing on both sides and it's an instructional issue.

So always...I think many of these questions could be answered—target where a child has challenges or is weaker. Provide instruction that's going to target those weaknesses and monitor the progress. What happens? If you see growth, then they just need instruction. Because for many of our children it's just they lack the opportunity.

“How long to provide interventions prior to referral?” I hope that the case study I'm showing you where Sergio had interventions for three years—first grade, second grade, and much of third grade before referral, was too long. I think, you know, we want to provide initial interventions maybe for about ten to twelve weeks. There's differing timelines in that; sometimes you hear four to six weeks, six to eight. I think the research is, is, is leaning more towards giving time to children to really see change, so you want to leave it in place, like, ten weeks. You might want a second round, but I wouldn't go more than a year of providing interventions before looking...

Well, first of all, if Tier 2 interventions don't seem to be having much of an impact on the student then we can certainly intensify those and perhaps call them Tier 3 interventions, but I would not provide interventions absent a referral for more than a year, if we don't want to get into a situation like Sergio where we watched him for three years before doing anything about looking more deeply into the cause of his struggles. If someone refers the child who's been here, yes, less than a year, but that can help in school psychs because again the, that disability needs to be evident in the native language and that's where, you know, having a good family interview, understanding what does that child look like at home, can they follow directions, do they have tasks and responsibilities? So we don't want to find that we're looking at children who look to be quote “disabled” only in an academic setting or at school and at home they are

typical compared to their siblings and, and peers. So there is not a timeline we should put into place; we should be providing appropriate instruction and language development opportunities.

I also agree with you, concerned about the quality of interventions at Tier 2. That is what the article that's on the slide on the screen right now, the PLUSS Model...what we've done is we've looked at the best practices for the instruction of English learners and we've basically put it into an acronym that's a little bit simplistic, but it's a framework that we use around typical literacy intervention programs like Horizons or Reading Mastery or Corrective Reading or any other intervention program that has not been developed with English language learners in mind. So our framework PLUSS stands for P, pre-teach vocabulary and prime background knowledge; L, language use of modeling; U, use visuals and graphic organizers; S, systematic explicit instruction; and a second S, strategic use of native language. And we have a lesson plan template in which we look at within intervention programs and what, what is the vocabulary or any language structures within the lesson materials that might be a barrier for the students, and we want to do that good pre-teaching, you know, and use graphic organizers to help us teach vocabulary and concepts.

We might need to really help students understand the experiential context of the lesson so we're looking at how we make lessons, how we help English learners access the materials that we, we have for teaching reading, that do a good job of teaching reading, but we know that they don't have enough language support or cultural connection, so this is the framework that we will be researching for the next four years.

“Is it possible that a student can have normal language development in the home language but not with second language development?” Yes, absolutely. That would not be a language disorder, but it may be that the instruction of the second language, that ESL program may not be rigorous enough for that student. It's very difficult for an ESL student with a learning disability to exit because of the reading and writing portions of access and no accommodations. How do you address that? There were perceived processes and you'll have to check with your state on this. Where the IEP Team could make those decisions in the past I'm not sure what policies your own states have in that regard.

But you're right, they often typically will not meet those benchmarks, so you'll have to look again specifically at your state for that. Some states have the options of portfolios and you might be able to do a portfolio for an exit but, but let me tell you, if the struggle that your system is having is scheduling and finding time particularly at the secondary level to schedule both ESL and special education services, then I would encourage you to figure out a collaborative model, and that's what we're really looking at. Moving away from pullout programs that don't have any overlap to how we work in collaboration, because I think for the most part that students really continue to need services from both of those programs if they're struggling because of a disability. But once again, we're not looking at two isolated programs but a way to do collaborative service delivery so that they are benefiting from instruction in English and developing their English as well as getting that specially designed instruction through special ed.

“Language acquisition expectations for a child adopted into an English-speaking home, robust family language models are evident.” Well, yeah, you know, I guess it depends on the kind of communication that, you know, is in the home, but it’s hard. Yes, there’s going to be differences obviously that will have to do with the child’s own innate language learning abilities. I am a third generation Mexican-American, was exposed to Spanish in my home but not really taught it. I, I am dominant English, I’m an English speaker, and it was a struggle for me as later in life as a teenager and young adult to learn Spanish. I became fluent—I’m a little rusty now—I became fluent, but that was a struggle. So I, innately, am not a great language learner. So I think that, you know, that’s a piece that’s hard to understand about children that are adopted into families, you know, what is their kind of their learning trajectories and their potential? How much instruction and intentional instruction will they need in a language to learn it? So that’s a really hard one to answer.

And making comparisons of, of even maybe within a larger system—maybe not our school but a district—of looking at, okay, what does look typical across those children that are adopted into English-speaking homes? I think that collecting data is going to help us, and there’s not a lot of good data around that yet, so you can certainly kind of make your own local norms, looking broader than just one school.

There’s not really a consensus as to what we call long-term or, you know, what is typical for children to exit. I will let you know of one...There’s, there’s little research on the time it takes for children to become proficient in English. I do know of a dissertation study here in Oregon that was...and I, I will have to look at the author’s name, but it was in a small school district here in Oregon. The researcher looked at the length of time it took for children that were EL and in TAG programs; children that were EL typically developing and then EL students in special education. So she looked at those three groups of students.

And within their dual language model she found that for the average student it took seven years to exit; TAG students that were English learners, five years; and ELs with disabilities, nine or more years. So, again, that’s within this one instructional context so it’s hard to make generalizations, but we do know that there are going to be differences and, particularly for students with true disabilities, their trajectory may look atypical. So those rates of progress...that’s why it’s important to look to see: Are they getting stuck at particular levels? Is it taking them a long time to progress in acquisition of language? Those tend to be red flags towards disabilities.

“Progress monitoring—are there any tools you’d recommend to use specifically with English learners?” Yes. The typical screening tools, progress monitoring tools, and data making...data, data tools that I use are DIBELS and AIMSWEB, and I know that there’s been pushback from bilingual communities regarding their use with English learners, but research...there’s quite a robust pool of research that shows that these tools are valid and reliable for English learners.

We have collected a lot of data and those two systems, DIBELS and AIMSWEB, are available in English and Spanish. So to date, those are the only two languages that they’re available in. So those are a good place to start. Within our research that we’ll be doing on the PLUSS Model, one of the strands that we have in the district we’re working with will be Russian so we will be

collecting data there. So, again, be watching for our publications over the next few years but other than that, once again, I want to reassure all fields that there is a really robust body of research to support the use of these systems, curriculum-based measures with English learners.

The only area that we might need to look a little more carefully is oral reading fluency measures. Those measures are used really to measure comprehension, and for English learners, I, I think often we have not focused enough on comprehension. We overemphasize skill building or decoding, so that needs to be looked at more carefully. Because what we find is sometimes our English learners can decode yet they're not really comprehending what they're reading. So at all points of instruction, it is about making language understandable, accessible, and that we're from the get-go that reading is learning something from text. You know, what is it that...what's on the page, and that's why the PLUSS Model, we're really intentional about language.

[Slide: *Contact Information*]

So that brings us to the end of our webinar. I certainly hope it was helpful for you, and here is my contact information and my email, and please feel free to email me. Thank you all.