

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

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Webinar Goals

As a result of your participation today, you'll learn:

- The important things to know about students: language development/profile; cultural background; life experiences; educational experiences; and personal characteristics;
- The process of second language acquisition and differences between typical and atypical language development; and
- Appropriate supports and screening tools to use prior to referral to special education.

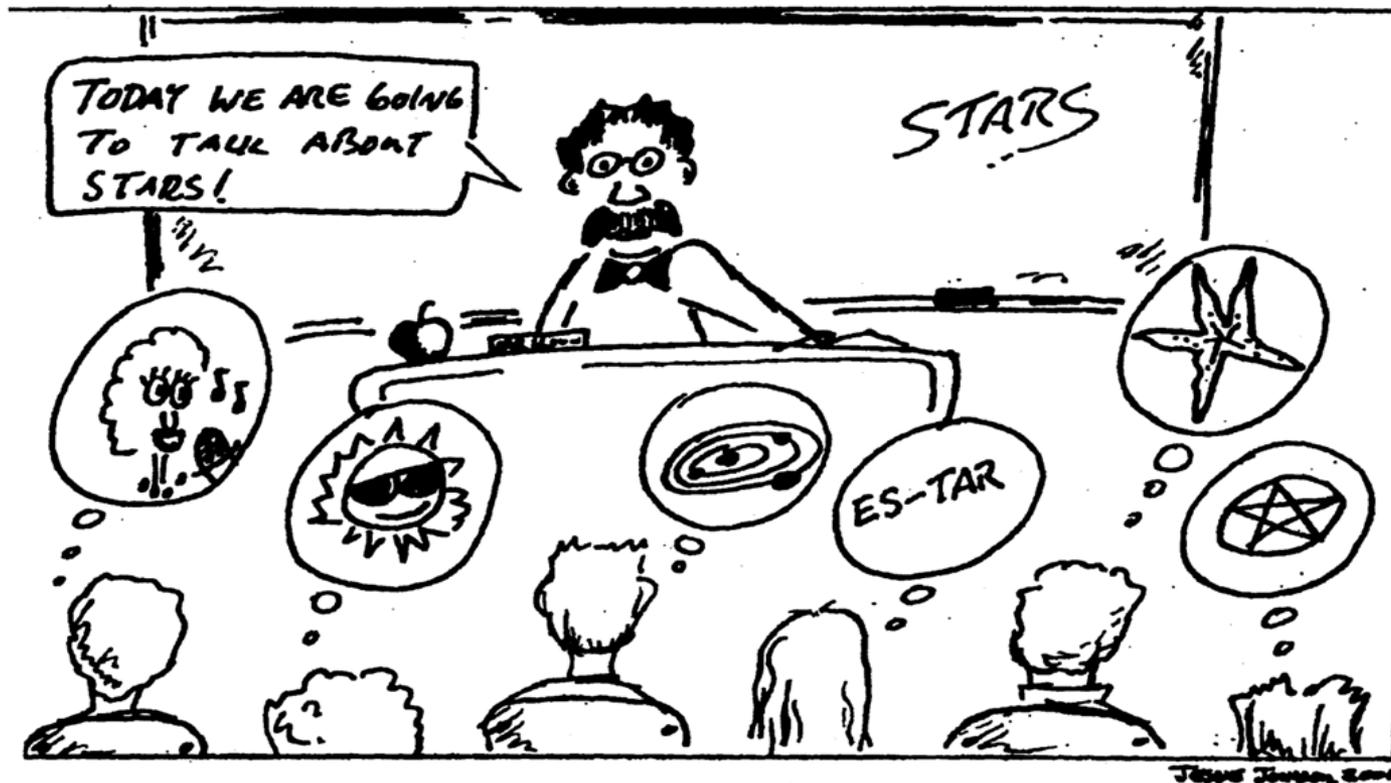
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Session Outline

- I. Setting the Context
- II. Keys to Difference vs. Disability
- III. Five Things to Know About Your Students
 1. Language Profile
 2. Cultural Background
 3. Educational Experiences
 4. Personal Characteristics
 5. Life Experiences
- IV. Decision-making

Is This Your Classroom Reality?



Is this your classroom reality?

Today's English Learner (EL) Students

- EL students who have exited English Language Development (ELD)/English as a Second Language (ESL) programs
- Students with interrupted formal education
- Long-term ELs (more than 7 year in ELD/ESL programs)
- EL students in ELD/ESL programs; ranging from levels 1-5
- Newcomers to the United States (US); less than 6 months in country
- ELs in special education

Keys to Distinguishing Difference Versus Disability

- It is essential to understand the reason(s) for the child's struggle to begin distinguishing difference from disability.
- The key is to make appropriate comparisons to gauge whether a student's progress seems to be hampered by more than just cultural and linguistic differences.
- Must compare to "true peers," when possible.

True Peers

- “True Peers” are those of the same age and grade who have similar language proficiencies, cultural and experiential background.
- If several “true peers” are struggling, this is an indication that the instruction is less than optimal for that group of students.

Student Problem Solving Profile Form

Last grade attended: _____ **Last grade attended:** _____

Language primarily used when speaking to this student at home: _____

Language student primarily uses at home: _____

Developmental milestones:

At what age did the student walk? _____

At what age did the student first start to speak? _____

What was the language the student first spoke? _____

When was a second language introduced? _____

Were there any prenatal, birth or early childhood difficulties or illnesses? _____

What are their child's strengths? _____

Does the child have any household responsibilities? _____

Does the parent have any concerns about their child? _____

What is their educational goal for their child? _____

How does the family celebrate and maintain their culture? _____

In what ways can they support their child at home? Who can help the student with their homework? _____

- You have a copy of the form for reference.
- Feel free to use or adapt.
- We will be referring to various sections of the form throughout the presentation.

Knowing your students: Language

Language Development,
Culture, and Background



Five Things to Know About Your Students

- Language Profile
- Cultural Background
- Educational Experiences
- Life Experiences
- Personal Characteristics



Language Concepts

Primary Language

- Home language
- Language child learns first

Dominant Language

- Depends on context
- Language child chooses to speak in the situation

Language Proficiency

- Based on opportunity
- Ability, accuracy, and fluency in a language

Home Language Experiences

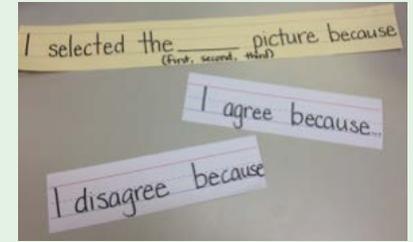
- What are the student's language experiences/development from birth until they entered school?
- Consider first, second, third language...

Typical Versus Atypical Language Development

Critical questions to ask families to determine if the students' language development seems typical or atypical for their specific context

- Was the student's language development typical as compared to peers and siblings before they entered the school setting?
- Was the child experiencing any delays in their home language (e.g., not understood by parents, not uttering first words until well past what would be considered typical) prior to entering school?

Language Knowledge/Profile



Know the English language and native language proficiencies of each of your EL students.

- Where do you get this information?
- What does it mean?

Identify appropriate teaching strategies for the proficiency stages of your students.

Identify appropriate ways for students to respond and demonstrate their knowledge based on their language proficiency stage.

Language Knowledge/Profile

Remember, EL students' language reservoir is the sum of Language 1 and Language 2!

Many US born students (second generation) may have heard both English and their native language from birth.



Language 1

Language 2

Second Language Learner: Difference

- Language performance is similar to other EL students who have comparable cultural and linguistic experiences. (“true peer;” Brown & Doolittle, 2008)
- Limited vocabulary in the native language due to lack of opportunity to use and hear the native language.
- Student shifts from one language to another within a single utterance
- Communication may be impeded by an accent or dialect.

Language Disability

- Language patterns are unique to the student and unlike others in the student’s cultural community.
- Student demonstrates limited vocabulary even when there are rich language opportunities in the native language.
- Word-finding problems are evident in both languages and often student substitutes with another language.
- Student exhibits deficits in expressive and receptive language, which impedes communication.

Adapted from Klingner, Hoover & Baca (2008)

Second Language Learner: Difference

- Age appropriate behaviors in interpreting facial expressions, appropriate physical proximity, and use and interpretation of gestures.
- Grammatical errors due to native language influences (e.g., student may omit initial verb in a question—You like cake? (omission of Do).
- Word order in L1 may differ from that of English (e.g., in Arabic sentences are ordered verb-subject-object while Urdu sentences are ordered subject-object-verb.

Language Disability

- Student demonstrates difficulty using and interpreting nonverbal language, often leading to social problems.
- Grammatical structures continue to be inappropriate in both languages even after extensive instruction (e.g., student cannot produce the past tense in either Spanish or English indicating difficulty with grammatical tenses).
- Student demonstrates limited phrasing and vocabulary in both languages (e.g., his/her sentences in both languages demonstrate limited or no use of adjectives and adverbs and both languages are marked by a short length of utterance).

Progress in English Acquisition

The general rule of thumb is that students progress through one stage per year.

However, some students take more time to progress through Levels 3 and 4...

Language Proficiency Information

School:

Student Problem Solving Profile

District:

Language Proficiency Assessments:

Eng (state assessment) (Score/Level)	Eng: WMLS-R/_____ % of success in oral language	Span: WMLS-R/_____ % of success in oral language

Five Things to Know About Your Students

- **Language Profile**
- Cultural Background
- Educational Experiences
- Life Experiences
- Personal Characteristics



Language Knowledge/Profile

- His native languages are Kanjobal and Spanish.
- Currently, Sergio's English language proficiency is at the Early Intermediate Level.
- His Spanish proficiency level is at the Beginning Level.
- His proficiency in Kanjobal is unknown.
- At home, the family uses a mixture of Kanjobal and Spanish and frequently code-switch or use both languages within a sentence.
- His oral English is more intelligible than his Spanish.
- However, he may be using both Kanjobal and Spanish when teachers assume he is trying to communicate in Spanish.

As Compared to “True Peers” : Language

- There are no other students who speak the particular dialect of Sergio’s primary language of Kanjobal.
- The true peer comparisons are to his siblings and cousins.
- With the exception of an older brother in special education, the children are making good educational progress.

Knowing your students: Culture

Language Development,
Culture, and Background



Gay(2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through the strengths of these students.

Culturally Responsive Teaching is...



The lens through which teachers see their students and their students' learning



the filter through which teachers listen to how students express their needs and dreams



the way in which teachers interact with students when delivering instruction using curricular materials, and making educational decisions

What Do Teachers Need to Know



- What cultural knowledge do your students possess about their own culture and US culture?
- What are each student's prior experiences in school and life?
- What are the ways in which they are used to learning?

Five Things to Know About Your Students

- Language Profile
- **Cultural Background**
- Educational Experiences
- Life Experiences
- Personal Characteristics



Cultural Background



- He was born in Portland but both of his parents are from small villages in Guatemala.
- The parents' native language is Kanjobal - a Mayan language.
- There are very few people in Portland from their region.
- They interact to some extent with the Mexican community but mostly socialize within their own family group.
- In their culture, power is hierarchical and the American focus on equality can be unfamiliar.
- Individuals from rural regions tend to have very limited formal education.

Information from Parents

School:

Student Problem Solving Profile

District:

Information from Parents:

Mother's L1

L2

L3

Father's L1

L2

L3

Last grade attended:

Last grade attended:

Language primarily used when speaking to this students at home:

Language student primarily uses at home:

Developmental Milestones:

As Compared to “True Peers” : Culture

- Although Sergio was born in the U.S., his family does not engage much within the broader community.
- Parents believe teachers have the responsibility of educating their children and the family provides for their well being.
- Sergio, thus, is unfamiliar with many concepts within the curriculum.
- How can a teacher help bridge the differences?

Remember...

A wide variety of ethnically and culturally diverse examples, scenarios, and vignettes could be used to embody and demonstrate the concepts, principles, skills, and ideas being taught.

Knowing your students: Educational Experiences

Language Development,
Culture, and Background



Five Things to Know About Your Students

- Language Profile
- Cultural Background
- **Educational Experiences**
- Life Experiences
- Personal Characteristics



Educational Experiences

- Sergio received Early Intervention services under Developmental Delay.
- Early intervention services were in English.
- In kindergarten and first grade, Sergio attended an elementary school with no bilingual education; special education services were in English.
- In second grade he transferred to a different school and entered a dual language program; special education services are in English and Spanish.
- Sergio is a third grade student in a dual language (English/Spanish) immersion program.
- His older brother is in middle school and receives special education services for Communication.
- The younger sister attends kindergarten in Sergio's school and is reportedly doing well.

Student's Educational Background

1. Student's Background

Attendance:

Days Absent/Tardy Kinder	Days Absent/Tardy Gr. 1	Days Absent/Tardy Gr. 2
Days Absent/Tardy Gr. 3	Days Absent/Tardy Gr. 4	Days Absent/Tardy Gr. 5

Hearing	Date	Results	Recheck needed
Vision	Date	Results	Recheck needed
Other			

Educational Background:

Preschool No Yes Language of Instruction: _____

Kindergarten Full-Day Half-Day Language of Instruction: _____

Early Intervention Program No Yes IEP Focus: _____

Retention No Yes If so, when? _____

Educational Experiences in Other Schools or Countries (include any concerns noted in file): _____

Was the school in an urban or rural setting?

Student Information

School: _____ Student Problem Solving Profile _____ District: _____

Student:

Date:

Grade:

Birthdate:

Typical Birthdate for This Grade is September 1, 20__ to August 31, 20__)

Student's L1:

Student's L2:

Student's L3:

Teacher (L1):

Teacher (L2):

Core Reading Program Eng:

Span:

Concerns (circle all areas):

Reading

Writing

Math

Other _____

What are the specific concerns regarding the areas circled above?

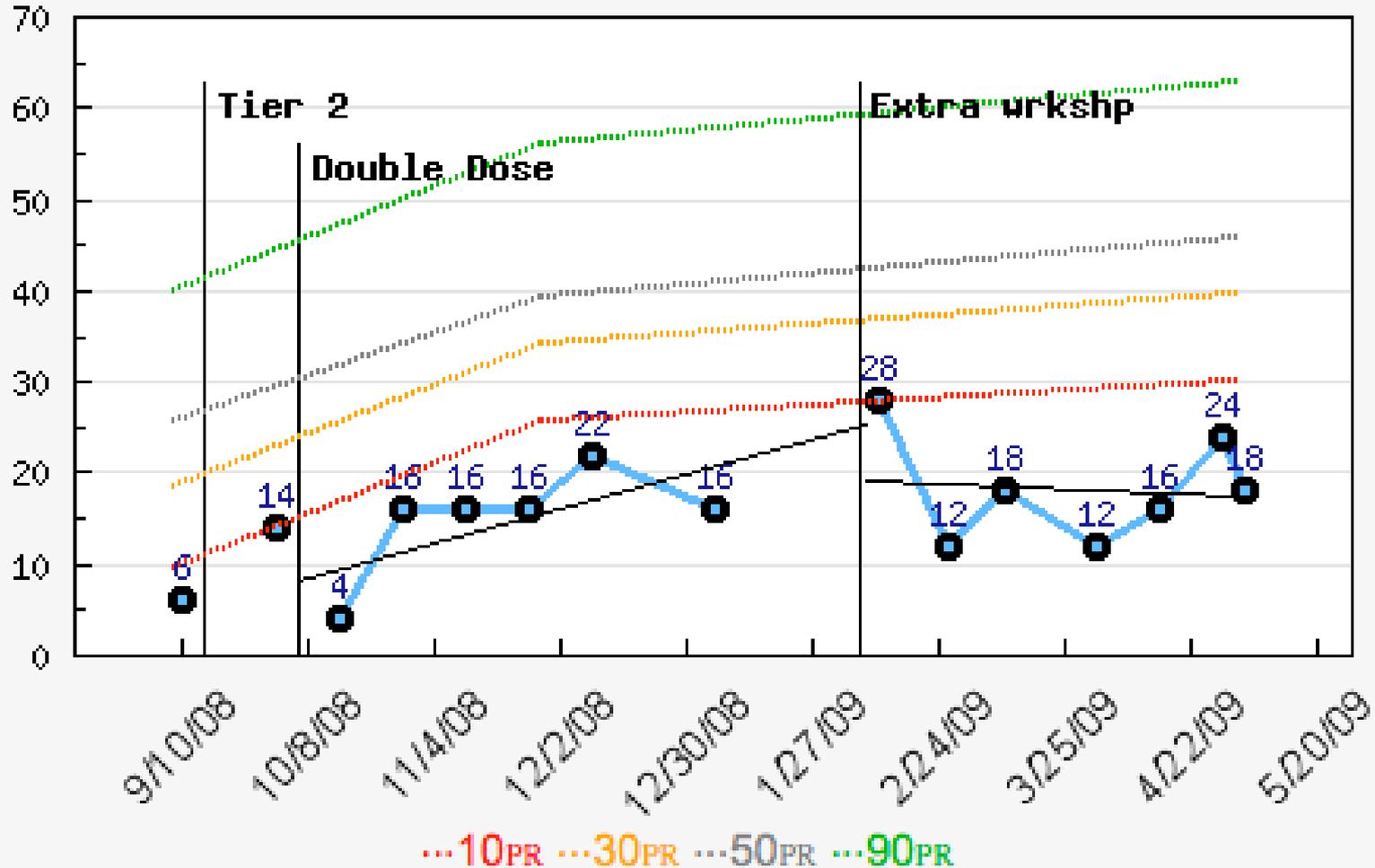
Concerns reported by:

Team Members:

Progress Monitoring Data Crucial

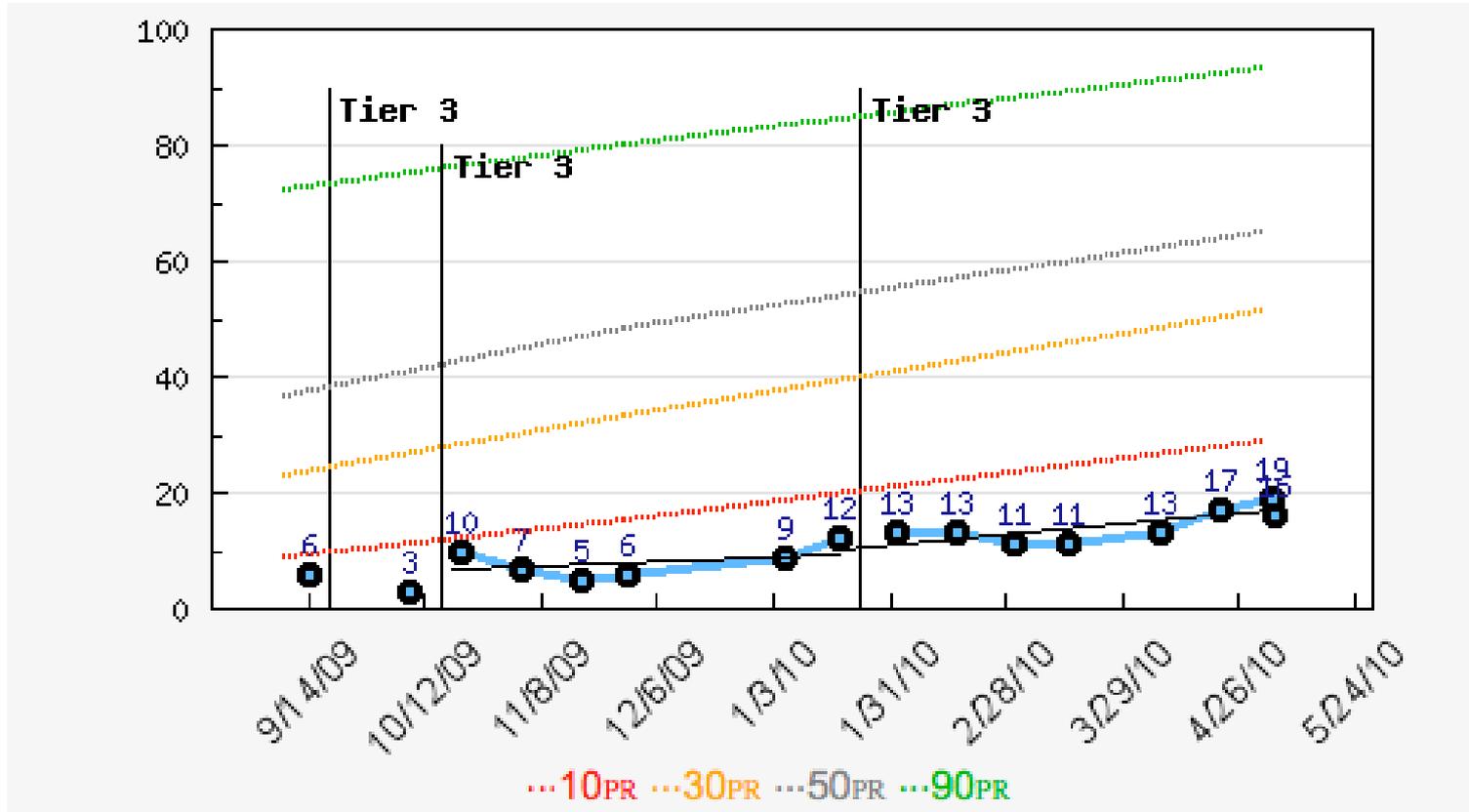
- After understanding the child's context, provide appropriate, targeted interventions and closely monitor progress.

Grade 1, Letter Sounds

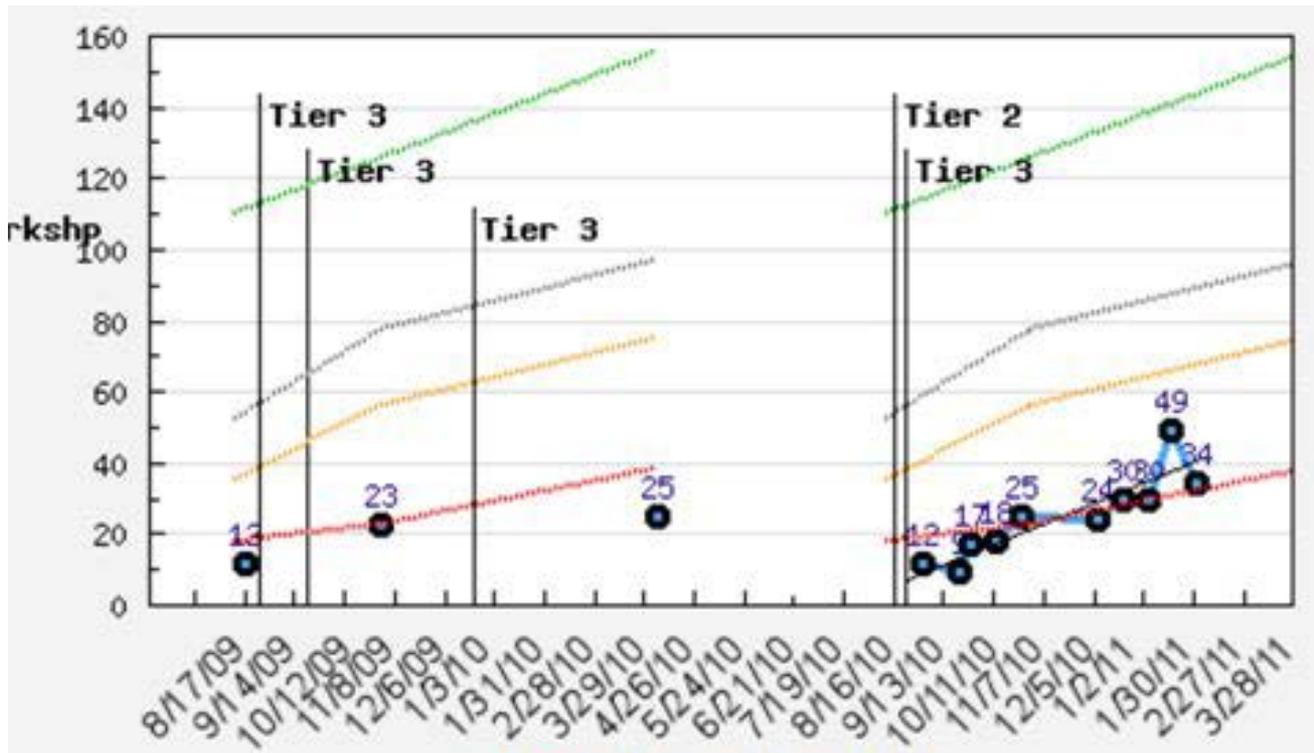


Grade 1 Tier 2 Interventions

Grade 2, Word Reading Fluency



Grade 2 Tier 2 Interventions



Grade 3 Tier 2 Interventions

Interventions

Did the school refer:

- At the appropriate time?
- Too early?
- Too late

Caution

- When data suggests the student is not making expected rate of progress as compared to true peers, do not delay a referral for a psychoeducational evaluation.
- **OSEP Addressed this:** “The regulations implementing the 2004 Amendments to the IDEA include a provision mandating that States allow, as part of their criteria for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability (SLD), the use of a process based on the child’s response to scientific, research-based intervention. See 34 CFR 300.307(a)(2). OSEP continues to receive questions regarding the relationship of RTI to the evaluation provisions of the regulations. In particular, OSEP has heard that some LEAs may be using RTI to delay or deny timely initial evaluation to determine if a child is a child with a disability and, therefore, eligible for special education and related services pursuant to an individualized education program.”

Knowing your students: Life Experiences

Language Development,
Culture, and Background



Five Things to Know About Your Students

- Language Profile
- Cultural Background
- Educational Experiences
- **Life Experiences**
- Personal Characteristics



Life Experiences

- Sergio was born in Portland, Oregon.
- He lives with his parents, older brother and younger sister.
- His mother's two sisters and their families live with Sergio's family in one home; there are nine children in the home.
- Communication by the adults is a combination of Kanjobal and Spanish with mostly English used by the children.
- After school the children generally play with each other in the home.

1. Student's Background

1. Student's Background

Attendance:

Days Absent/Tardy Kinder	Days Absent/Tardy Gr. 1	Days Absent/Tardy Gr. 2
Days Absent/Tardy Gr. 3	Days Absent/Tardy Gr. 4	Days Absent/Tardy Gr. 5

Hearing	Date	Results	Recheck needed
Vision	Date	Results	Recheck needed
Other			

Knowing your students: Personal Characteristics

Language Development, Culture,
and Background



Five Things to Know About Your Students

- Language Profile
- Cultural Background
- Educational Experiences
- Life Experiences
- **Personal Characteristics**



Personal Characteristics

- Sergio is a friendly, happy boy who gets along with his peers.
- He prefers to communicate in English and he is more intelligible in English.
- He was recently provided a tablet and is enjoying learning apps and playing games on it.
- Sergio also enjoys puzzles.

Student Interview

Student Interview - Secondary Level

1. Were you born in the U.S? If not, how long have you lived here?
2. How long have you attended this school? Where did you go before?
3. Are you involved in any special activities outside of school (e.g., sports, religious, volunteering, cultural groups)? If yes, what activities?
4. Do you read and write in your first language? If yes, how well?
5. Do either of your parents (or guardians) read and write in their first language? If yes, a little bit or very well?
6. What do you want to do after you graduate from high school?
7. What are your favorite subjects (or classes)?

Sergio: Difference or Disability?

- What would your team do?



Second Language Behaviors

- Difficulty following directions
- Difficulty expressing needs or answering questions
- Poor attention and concentration
- May be easily frustrated
- Errors in speech, reading and writing

Characteristics of Learning Disability

- Difficulty following multiple directions
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty finishing work on time
- Slow in learning sound-symbol correspondence

Cultural Differences

- Discourse styles different (e.g., overlapping talk vs. waiting for one's turn)
- Differences in gender expectations
- Anxiety and stress due to process of adapting to new culture
- Differences in ways of showing respect
- Differences in writing patterns and rhetorical features

Adapted from Klingner, Hoover & Baca (2008)

Second Language Behaviors

- Slow processing
- Confused by slang or idioms
- Poor auditory memory

Characteristics of Learning Disability

- Difficulty remembering sight words
- Difficulty understanding social situations
- Difficulty retelling a story in sequence

Cultural Differences

- May view time differently
- Differences in behavioral expectations across settings
- Focus on group achievement instead of individual

Adapted from Klingner, Hoover & Baca (2008)

Concluding Comment

Regarding the issue of referring students for special education evaluation who are recent arrivals, Elena Gallegos (an attorney in Austin, Texas) gave the following information at a Special Ed and the Law conference in held in Washington State in 1999.

She states 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. San Francisco Unified School District, 16 IDELR 194 (OCR 1989)."

Selected Resources

Brown & Sanford (2010) Practitioner's Brief

<http://www.rti4success.org/resource/rti-english-language-learners-appropriately-using-screening-and-progress-monitoring-tools>

Selected Resources

Brown & Doolittle (2008) Practitioner's Brief:

<http://www.rti4success.org/resource/cultural-linguistic-and-ecological-approach-response-intervention-english-language-learners>

Selected Resources

Enhancing Instruction for English Learners in
Response to Intervention Systems: The PLUSS
Model

Sanford, Brown, Turner (2012)

Selected Resources

A Cultural, Linguistic, and Ecological Framework
for Response to Intervention with English
Language Learners

Culturally Responsive Systems: Education for All

“The beauty of the world lies in the diversity of its people” ~ *Unknown*



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