Literacy Programs: Identification and Assessment of English Language Learners

by

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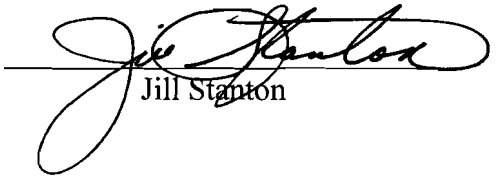

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ABSTRACT

The United States has seen an influx of English language learners (ELL), particularly in public schools. Due to this increase in ELL students, educators are faced with the question of how to effectively teach and assess this population of students. There is currently a wealth of information available on how to properly adjust the curriculum to meet ELL students needs; however, more information needs to be gathered on the current programs used in literacy instruction, and how ELL students are assessed for special services.

This research project reviewed the relevant literature pertaining to literacy programs used with ELL students, how ELL students are assessed for special services, and the psychometric problems of assessments used with ELL students. The results of past literature indicate three main findings. First, current literacy programs used with ELL students are designed for English speaking students and

modified for ELL students. Second, a small portion of ELL students are referred for evaluation, and an even smaller portion are actually identified as needing special services. Finally, the current assessments used to identify students with special needs contain culturally loaded content and appear to be biased against ELL students.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The controversy behind bilingual education in the United States and the push for instruction in English only, dates back hundreds of years. In the mid 1500's, bilingual education was a part of church practice to spread the word about Christianity throughout the United States (Genzuk, 1988). It was not until the late 1800's when the United States began to decrease the amount of bilingual education applied in schools. This decrease led to some states enacting "English Only" laws. It was not until 1968 that a change in the education of English Language Learners (ELL) occurred (Citrin, Reingold, Walters, & Green, 1990). The Bilingual Education Act (BEA) is a federal policy which forced public schools to realize bilingual education is needed for some students. Funds were set aside to ensure that bilingual programs were being used in schools (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006).

Many policies and changes were made throughout the years, particularly "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB). Schools were once required to show "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) for all students, until the recent Title III Regulation under NCLB. This gives some schools flexibility in showing AYP in order to allow ELL students to learn English. Teaching English is only the beginning process for educators today. It can take 4 to 12 years for ELL students to be at the same academic/cognitive level of those whose native language is English (Collier, 1995).

Statement of the Problem

Public schools in the United States continue to see an increase in the enrollment of ELL students. In the last ten years, there has been a 60% increase, with a total of more than 5 million ELL students attending public schools in the United States (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006). While both coasts

have seen tremendous growth, even Midwest states such as Minnesota and Wisconsin have seen a dramatic increase of ELL students. In the last ten years, Minnesota has seen a 161% increase in ELL students, while Wisconsin has had a 71% (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006). There are currently 85 different languages spoken in the state of Wisconsin's public schools (Wisconsin Department of Instruction, 2007). Many of these students come from homes where English is not spoken at all. This factor, along with the growing ELL population, has heightened the need for literacy programs and assessment measures tailored to fit ELL students' needs. Unfortunately, fewer than one in five teachers who currently serve second language learners are certified to teach ELL students (Thomas & Grimes, 2002). Nearly one-third of ELL students receive no tailored instruction in English or any subject areas. The shortages of teachers, along with the lack of an established national curriculum, increase ELL students' helplessness in academics.

Literacy skills cannot be completely achieved until second language acquisition is fully developed. This is an area that researchers do not totally understand. It is known that social talk and academic language develop at different rates. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) is the form of communication that is used in daily routine and social talk (Cummins, 1984). This usually develops within two to three years, which is much sooner than academic language, or Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). CALP is needed for academic success, but can take five to seven years to develop. BICS can often be mistaken as full language immersion, which can lead to higher expectations for educators. Although an ELL student may be able to engage in social conversations, there are cognitively demanding and context embedded communication skills that this student may not understand.

Literacy success can be challenging for ELL students because they are often learning a second language while simultaneously learning to read. There are numerous ways to teach a child to read, but none of them are geared towards ELL students. Research has shown the advantages of using phonemic awareness to teach reading. Readers who were given phonics instruction had faster word recognition in comparison to other instructional methods used (Berninger et al., 2000; Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, Mehta, 1998). Phonemic awareness was also found to be the first step towards developing decoding ability. The National Reading Panel (2000) has indicated five reading components that are determinants of literacy achievement by ELL students: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In particular, phonemic awareness is important in developing pre-literacy skills. Bradley and Bryant (1985) found that phonemic awareness instruction with pre-readers lead to significant gains in later reading skills. This predictive power is what attracts researchers and educators alike. There appears to be a direct link between phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle that outweighs the use of other approaches (Bradley & Bryant, 1985). This research has led most educators to favor the phonemic awareness approach. However, the majority of research done on pre-literacy instruction has been on children with proficient skills in English. Despite the vast amount of research on phonemic awareness, other methods such as direct instruction (DI) and whole language have been used as well.

In 2005, only 27% of fourth grade ELL students scored at or above "basic level" of performance and only 7% performed at a "proficient level" in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). A small number of ELL students are referred for special education services (9.2%) in comparison to the general population (13.5%). Abedi (2002) reports lower academic achievement among ELL students in comparison to non-ELL students. Although

there is a scarcity of data on ELL students in special education, the existing data suggests the majority (56%) of ELL students may have a learning disability (LD) along with reading disabilities (Klingner, Artiles, Barletta, & Mendez, 2006). The inconsistency in reports of ELL students having a lower academic achievement raises questions concerning the identification of ELL students who may have special needs. Bilingual/multilingual students may not fare as well on these tests because their first language is not English. English only standardized cognitive and achievement tests are most used to assess ELL students. The verbal/language portions of these tests are culturally loaded and often produce low scores from ELL students (Abedi, 2002). With increasing numbers of ELL students, educators are going to have to find alternative methods of assessment. In particular, school psychologists need to become more conscious of effective cross-cultural assessment practices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the existing literature regarding ELL students and how they are assessed. This paper will look at commonly used methods and programs, the effectiveness of these programs, as well as how students are assessed for special services. Six research questions guided this study:

1. What is the history of English Language Learners in the United States?
2. How is a second, third, or fourth language acquired?
3. What is known about the effectiveness of phonemic awareness instruction, whole language approaches, and direct instruction (DI) on English Language Learners' literacy skills?
4. What is the incidence rate of ELL students identified for special services, like learning disabilities?

5. How effective are current assessments in determining educational needs of ELL students?

6. How will school psychologists be impacted by the increasing need to authentically assess ELL students for special services?

Definition of Terms

Below is a list of frequently used terms throughout the literature review that needed to be explicitly understood in order to fully comprehend the research.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP is an accountability measure used under NCLB. School districts must provide ample evidence that students are meeting all requirements under NCLB and are making progress (National Clearing House for Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006).

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS). A communication skill that is used daily in social talk and does not require a high degree of cognition. BICS typically develops within two to three years (Cummins, 1984).

Bilingual/Multilingual. The ability to speak two or more languages (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006).

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). A communication style that requires higher order thinking. This skill enables students to think analytically, find relationships, and draw conclusions. CALP normally takes five to seven years to develop (Cummins, 1984).

Direct Instruction (DI). A reading program that starts in kindergarten and has very specific instructions for teachers on how to teach reading. This programs uses phonics,

vocabulary, rapid pace instruction, and assessments to help promote language development (Slavin & Cheung, 2003).

English Language Learners (ELL). Also called English as a Second Language (ESL), ELL students are students who were not born in the United States and the primary language spoken at home is one other than English. These students lack the language skills necessary for listening comprehension, reading, writing, and speaking proficiently in English. This may have a significant impact on the success the student has in regular education classrooms (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB was enacted in 2002 to improve the performance of U.S public schools by providing them with accountability measures (National Clearing House for Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006).

Phonemes. The smallest unit of sound that comprises a spoken language (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Phonemic Awareness. Refers to the ability to manipulate phonemes in spoken words (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Whole Language. An instructional approach based on the assumption that learning cannot occur by closely studying chunks of a word. This approach emphasizes that children should focus on meaning rather than parts of a word (Wikipedia, 2007).

Assumptions and Limitations

The assumptions of this literature review include being able to obtain relevant articles pertaining to the topic discussed. A limitation of this literature review is the vast amount of

information to sort through. There are also political ramifications tied to immigration concerns which may create bias in some of the information available.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

The following literature review will first discuss the history behind English Language Learners (ELL) in the United States. It will then describe the acquisition of a second language and its role in developing literacy skills. Further, research on literacy programs will be presented and discussed. Finally, the number of ELL students identified as learning disabled, how ELL student are assessed for special services, and the role of school psychologists will be reviewed.

History of English Language Learners in the United States

In the late 1500's, Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries taught bilingual education by using Native American dialects in southwestern Native American tribes (Genzuk, 1988). In New England, bilingualism was used in seminaries to teach English and German. By 1775, more than 118 bilingual schools were established to teach religious education (Genzuk, 1988). German-language schooling prevailed until the 20th century, with pressures to change to English instruction. Until this time, bilingualism was accepted as a fact of life. There was no social pressure to adopt an official language, with many writers of the Constitution believing a democracy should let the people decide what language they want to speak. In 1854, Wisconsin Catholic schools taught students mainly in English and German. The United States began to see a wave of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe that stirred up nationalistic feelings. It was not until 1887 that the United States saw a decrease in the amount of bilingual instruction being taught in private and public schools (Genzuk, 1988). Many states passed "English only" statutes between 1887 and 1920, prohibiting the use of any language but English in public schools (Citrin et al., 1990). Many public schools, such as in St. Paul, Minnesota, dropped bilingual education, making German become a foreign language only offered in the upper

grades. This "Americanization" of requiring proficiency in English was linked with political loyalty and being a good American. The pressure for immigrants to assimilate was tremendous during this time.

It was not until the 1960's that America saw a backlash surrounding bilingual education. The Civil Rights Movement for equality between blacks and whites instilled hope that public education could be changed. In particular, the 1954 Supreme Court decision in Brown vs. the Board of Education ended legal segregation in schools and other public places (Cozzens, 1995). Finally, a change in how ELL students are educated occurred in 1968 with the passing of the Bilingual Education Act (BEA). This federal policy forced public schools and the general public to realize bilingual education is needed for some students. Funds were set aside to ensure that bilingual programs were being used in schools where needed (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006). This act rejected the United States attempt at the "melting pot" to conform multicultural residents to an "American identity." Many people in the public saw the BEA and bilingual education as disrespectful to America, which elicited some to have a negative response towards programs not promoting English only.

The Lau v. Nichols Supreme Court decision requiring schools to establish special education programs for non-English speaking students has been the foundation of many bilingual programs. In 1974, thirteen non-English speaking Chinese students filed suit against the San Francisco Unified School District (Genzuk, 1988). They alleged they were not receiving an adequate education because instruction was only being taught in English. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the students under the grounds the school was violating the 1964 Civil Rights Act and also the student's constitutional right to "equal protection under the law."

Over the years Congress passed numerous acts to make certain ELL students were receiving a quality education. In particular, Amendments to Title VII in 1978 were the first reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which required states to provide instruction in students' native language whenever possible(National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006). It was also required of schools to spend a minimum 15% of their money towards teacher development.

In 1981, California Senator Hayakawa proposed the first Amendment to declare English as the official language of the United States. This Amendment made no legislative progress, even when reintroduced in 1983 and 1985 (Citrin et al., 1990). Hayakawa and others formed an organization which promoted "English only." Since their efforts to pass the English Amendment did not work, the focus turned on individual states. This focus resulted in 44 states passing English as the state's sole official language, each varying in degree on restrictions of other languages. To whatever the degree, these states are making a bold statement to the public regarding equality. Passing the "English only" laws creates the attitude, "If you want to stay in our country, learn English," with little regard to the time and instruction needed to help them do so. In 1998, California made a bold statement to its citizens by passing Proposition 227, which declared English as the official language. This law changed how ELL students are taught in California schools; in particular, it attempted to eliminate most bilingual classrooms (Grissom, 2004). Under Proposition 227, ELL students are placed in English language classrooms, where they learn English by being taught in English only. Since the passing of Proposition 227, California school districts have seen little to no change in the number of ELL students becoming reclassified as fluent in English (Grissom, 2004). Immersion into English only classrooms appears to not be a better method to help ELL students trying to become fluent in English.

Recently, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to replace Title VII with Title III. In order to qualify, students must be limited in proficiency in English at a level which adversely affects their educational performance (National Clearing House for Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006). ELL students qualifying under NCLB must show Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) to eventually be taken out of this program. School districts are given funding if they implement and provide high quality language instruction, promote parental involvement, show improvements in English proficiency, and show AYP for ELL students. These school districts are held accountable for ELL and other immigrant students AYP (Wisconsin Department of Instruction, 2007).

A major problem behind requiring schools to show AYP is those schools with a large ELL population must make the same progress as schools made up of predominately non-ELL students (National Clearing House for Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006). Also, the new Title III reauthorization under NCLB, will help ELL students be included yearly in state assessments of academic achievement in reading/language arts and mathematics. ELL students must receive appropriate accommodations, which could include native language assessments. Title I also requires that ELL students be assessed annually for their proficiency in English in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (US Department of Education, 2006). Providing tests in the student's native language has been criticized by some educators and researchers (Abedi, 2004). Most often, native language assessments are not available. Tests are often translated from English to the student's native language, which puts the validity into question, as not all words can be translated to have the

some meaning. The difficulty of vocabulary words tends to differ across languages, yet provisions under NCLB require states to rely heavily on the test results (Abedi, 2004).

Second Language Acquisition

Second language acquisition is a process that is not fully understood by researchers. There are a number of theories that attempt to explain the process of acquiring a second language, but none of the theories seem to be able to fully explain this process. Cummins (1984) described what is known about the difference between social language skills and language skills that require more advanced cognition. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) is a form of communication that is used in daily routine and social talk. This does not require a high degree of cognition. Students learning a second language will typically develop BICS in two to three years. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is much more difficult to develop in comparison to BICS. CALP skills are necessary for literacy gains and academic success. Unlike BICS, CALP can take five to seven years to fully develop. It is cautioned by Cummins (1984) that a student may appear to have developed fluency in a second language because of BICS, but BICS does not equal CALP. These are two different skills of which both are necessary components for literacy success.

As stated earlier, BICS is a form of conversational or social talk. This skill will not ensure academic success in ELL students (Cummins, 1984). ELL students must acquire CALP, or an academic language before success in school will be obtained. Unfortunately, many people perceive BICS capable students as being able to academically apply the language when nothing could be further from the truth. Academic language requires in-depth vocabulary skills. Vocabulary skills must be applicable to written language as well. Oral language, or social talk, is much easier to master than written language (Francis, 2006). The understanding of the multiple

meanings of words, proper word usage, sentence structure, and syntax are required to fully obtain success in CALP or academic language.

All of these components to success in school are dependent upon a child's ability to read. Research supports the premise that reading fluency and comprehension are predictors to further success in school (Francis, 2006). The components of reading must be taken with more seriousness when dealing with ELL students. The two skills of BICS and CALP are necessary components of literacy development. Educators must be aware of the proper instructional methods and important reading components to ensure reading success in ELL students.

Essential Reading Components

Acquiring a second language is only part of the process of learning to read. ELL students often lack academic language, which is required for reading success. ELL students most often must learn a second language while simultaneously learning to read. The areas of difficulty for ELL students are most commonly comprised of skills in vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Research supports the idea that ELL students need early, intensive, and explicit instruction in phonics and phonemic awareness. These two areas are highly correlated across languages and have been shown to be a predictor of reading success (Francis, 2006).

Learning the concept of phonemic awareness is an important aspect of successful literacy development (Adams, 1990). Phonemic awareness is necessary before learning to read because the English language is alphabetic. Children must gain an understanding that each letter represents a sound, or many sounds. Research has shown a link between the understanding of phonemic awareness and reading success (Bradley & Bryant, 1985). A lack of understanding often leads to reading failure. Torgesen et al. (2001) found instruction in phonemic awareness with those demonstrating reading failure showed significant student gains in reading. It should be

noted the students included in this study were fluent in the English language, meaning they were not ELL students.

Research on phonemic awareness has mainly focused on primarily English speaking students. Research is just now beginning to address the issue of the effectiveness of phonemic awareness instruction on bilingual or multilingual students. In an overall review of literature on phonological awareness and reading, some researchers found that phonological awareness in one language supports phonological awareness in a second language (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006). Hence, if students are phonemically aware in their first language, this will lead to phonemic awareness in their second language, after instruction. If a student has not significantly developed their second language (English), phonemic awareness instruction in that language can improve literacy development (Carlisle, Beeman, Davis, & Sparim, 1999). The National Reading Panel (2000) reported that although approaches used with native language speakers are effective, these approaches must be altered to fit the needs of ELL/bilingual students. It was also reported that the elements of reading for monolingual students, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency, appear to be the same for bilingual students.

Programs and their Effectiveness

Literacy instruction is a key component in early education. With the increasing population of ELL students in public schools, there is a need for an effective approach to teach reading. This is a more challenging task in comparison to teaching monolingual students. This section will focus on instructional practices used for developing literacy skills in ELL students.

Lesaux and Siegel (2003) did a study to examine the effectiveness of the phonemic awareness approach on ELL students. Pre-literate ELL students received instruction using

phonemic awareness in kindergarten and phonics instruction in grade one. At the end of grade two, the students were evaluated on their reading ability, word naming, and reading comprehension. The ELL students performed as well as, or better, in comparison to monolingual students at their grade level. Stuart (2004) also did a study using pre-literate ELL students. The students were divided into two groups, with one group receiving phonemic awareness instruction, and the other group receiving a more whole language approach. The results found that the phonemic awareness group performed significantly better on tests of initial phoneme identification, phoneme segmentation, letter-sound recognition and recall, and word/non-word reading. The students' accuracy of word reading and spelling were also significantly better than the whole language group.

The effectiveness of whole language instruction used with ELL students has also been studied extensively. In particular, Almaguer (2005) used dyad reading with third grade Hispanic ELL students who were struggling readers. Dyad reading is comprised of having a "leader reader," a student who is not struggling, and an "assisted reader," a student who does not read well. In a pre-test/post-test comparison, the Hispanic ELL students had significant improvements in reading fluency and reading comprehension. This whole language approach is thought to be more effective because the student is exposed to text and hears the correct pronunciation of words (Almaguer, 2005). Self-esteem and social interaction between ELL and non-ELL students can also increase because of the cooperative learning aspect of this strategy.

Direct instruction (DI) is an approach that uses letter-sound correlation, or phonemic awareness. Very specific instructions are given to the teacher as to how to implement DI. This program starts in kindergarten using phonetically-based vocabulary instruction. DI moves at a rapid pace with regular assessments required. DI was not designed for ELL students, but is often

used with them. Gersten (1985) evaluated the effectiveness of DI on students who spoke a variety of Asian languages. These students were limited in English; therefore, only English words the students understood were used. The results indicated 75% of the DI group scored at or above grade level when tested.

Jolly Phonics is an English kindergarten phonetic reading program. In a comparison study, Stuart (1999) compared the effectiveness of Jolly Phonics on ELL students to a Big Books program, which is a series of popular children's books that focuses on teaching letters and words. A teacher from each selected school volunteered to implement one of the programs. Pre-tests were given to determine the students' vocabulary, oral language, phonemic awareness, and letter-sound identification. The students in the Big Books program scored higher on vocabulary measures, while the Jolly Phonics group scores higher on phonemic awareness and reading and writing skills. This pre-test finding was attributed to the fact that the study began halfway through the school year. The volunteer teachers may have already been teaching the core components of their selected program. The researchers used gain scores to deal with the pre-test differences. The interventions took place for one hour per day for 12 weeks. A follow-up one year later found the differences in reading and writing were not as large, but the Jolly Phonics group still out performed the Big Books group.

A number of bilingual programs have been used in public schools to implement reading instruction. Success for All is a reading program with two versions. One version teaches reading in Spanish in grades 1-2 and then transitions to English only instruction. The second version teaches reading in English only from the beginning. A focus is put on phonics development in grades K-1, and cooperative learning, direct instruction, and comprehension skills are the focus in grades 2-6. Studies done on the effectiveness of Success for All compare the bilingual

variation to other bilingual programs, and the English variation to other English only programs (Slavin & Cheung, 2003). Of the school districts participating in the study, positive results were found for the English only and bilingual variation of the program. In contrast, long-term results were mixed. The Spanish bilingual program found no difference between control and experimental 3rd graders. This was attributed to the large proportion of high achieving ELL students who transferred out of the bilingual program, into English only instruction. The English only variation did find long-term positive effects for schools and students participating in the study.

Reading Recovery is an early intervention for young students who are struggling readers, or identified in the lowest 20% of the class. This program provides struggling readers with extra 30-minute tutoring sessions in addition to regular reading instruction. The focus of this program is having the students read and write stories, put together cut up sentences, and read a story that was read the day before. A Spanish version of this program, called Descubriendo la Lectura (DLL), includes the same teaching components of the original program. Escamilla (1994) evaluated the effectiveness of DLL over a 7 month period. Students who started out below the control group were substantially ahead of them at the end of the study. The DLL group was also compared to a random sample of students who were not identified as struggling readers. As a whole, the DLL group out performed that random sample of students as well. The DLL group was also given the Aprenda Spanish Achievement Test. Pre-test and post-test comparison showed larger gains in scores by the DLL group than the control group. The results imply the tutoring program improves achievement in reading more so than students who do not receive any extra instruction. The results imply providing extra help for struggling readers improves reading achievement regardless of a students native language.

Prevalence of ELL's identified as Learning Disabled

Currently, state norms show that most ELL students are not performing well on reading assessments. In 2005, only 27% of fourth grade ELL students scored at or above "basic level" of performance and only 7% performed at a "proficient level" in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Only 4% of eighth grade ELL students performed at the "proficient level" in comparison to 32% of non-ELL students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). This number should be taken with caution since states are not required to report on ELL test performance. These tests are given in English or in the student's native language, depending on the school's decision and the availability of a test printed in that language. Most tests are printed in English only, with the exception of some being available in Spanish. Students speaking a different language are often left to fend for themselves when testing takes place.

During the 2001-2002 school year, 357,300 K-12 ELL students were identified as learning disabled. This represents approximately 9% of the K-12 ELL population and 8% of all students in special education. Research reports a smaller number of ELL students are referred for special education services (9.2%) in comparison to the general population (13.5%). Out of those referred, even a smaller portion of ELL students qualify for special education services. The Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) attributed these statistics to three possible explanations: 1) ELL students may be under identified nationally in U.S. public schools as having a need for special education services; 2) In district records, ELLs in special education programs may not be identified as both ELL and ELL with LD; and 3) There actually may be a lower disability rate among those identified as ELL (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2003).

There are reports that refute the findings of ELL students being underrepresented in special education services. Abedi (2002) reports lower academic achievement among ELL students in comparison to non-ELL students. Bilingual/multilingual students do not fare as well on tests because their first language is not English. Although there is a scarcity of data on ELL students in special education, the existing data suggests the majority (56%) of ELL students in that group have LD with reading disabilities (Klingner et al., 2006). Due to the inconsistent reports on representation in special education among ELL students, assessment measures used with ELL students need to be addressed.

Assessing ELL Students

Due to the influx of ELL students in U.S public schools, the lack of programs available for ELL students, and the questionable number of those students being referred for special education services, one would think a standardized assessment has been developed for ELL students. On the contrary, the standardized assessments used with English speaking students are also used with ELL students. School psychologists are the part of the educational team who are called in to assess a student who is struggling in school, which means they are going to have to become more culturally competent as the population becomes more diverse. School psychologists work to help children and youth succeed academically (NASP, 2003). School psychologists are advised to use "best practice" methods when assessing ELL students. Not only are assessments a large part of the educational system, high stakes testing is also used for accountability measures. Most standardized tests are administered in English and normed on native English speakers. Abedi (2002) found major score differences on achievement tests between non-English and English speaking participants. Further analysis revealed non-English speakers performed lower on math, reading, and science subtests. The greatest difference was

found on reading subtests, those requiring more language ability. It was also found the more English complexity required in a subtest, the larger the gap between English and limited English speakers scores (Abedi, 2002). These findings suggest any subtest requiring language/verbal ability may not reflect an ELL student's true ability.

Test developers have revised many intellectual assessments due to the criticism regarding cultural bias. The Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children-Second Edition (KABC-II), developed by Kaufman & Kaufman (2004), revised the original version of the intellectual assessment. Providing a fair assessment to culturally diverse students was an objective of the authors. Changes included more teaching items in an attempt to ensure the child's poor performance would not be due to failure to understand test directions. The number of words spoken by the examiner was kept to a minimum. A Nonverbal Scale was added to the revision for those children whose linguistic background prevents valid assessment using verbal subtests. According to the test developers, norming of the KABC-II also included a more diverse group of children (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2004). Unfortunately, the test manual presents quite the opposite. The total sample used was 60.3% Caucasian, 15.8% African American, 18.3% Hispanic, and 5.6% other, but no ELL students are represented in the norming sample.

The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Fourth Edition (WISC-IV) has also gone through many revisions to meet the needs of public schools. Developed by Wechsler in 2003, changes in item bias were a concern. Reviewers looked for potential bias, content relevance, and clinical utility (Wechsler, 2003). Specific changes to subtest items were not reported in the manual. The norming included children of ethnic backgrounds based on the percentage represented in the population. Once again, the manual paints a similar picture much like the KABC-II by including a small portion of minority students and no ELL students. It should be

noted there is a high amount of verbal ability required in many of the WISC-IV subtests. Verbal Comprehension subtests (similarities, vocabulary, comprehension, information, and word reasoning) and Working Memory (digit span, letter-number sequencing, and arithmetic) subtests require the child to have a receptive and expressive verbal ability in English. It appears the changes to the WISC-IV did not amount to anything positive in regard to cultural bias. There still remains a substantial amount of verbal ability required on the test. This could pose as a problem and unfair assessment for an ELL student who is not fluent in English.

In order to increase cultural awareness, educators must actively promote fair test development. Hinkle (1994) suggests practical solutions for those who are administering and interpreting assessments. An increased awareness of test items that may be culturally loaded will help with choosing an appropriate test and also with how much the examiner should rely on the results. Hinkle (1994) also suggests practitioners be knowledgeable of tests developed for different cultures. Most importantly, they should advocate for tests and testing procedures relevant to specific cultures. If an assessment must be used in the identification of special educational needs, awareness of the examinee's primary home language is key. When interpreting results, home environment, relationships, and social and cultural customs should be considered (Hinkle, 1994). Practitioners must advocate for fair, non biased tests, in order to educate and work towards changing how ELL students are currently assessed and thereafter, educated.

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is an organization that represents and supports school psychologists. This organization promotes professional competency, advocacy, diversity, and professional excellence. NASP continually advocates for culturally competent assessment and consultation. NASP purports culturally competent practices

require integrating culturally sensitive attitudes, knowledge, and skills into any assessment, consultation, or intervention done by a school psychologist. NASP suggests that school personnel should gain an understanding of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the community they work in (Klotz & Canter, 2006). Every school district should identify consultants to serve as the person who addresses concerns about the behavioral and academic achievement of culturally diverse students (school psychologist, school social worker, bilingual education teachers). Consultants should also be established in the community for resources outside of the school. Consultants must have a solid knowledge base of second language acquisition. Understanding this process and how it affects academic achievement is critical to providing effective services (Klotz & Canter, 2006).

Chapter III: Summary, Critical Analysis, and Recommendations

Introduction

The following section will first discuss the overall findings presented in the literature review. Based on the information gathered, a critical analysis of the research will be discussed and also recommendations for practitioners will be presented.

Summary of Main Findings

The purpose of this literature review was to discuss the relevant history of ELL students, programs available in U.S public schools, and how ELL students are currently being assessed for special services. Currently, more than 5 million ELL students attend U.S. public schools (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006). While east and west coast states have seen a large increase in ELL students, even the Midwest states have seen a dramatic increase. Minnesota has seen an increase of 161%, while Wisconsin has had a 71% increase in the last ten years (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006). There are currently 85 different languages spoken in the state of Wisconsin (Wisconsin Department of Instruction, 2007). This increase has raised educators' and researchers' attention as to how to address the need for more appropriate literacy instruction, programs, and assessment procedures used on ELL students.

ELL students have been fighting for equal opportunity rights in the educational system since the early 1900's. Progressively, a number of government actions have improved the opportunities for ELL students to receive an adequate education. There have also been political movements to deny programs such as the recent No Child Left Behind (NCLB), that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to replace Title VII with

Title III. In order to qualify, students must have limited proficiency in English which adversely affects their educational performance (National Clearing House for Language Acquisition, 2006). Under this grant, schools are provided funding for quality instruction, but must show Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). A major criticism of AYP, however, is the fact that schools with a large ELL population are required to make the same progress as a school with predominately non-ELL students. Also, the new Title III reauthorization will include ELL students in yearly state assessments of academic achievement in reading/language arts and mathematics. ELL students, however, must receive appropriate accommodations, which could include native language assessments (US Department of Education, 2006.) Providing tests in the student's native language has been criticized by many researchers (Abedi, 2004). Most often, native language assessments are not available. Tests are often translated from English to the student's native language, which puts the validity into question. The difficulty of vocabulary words tends to differ across languages, yet provisions under NCLB require states to rely heavily on the results of these tests (Abedi, 2004).

Literacy skills are dependent upon language acquisition. A student entering school must first understand and learn English before the components of reading can be fully achieved. Social language skills are mastered by ELL students before academic language skills. Cummins (1984) described what is known about the differences between social language skills and language skills that require more advanced cognition. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) is a form of communication that is used in daily routine and social talk. Students learning a second language will typically develop BICS in two to three years. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is much more difficult to develop in comparison to BICS. CALP skills usually take five to seven years to develop but are necessary for literacy gains and academic

success. ELL students most often must learn a second language while simultaneously learning to read.

The National Reading Panel (2000) has indicated five reading components that are determinants of literacy achievement by ELLs: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. A number of reading programs used with monolingual students have been used with bilingual students as well. Most programs are phonics and phonemic awareness based programs (Gersten 1985; Lesaux & Siegel, 2003; Stuart, 2004). Phonemic awareness programs have shown positive and effective results for ELL students. Bilingual programs have also gained popularity as the demand for ELL literacy instruction increases. Most programs are geared towards Spanish speaking students only and do not include other languages (Escamilla, 1994; Slavin & Cheung, 2003). These programs also report positive results for Spanish speaking students, but mixed long-term results.

Currently, most national norms show that ELL students are not performing well on reading assessments. In 2005, only 27% of fourth grade ELL students scored at or above "basic level" of performance and only 7% performed at a "proficient level" in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Only 4% of eighth grade ELL students performed at the "proficient level" in comparison to 32% of non-ELL students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). During the 2001-2002 school year, 357,300 K-12 ELL students were identified as learning disabled. This represents approximately 9% of the K-12 ELL population and 8% of all students in special education. A smaller number of ELL students are referred for special education services (9.2%) in comparison to the general population (13.5%). Out of those referred, an even smaller portion of ELL students actually qualify for special education services. This small proportion qualifying for special education services could possibly

be linked to the problems with assessments used to identify special needs. Abedi (2002) reports lower academic achievement among ELL students in comparison to non-ELL students. Abedi (2002) also found major score differences on achievement tests between non-English and English speaking participants. The greatest difference was found on reading subtests, those requiring more language ability. It was also found the more English complexity required in a subtest, the larger the gap between English and non-English speakers scores (Abedi, 2002). Although there is a scarcity of data on ELL students in special education, the existing data suggests the majority (56%) of ELL students placed have LD with reading disabilities (Klingner et al., 2006). The inconsistencies in statistics and reports should be a major concern of educators.

Critical analysis

It is clear from this literature review that cross-cultural issues still remain in the area of education. In particular, there are many concerns relative to cross-cultural assessment because of the vast amount of biases embedded in administration, test content, and interpretation. Based on the research available, most practitioners are using English normed assessments to address the needs of ELL students. This should be a concern of all parents, educators, and especially school psychologists. The role of school psychologists is to work to help children and youth succeed academically (NASP, 2003). School psychologists are called in to assess a student who is struggling in school. For a student who is having reading problems, a school psychologist would gather information about the student's reading skills through evaluation or assessment data, and collaborate with the student's teachers and parents to come up with an effective intervention to improve the student's reading skills. With this in mind, how prepared are school psychologists for the influx of ELL students? Do school psychologists know how to properly assess an ELL student? This literature provides ample evidence that programs and assessments used for English

speaking students are also being applied to ELL students as well. There is also evidence a small proportion of ELL students are referred for further assessment, and an even smaller portion actually receive special education services. Other reports state that ELL students have an overall lower academic achievement than non-ELL students (Abedi, 2002). Klingner et al. (2006) also reported that ELL students who are in special education most often have a learning disability in reading (56%). These reports need to be addressed by researchers and educators. Using the obtained information, further evaluation of school psychologists' lack of preparedness for ELL students should be addressed, along with their knowledge of cross-cultural assessments, and how to properly assess an ELL student.

There is a vast amount of literature available on ELL students who enter the United States during primary/elementary years. The current research available does not address how ELL students who are in middle or high school progress in acquiring a second language, learning to read, and overall academic achievement. How are public schools ensuring these students "catch up" to the students who are fluent in English? What types of programs are available to teach secondary ELL students how to read and write in English? An investigation of the posed questions needs to be explored further to obtain relevant information as to how this is addressed.

The present literature review provides ample evidence that extra time spent on reading instruction/tutoring leads to improvements in reading achievement among ELL students (Escamilla, 1994). How much of a disadvantage is it in learning to read in terms of having parents who are not fluent in English? Parents who are not fluent in English will not be able to provide "extra" reading time at home for ELL students. How much of an impact does this have on ELL students' reading achievement? Current research does not address this question, which is relevant to the success or failure of ELL students' educational careers.

This literature review has ample evidence of the lack of culturally responsive education in public schools in the United States. A culturally responsive education includes curriculum content that reflects culture and ethnicity. Currently, most literacy programs do not consider a student's cultural background. A culturally responsive assessment should consider the student's language and cultural background prior to the assessment. The assessment should not be based on a particular culture's own beliefs, practices, and history. The exact opposite seems to be happening in state-wide testing and identification assessments. The assessments do not attempt to build off of an ELL student's prior knowledge of culture and language but instead attempt to assimilate ELL students to an entirely new culture. Further research and evaluation needs to address how multiculturally competent K-12 teachers truly are, how much multicultural education current teachers and other school professionals in training receive, and school districts' efforts to hire multiculturally competent employees.

Academic institutions need to be working towards valuing ethnic diversity. In particular, the field of school psychology, the public school's primary coordinator of assessment services, needs to be reaching out to bring minority views into their training programs. Robinson-Zinartu & Cook-Morales (1994) suggest eight features school psychology training programs should have in order to prepare culturally competent graduates. Programs should employ faculty with multicultural expertise; emphasize programs to engage in diversity; employ faculty from diverse cultural groups; admit students from diverse cultural groups; encourage faculty and student research on cross-cultural issues; implement a curriculum promoting cultural understanding; provide mentors who can support culturally diverse students; and be physically located in areas more accessible to diverse students (Robinson-Zinartu & Cook-Morales, 1994). This literature review implies school psychology programs are not fully preparing school psychologists for the

influx of ELL students. Further research needs to examine whether or not school psychology graduate programs are meeting the previous suggestions put forward.

Recommendations

In reviewing the literature, it becomes abundantly clear that more research and training are needed to meet the needs of our Pre K-12 student population. Practitioners can become more culturally competent when working with ELL students and assessing them by consulting with those who are experienced in cross-cultural assessment. This can also be achieved by attending workshops, conferences, or taking courses geared towards cross-cultural assessment. It is also recommended that practitioners rely on test results with caution. Total reliance on test scores when assessing ELL students should be avoided. Practitioners may also want to consider using alternative methods such as interviews, observation, and checklists. Practitioners need to work to integrate primary language competence, adaptive behavior, and cultural background into the assessment process. This process will help implement effective interventions for the individual student. It is recommended to those giving assessments to always be aware of their own cultural beliefs and attitudes. Predisposed beliefs about an examinee's ability can consciously and unconsciously affect the test scores.

The present literature review provides evidence of a need for culturally competent educational professionals. Cultural competence can be achieved by including multicultural courses and training in teacher, school psychology, school counseling, and other educational professionals. Integrating multicultural components into educational training programs will lead to cultural awareness personally and professionally. This may also encourage teachers to include a multicultural curriculum in their classrooms.

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