

WORKING WITH LATINO CHILDREN WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

As of 2011, Hispanics accounted for 16.7% of the national population, or around 52 million people.^[2] The Hispanic growth rate over the April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2007 period was 28.7% about four times the rate of the nation's total population (at 7.2%).^[55] The growth rate from July 1, 2005 to July 1, 2006 alone was 3.4%^[56] — about three and a half times the rate of the nation's total population (at 1.0%).^[55] Based on the 2010 census, Hispanics are now the largest minority group in 191 out of 366 metropolitan areas in the US.^[57] The projected Hispanic population of the United States for July 1, 2050 is 132.8 million people, or 30.2% of the nation's total projected population on that date.^[58]

WHAT DO TYPICALLY-DEVELOPING LATINO STUDENTS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH ABILITIES LOOK LIKE IN THE CLASSROOM

- A. They tend to be quiet and reserved. A "silent period" is very normal. Many students use this time to focus on comprehension. This can last anywhere from a few weeks to a few months. In general, the younger the child, the longer the "silent period". Older children can remain silent for a few weeks to a few months.
- B. Many may appear to be confused when asked questions, and take a while to respond. ELL students tend to be insecure when they do respond, and typically respond in one word responses or short utterances. They look to their teachers frequently for reassurance. Sometimes questions are not a frequent part of home discourse.
- C. They tend to use single words, short phrases, and well rehearsed phrases. You may also hear vocabulary from the first language and code switching.
- D. They make sound errors, but this is related to learning new words in English vs. articulation or phonological distortions. Vowels are often distorted.
- E. They will latch onto any translator available (educator or peer) for as long as needed.
- F. They typically need much more time to reach academic benchmarks especially in higher grades. At the lower grades, comprehension, making connections between stories read and own experiences, and rhyming, are notably difficult areas. Most families I have worked with were never exposed to nursery rhymes in their country of origin. On standardized tasks, when many children are not allowed a verbal model of a word, they will use the incorrect word or mispronounce the word making it virtually impossible for them to find the correct targeted response.

WHEN TO BE CONCERNED

1. No significant growth from baseline assessments.
2. Very slow academic growth compared to peers from a similar backgrounds.
3. Poor comprehension and lack of strategies (e.g. looking to peers) being observed.

4. Increase in behavior and frustration after understanding classroom rules and expectations.
5. After a variety of appropriate interventions, have been implemented with fidelity, have failed to demonstrate growth.
6. Parents continue to express concern.

SPECIFIC ISSUES RELATED TO LATINO CHILDREN

AS WITH MANY OTHER MINORITY GROUPS, THESE CHILDREN OFTEN END UP TRANSLATING FOR CAREGIVERS WHO DO NOT LEARN ENGLISH.

- A. Latino culture tends to foster more of a cooperative within the family as opposed to American ideals of individualism and independence. Frequently, parents who do not learn English will rely on children to translate.

DEFINITIONS

1ST LANGUAGE-First learned or exposed language in the home. 1st language may be greatly reduced if it is devalued or infrequently used. It is possible to forget it all together.

2ND LANGUAGE- Subsequent language child is receives exposure to. This may become dominant language.

SEQUENTIAL ACQUISTION-When children are exposed to additional languages at age three or older, they are considered sequential or successive bilinguals.

Sequential bilinguals move through four stages. Children may appear to be in one or more of these stages depending on context, communication partners, language scaffolds, and opportunities provided by the teacher. Movement through the four stages may take anywhere from six months to two years, depending on the child and the quality of the child's language-learning environment. The four stages are as follows: *home language use, observation and listening stage, telegraphic and formulaic speech, productive language use.*

Productive Language use- is when a child uses language more creatively, demonstrates the general rules of grammar, uses social and academic language, but struggles with more cognitively demanding language.

It is important to note that full fluency in any language takes anywhere from four to seven years. Full fluency includes comprehension, expression, reading, and writing. Moreover, the rate of acquisition is influenced by a broad range of factors (e.g. years in country, motivation, need).

SIMULTANEOUS ACQUISTION-Simultaneous bilinguals are children who are exposed to more than one language prior to age three. They develop two or more languages equally, or nearly equally, through exposure and frequent opportunities to use each language.

BILINGUAL-Speaking two different languages. True bilinguals are rare. One language is typically mastered better than the other.

MULTILINGUAL/POLYLINGUAL-Speaking more than two languages.

SEMILINGUAL-Limited proficiency.

DIALECTS-AN ACCEPTABLE VARIATION OF A SPECIFIC LANGUAGE. VARIATIONS MAY REFLECT VOCABULARY, SYNTAX, WORD MEANINGS, AND LANGUAGE USE.

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DOMINANT LANGUAGE-Language in which student is most comfortable. More recent research states that ELL's should no longer be assessed in a dominant language, but rather be assessed in both languages because it is difficult to determine what they know in each language.

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) are language skills needed in social situations. It is the day-to-day language needed to interact socially with other people. English language learners (ELLs) employ BIC skills when they are on the playground, in the lunch room, on the school bus, at parties, playing sports and talking on the telephone. Social interactions are usually context embedded. They occur in a meaningful social context. They are not very demanding cognitively. The language required is not specialized. These language skills usually develop within six months to two years after arrival in the U.S.

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

CALP refers to formal academic learning. This includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing about subject area content material. This level of language learning is essential for students to succeed in school. Students need time and support to become proficient in academic areas. This usually takes from five to seven years. Recent research has shown that if a child has no prior schooling or has no support in native language development, it may take seven to ten years for ELLs to catch up to their peers.

Academic language acquisition isn't just the understanding of content area vocabulary. It includes skills such as comparing, classifying, synthesizing, evaluating, and inferring. Academic language tasks are context reduced. Information is read from a textbook or presented by the teacher. As a student gets older the context of academic tasks becomes more and more reduced. The language also becomes more cognitively demanding. New ideas, concepts and language are presented to the students at the same time.

NORMAL SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESSES

THERE ARE SEVERAL PROCESSES THAT MAY OCCUR BEFORE A CHILD BECOMES FLUENT IN A LANGUAGE.

Interference

ELL children may manifest *interference* or *transfer* from their first language (L1) to English (L2). This means that a child may make an English error due to the direct influence of an L1 structure. For example, in Spanish, "esta casa es mas grande" means "this house is bigger." However, a literal translation would be "this house is more bigger." A Spanish-speaking child who said "this house is more bigger" would be manifesting transfer from Spanish to English. This is a normal phenomenon-a sign of a language difference, not a language disorder.

Silent Period

Children may also manifest a common second-language acquisition phenomenon called the **silent period**. When children are first exposed to a second language, frequently they focus on listening and comprehension. These children are often very quiet, speaking little as they focus on understanding the new language-much, in fact, as adults do when traveling in foreign countries. The younger the child, the longer the silent period tends to last. Older children may remain in the silent period for a few weeks or a few months, whereas preschoolers may be relatively silent for a year or more.

Codeswitching

Many children who are ELLs also engage in a behavior known as **codeswitching**. This involves changing languages over phrases or sentences. For example, a Spanish speaker might say, "Me gustaria manejar-I'll take the car!" ("I'd like to drive-I'll take the car"). Or, a Filipino speaker might say, "With my teacher, I have utang ng loob [debt of gratitude] because she has been so good to me." Again, this is a normal phenomenon engaged in by many fluent bilingual speakers worldwide.

Language Loss

Some children who are ELLs undergo the phenomenon of **language loss**. As they learn English, they lose skills and fluency in L1 if their L1 is not reinforced and maintained. This is called **subtractive bilingualism**, and it can be cognitively and linguistically very detrimental to children's learning and to their family lives (especially if the parents speak only the L1 and no English). Ideally, children should experience **additive bilingualism**, where they learn English while their first language and culture are maintained and reinforced.

CHALLENGES MANY LATINO/ELL STUDENTS ENCOUNTER RELATED TO ACADEMICS

- A. Many Latino students are not receiving academic help at home in English in both oral and written form.
- B. Interactional styles are distinct. Sometimes teachers misinterpret student behavior. For example, a Latino student who is quiet may be viewed as unresponsive and defiant. When often times, they are just showing respect. Asking for help or clarification is intimidating to these students.
- C. Teacher and student do not share common events. Stories read in the classroom are not reflective of their typical experiences. This makes making connections more challenging for them.
- D. Students are frequently exposed to uncommon vocabulary and longer sentences and may have difficulty following directions and completing assignments without extra support.
- E. Many Latino children may view English as their school language and fail to master it because at home and in their communities, they continue to hear and speak Spanish. This has direct consequences to their academic performance.

- F. School Staff not always adequately trained to produce effective interventions to help ELL students make sufficient academic gains.

STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING ACADEMIC DIFFICULTY

PARENTS, EDUCATORS, AND SPECIALISTS NEED TO COLLABORATE TO PROVIDE LATINO CHILDREN WITH OPTIMAL LANGUAGE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS.

A. DEVELOP SELF-ESTEEM THROUGH VALUING CULTURE. Create opportunities for students to share experiences with mainstream students. Incorporate multicultural activities into the curriculum whenever possible.

B. USE VISUALS, SPEAK SLOWER, REPEAT AND REPHRASE OFTEN: Pretend like you are in a foreign country what would help you better understand the natives. Use real items and pictures.

C. SPEND MORE TIME ON VOCABULARY AND CATEGORIES Sometimes ELL students may not have targeted vocabulary words used in classroom in texts in their first language (e.g. zoo animals), and they typically struggle with labeling categories, and identifying items in categories. Spend as much time as possible teaching new words and modeling where and how to use them.

D. THEMATIC UNITS-There is research to support that you should follow the interests of young students. However, ELL students need an appropriate context and reinforcement to learn new words and concepts. They also need additional time and a variety of opportunities to practice new vocabulary and recently acquired concepts. Build developmental centers around the themes as much as possible. When possible, select themes that ELL students possess some background knowledge (e.g. foods, family).

E. EXPLAIN AND DEMONSTRATE CONCEPTS, HOLIDAYS, AND THEMES This is especially important when you know that students may have never received any exposure to targeted themes and holidays. Students especially love it when you share your own experiences and pair with family photos.

F. PARENT INVOLVEMENT SPEND MORE TIME ON VOCABULARY Encourage parents to help their children at home to the best of their abilities (e.g. If a parent is illiterate, they can still be trained to label and describe pictures even in the child's native language. This will facilitate the child's ability to learn English. The stronger the first language the easier the English acquisition process). Provide translated material on classroom content and academic expectations. Invite parents who speak some English to volunteer at school. They often are intimidated. They can start by helping with small tasks and move onto other tasks as they get more comfortable (e.g. counting items).

G. TEACH IMPLICIT SCHOOL RULES. EXPLAIN EXPLICITLY WHAT IS HIDDEN IN SCHOOL DISCOURSE. FOR EXAMPLE, NEVER RAISING ONE'S HAND MAY INDICATE A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE, AND PREPARATION NOT SHYNESS OR RESPECT.

H.SPEND MORE TIME IN DEVELOPMENTAL CENTERS WITH YOUNG STUDENTS Peers are wonderful, but ELL students often need more guided support in centers in order to comprehend and practice new vocabulary and syntax.

I. PREVIEW TEXTS AHEAD OF TIME Students benefit from knowing vocabulary and concepts before they hear a text, even if it is just a picture walk through a text. This strategy is used a lot in Kindergarten rooms with ELL students.

PROBLEMS WITH USING STANDARDIZED TESTS ON LATINO CHILDREN

STANDARDIZED TESTS SHOULD BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH OTHER INFORMAL MEASURES (E.G LANGUAGE SAMPLES, HIGHLY METHODOICAL/TIERED RTI PROGRAM), IF NOT IT WILL NEED TO MANY SPECIAL EDUCATION REFERRALS.

PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

- A. NORMING SAMPLE OF LATINO CHILDREN MAY NOT ALWAYS BE LARGE ENOUGH OR REFLECT THE TRUE COMPOSITION OF LATINOS BEING TESTED
- B. ATTEMPTS TO MAKE EXISTING STANDARDIZED TESTS MORE SUITABLE FOR ASSESSING LINGUISTIC MINORITY SPEAKERS HAVE QUESTIONABLE VALUE. FOR EXAMPLE, A STANDARDIZED SAMPLE MAY BE ALTERED TO INCLUDE MINORITIES IN PROPORTION TO THEIR REPRESENTATION IN THE U.S. POULATION. HOWEVER, THIS POPULAR STRATEGY DOES NOT NECESSARILY IMPROVE A TEST'S APPROPRIATENESS FOR THEM.
- A. CHILD'S BACKGROUND EXPOSURE TO LIFE EXPERIENCES AND SCHOOL CURRICULUM MAY DIFFER ENOUGH FROM THAT OF THE STANDARDIZED SAMPLE THAT THE CHILD IS PENALIZED FOR LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OUTSIDE THE CHILD'S REALM OF EXPERIENCES.
- D. SOME STANDARDIZED TESTS HAVE BEEN TRANSLATED INTO SPANISH, HOWEVER THIS DOES NOT ASSURE THAT VALIDITY, RELIABILITY, SAMPLE SIZE, AND NORMS, CARRY OVER TO TEST TRANSLATIONS.
- E. TRANSLATED TESTS MAY ASSUME THAT CHILDREN COMING FROM A BILINGUAL CLASSROOM AND BILINGUAL CHILDREN COMING FROM A MONOLINGUAL CLASSROOM WILL SHARE THE SAME EXPERIENCES AND CURRICULUM. WHETHER OR NOT A CHILD IS IN A BILINGUAL CLASSROOM IS A VARIABLE THAT MUST BE CONSIDERED WHEN INTERPRETING RESULTS.

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