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# Special Education or Second Language Acquisition: Considerations for Differentiating the Two

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# Brainstorming

What are the most common types of activities you do in your classroom? What is expected of students to successfully complete the activities' objectives?





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# Brainstorming

- What characteristics would you use to identify an English learner (EL)?
- What factors do you look for before referring any student for special education?





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## Disability Defined (IDEA- 2004)

Child with a disability means a child having mental retardation, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as "emotional disturbance"), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, an other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.





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## Language Disability Defined (IDEA, 2004, Section 300.8)

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

Does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.





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# Points of Issue

- No uniform way across states (and sometimes within states) to identify ELs with SpEd needs.
- Overrepresentation of ELLs in Special Education.
- Underrepresentation of ELLs in Special Education.



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# Over/Underrepresentation of ELs in SpEd

(from Echevarría, Richards-Tutor, & Vogt, 2015)

- Immigration → loss of status & difficulty communicating (e.g., pressure of translating for all family members).
- Separation from loved ones.
- Household and family responsibilities affecting schooling.
- Prior educational experiences.



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# Over/Underrepresentation of ELs in SpEd

- Cultural/familial perceptions of schooling (when to start, who goes, for how long).
- Type of language exposure (first language, other languages).
- Testing for Special Education (in English and learners' "first language").
- Teachers' sensitivity towards ELs and their linguistic and cultural needs.





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# Second Language Acquisition 101

Stephen Krashen's Model (key points):

1. Comprehension will precede production (a “silent period” as learners soak in language).
2. Comprehensible input is key ( $i+1$ ).
3. Affective Filter.



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# Second Language Acquisition 101

Vygotskysan Sociocultural Theory (key points):

- Zone of Proximal Development.
- Scaffolding to assist novice/expert interactions.
- Learners as active participants in the learning.



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# Second Language Acquisition 101

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (e.g., Sonia Nieto)

- Motivation affects learning.
- Account for learners' funds of knowledge (e.g., life experiences beyond holidays).
- What languages have they experienced.



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# Second Language Acquisition 101

## Types of ELs:

- Long-term English Learner (LTEL)
- Newcomer: Grade-level in First Language/Adequate Formal Schooling (AFS)
- Newcomer: Student with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)





# NCLD LD Checklist

## Language

Demonstrates early delays in learning to speak				
Has difficulty modulating voice (e.g., too soft, too loud)				
Has trouble naming people or objects				
Has difficulty staying on topic				
Inserts invented words into conversation				
Has difficulty re-telling what has just been said				
Uses vague, imprecise language and has a limited vocabulary				
Demonstrates slow and halting speech, using lots of fillers (e.g., uh, um, and, you know, so)				
Uses poor grammar or misuses words in conversation				
Mispronounces words frequently				
Confuses words with others that sound similar				
Inserts malapropisms ("slips of the tongue") into conversation (e.g., a rolling stone gathers no moths; he was a man of great statue)				
Has difficulty rhyming				
Has limited interest in books or stories				



# Some Issues Explained

<b>Behavior Observed in the Student</b>	<b>Possible EL Reason</b>	<b>Possible SpEd Reason</b>
Difficulty in text comprehension	English linguistic system underdeveloped; lack of relevant background information	Sequencing problems; memory problems; difficulty with inferences
Easily Distracted	Not understanding, needs varied forms of input (visuals)	Auditory processing issues, attention issues
Trouble retelling a story	Lacks the lexicon and discourse knowledge to do so.	Organization or processing issues; long-term memory issues
Aggressive or withdrawn behavior	Lack of educational experience (SLIFE); different cultural norms for classroom behavior; “silent period”	Self-regulation difficulties; social communication concerns; anxiety or depression



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# Your Thoughts...

(from Adelson, Geva, & Fraser, 2014)

With the people near you:

- Review the different Literacy Skill Categories assigned. Note what things you had never considered before or anything that you are not understanding.
- Discuss specific ways/activities that all of you could adapt into your teaching to better assess (either formatively or summatively) whether your ELs are developing typically or if there is a possibility that they also have SpEd issues.





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# Your Thoughts...

Group A: Syntactic (Grammar) Skills & Writing Skills

Group B: Phonological Skills, Word Reading Skills, Vocabulary

Group C: Spelling & Reading Comprehension

After 15 minutes, find a group with the same letter and share your ideas.







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# Questions to Always Consider

1. Does the student differ significantly from others with similar background?
2. Does his or her family see a problem?
3. Is the difficulty the student is experiencing resulting primarily from cultural, environmental, or economic disadvantage?
4. Is the student making steady progress, regardless of how slow?





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## Questions to Always Consider

5. Has the student had an opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and skills in his or her home language/first language?

6. Has the student had sufficient opportunities to learn by hearing engaging stories, reading interesting texts, and using the home language/first language for literacy development and background information?





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# Questions?





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*Thank you!*  
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