

## Appendix D2:

### Learning Issues Frequently Seen In ELs (What it may seem like) and Language Difference Related Reasons for the Difficulty

Adapted by Jarice Butterfield, Ph. D.

<b>Academic Learning difficulties</b>
ELs often have difficulty with grade level academic language and concepts because it takes at least five years for non-native speakers to display native-speaker like functioning in academics.
<b>Language disorder</b>
Lack of fluency and correct syntax is a natural part of learning a new language. Students may require more “wait time” as they process an utterance in one language and translate into another. This “wait time” - may be misinterpreted as a language processing issue.
<b>Attention and memory problems</b>
ELs may have difficulty paying attention and remembering if they cannot relate new information to their previous experiences in their respective cultures. ELs may also be experiencing exhaustion due to the task of learning in a language in which they are not yet proficient.
<b>Withdrawn behavior</b>
When students are learning a new language and adapting to a new culture a “silent period” is normal. Also, this behavior might be appropriate in the student’s culture.
<b>Aggressive behavior</b>
The student may not understand appropriate school behavior and language in the US. Also this behavior may be appropriate in the students’ culture.
<b>Social and Emotional problems</b>
When students are learning to live in a new culture and using a new language, social and emotional problems often develop.

#### When It is Appropriate to Make A Referral of An EL to Special Education

Even though it takes time to learn a language, we need to recognize that some ELs, just as students in the English speaking population, do have disabilities that may make them eligible for special education. As mentioned above, because it is difficult to determine if an EL’s difficulties stem from learning a new language or having a true disability, some school districts are reluctant to consider referring ELs for special education services until the student has been learning English for a predetermined number of years -- usually two or three. **This practice of waiting a number of years before referring a student for special education services is detrimental to ELs who may truly have disabilities**

Below some possible reasons for initiating a special education referral for an EL:

- The EL student is exhibiting the academic/behavioral difficulties in both first and second languages
- The EL teacher and other general education staff indicate that the EL is performing differently from his/her “like peers”.
- The EL student displays very little or no academic progress resulting from appropriate instructional strategies, alternative instruction, or academic interventions.
- Parents confirm the academic/ behavioral difficulties seen in the school setting (lack of response to intervention documented over time).

- School personnel such as tutors and aides confirm the academic/behavioral difficulties seen in the classroom setting

## Comparison of Language Differences Versus Disabilities

Learning Behavior Manifested	Indicators of a Language Difference due to 2 <sup>nd</sup> Language Acquisition	Indicators of a Possible Learning Disability
<b>Oral Comprehension/Listening</b>		
1. Student does not respond to verbal directions	1. Student lacks understanding of vocabulary in English but is demonstrates understanding in L1	1. Student consistently demonstrates confusion when given verbal directions in L1 and L2; may be due to processing deficit or low cognition
2. Student needs frequent repetition of oral directions and input	2. Student is able to understand verbal directions in L1 but not L2	2. Student often forgets directions or needs further explanation in L1 and L2 (home & School); may be due to an auditory memory difficulty or low cognition
3. Student delays responses to questions	3. Student may be translating question in mind before responding in L2; gradual improvement seen over time	3. Student consistently takes a longer time period to respond in L1 & L2 and it does not change over time; may be due to a processing speed deficit
<b>Speaking / Oral Fluency</b>		
1. Student lacks verbal fluency (pauses, hesitates, omits words)	1. Student lacks vocabulary, sentence structure, and/or self-confidence	1. Speech is incomprehensible in L1 and L2; may be due to hearing or speech impairment
2. Student is unable to orally retell a story	2. Student does not comprehend story due to a lack of understanding and background knowledge in English	2. Student has difficulty retelling a story or event in L1 and L2; may have memory or sequencing deficits
3. Does not orally respond to questions or does not speak much	3. Lacks expressive language skills in English; it may the silent period in 2nd language acquisition	3. Student speaks little in L1 or L2; student may have a hearing impairment or processing deficit
<b>Phonemic Awareness/Reading</b>		
1. Student does not remember letters sounds from one day to the next	1. Student will initially demonstrate difficulty remembering letter sounds in L2 since they differ from the letter sounds in L1, but with repeated practice over time will make progress	1. Student doesn't remember letters sounds after initial and follow-up instruction (even if they are common between L1/L2 ); may be due to due a visual/auditory memory or low cognition
2. Student is unable to blend letter	2. The letter sound errors may	3. Student makes letter

sounds in order to decode words in reading	related to L1 (for example, L1 may not have long and short vowel sounds); with direct instruction, student will make progress over time	substitutions when decoding not related to L1; student cannot remember vowel sounds; student may be able to decode sounds in isolation, but is unable to blend the sounds to decode whole word; may be due to a processing or memory deficit
3. Student is unable to decode words correctly	3. Sound not in L1, so unable to pronounce word once decoded	3. Student consistently confuses letters/words that look alike; makes letter reversals, substitutions, etc. that are not related to L1; may be processing or memory deficit
<b>Reading Comprehension &amp; Vocabulary</b>		
1. Student does not understand passage read, although may be able to read w/ fluency and accuracy	1 Lacks understanding and background knowledge of topic in L2; is unable to use contextual clues to assist with meaning; improvement seen over time as L2 proficiency increases	1. Student doesn't remember or comprehend what was read in L1 or L2 (only applicable if student has received instruction in L1); this does not improve over time; this may be due to a memory or processing deficit
2. Does not understand key words/phrases; poor comprehension	2. Lacks understanding of vocabulary and meaning in English	2. The student's difficulty with comprehension and vocabulary is seen in L1 and L2
<b>Writing</b>		
1. Errors made with punctuation/capitalization	1. The error patterns seen are consistent with the punctuation and capitalization rules for L1; student's work tends to improve with appropriate instruction in English	1. Student consistently makes capitalization and punctuation errors even after instruction or is inconsistent; this may be due to deficits in organization, memory or processing
<b>Handwriting</b>		
1. Student is unable to copy words correctly	1. Lack of experience with writing the English alphabet	1. Student demonstrates difficulty copying visual material to include shapes, letters, etc. This may be due to a visual/motor or visual memory deficit
2. Student has difficulty writing	2. Student's syntax is reflective of	2. The student makes more

grammatically correct sentences	writing patterns in L1; typical error patterns seen in 2 <sup>nd</sup> language learners (verb tense, use of adverbs or adjectives); improves over time	random errors such as words omissions, missing punctuation; grammar errors are not correct in L1 or L2; this may be due to a processing or memory deficit
3. Student has difficulty generating a paragraph or writing essays but is able to express his or her ideas orally	3. Student is not yet proficient in writing English even though they may have developed verbal skills; student makes progress over time and error patterns are similar to other 2 <sup>nd</sup> language learners	3. The student seems to have difficulty paying attention or remembering previously learned information; the student may seem to have motor difficulties and avoids writing; student may have attention or memory deficits
<b>Spelling</b>		
1. Student misspells words	1. Student will “borrows” sounds from L1; progress seen over time as L2 proficiency increases	1. Student makes errors such as writing the correct beginning sound of words and then random letters or correct beginning or ending sounds; may be due to a visual memory or processing deficit
2. Student spells words incorrectly; letters are sequenced incorrectly	2. Writing of words if reflective of English fluency level or cultural thought patterns; words may align to letter sounds or patterns of L1 (sight words may be spelled phonetically based on L1)	2. The student makes letter sequencing errors such as letter reversals that are not consistent with L1 spelling patterns; may be due to a processing deficit
<b>Mathematics</b>		
1. Student manifests difficulty learning math facts and/or math operations	1. Student lacks comprehension of oral instruction in English; student shows marked improvement with visual input or instructions in L1	1. Student has difficulty memorizing math facts from one day to the next and requires manipulatives or devices to complete math problems; may have visual memory or processing deficits
2. Student has difficulty completing multiple-step math computations	2. Student lacks comprehension of oral instruction in English; student shows marked improvement with visual input or instructions in L1	2. Student forgets the steps required to complete problems from one day to the next even with visual input; student reverses or forgets steps; may be due to a processing or memory deficit
3. Student is unable to complete word	3. Student does not understand mathematical terms in L2 due	3. Student does not understand how to process the problem or

problems	to English reading proficiency; student shows marked improvement in L1 or with visuals	identify key terms in L1 or L2; may be a processing deficit/reading disability
<b>Behavior</b>		
1. Student appears inattentive and/or easily distracted	1. Student does not understand instructions in English due to level of proficiency	1. Student is inattentive across environments even when language is comprehensible; may have attention deficits
2. Student appears unmotivated and/or angry; may manifest internalizing or externalizing behavior	2. Student does not understand instruction due to limited English and does not feel successful; student has anger or low self esteem related to 2 <sup>nd</sup> language acquisition	2. Student does not understand instruction in L1 or L2 and across contexts; may be frustrated due to a possible learning disability
3. Student does not turn in homework	3. Student may not understand directions or how to complete the homework due to lack of English proficiency; student may not have access to homework support at home	3. Student seems unable to complete homework consistently even when offered time and assistance with homework during school; this may be due to a memory or processing deficit

*Adapted from Jarice Butterfield's ELLs With Disabilities Training Materials*  
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#### **Appendix D4:**