

THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES
OF AN ELL/LD STUDENT

By
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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Masters of Arts in English as a Second Language

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April 2011

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Teaching has always been an interest of mine. I knew early on that I would probably become a teacher, just as my mother had done. I graduated from college with a bachelor's degree in elementary education with a concentration in communication arts. During my college career I was fortunate to have several field experiences. One that always resonated with me, my very first classroom experience, was in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. I had never heard of ESL before, but quickly became interested in the students and wanted to learn more about their cultures. Though I enjoyed my experience in that ESL classroom, I did not pursue any coursework in that area at that time. Three years after graduating, an opportunity for an ESL teaching position arose in my hometown. I applied and was hired. I was excited and nervous about my new position. I also knew that I was in for a great learning experience.

My first two years flew by without trouble. I worked hard to create a better, more organized program. I adopted a new curriculum for my English Language Learners (ELLs), one that I felt would offer them some consistency and would support the language being learned in the mainstream classrooms. Beginning my third year, I felt better prepared and with two years of teaching under my belt, and several ESL courses completed, I figured that I could relax a bit and just enjoy teaching. Now, I did enjoy teaching that year, and still do, but I was not prepared for the latter half of the year. It

brought about some challenging situations: specifically, how to determine if an English language learner has a learning disability.

Personal Interest

My interest in the issue of determining whether or not one of my students also has a learning disability (LD) came about last year, during my third year of teaching ESL. As a relatively new teacher, and still completing ESL licensure coursework, I was presented with the issue of several of my students being referred by their classroom teachers for special education testing. I wished I knew more about special education and the special education process, and its correlation with English language learners. I was approached several times by special education staff with questions about these students. They asked questions about which assessments they should use, what habits these students displayed during my class, and recommendations on how best to assess them. I knew they should be assessed in their first language (L1) as well as English, their second language (L2), but beyond that I did not have many answers for them. From the perspective of an ESL teacher in a district that uses a pull-out model program, the challenges that arose when trying to diagnose an English language learner with a learning disability seemed daunting. That is when I became committed to researching this topic. I knew I had an opportunity as a master's candidate and an obligation as an ESL teacher to research this issue.

The ELL students that were referred for special education were assessed and all qualified for special education services. They were diagnosed with a learning disability in reading. Throughout this process I began to wonder what part I was to play in this. I wished I had been equipped with better answers for their questions, and hoped that my students had been assessed properly. I decided that I needed to learn more about the special education referral and assessment process. It is now a new school year, and the referral process has become more restrictive due to Response to Intervention, or RTI. This is an initiative focused on appropriately assessing students that are at risk for low performance as well as incorporating a behavior system that supports students in achieving their greatest potential. In the past, in our district, there was a “fast track” to special education assessment. If a parent requested testing, it was done. At some point, classroom teachers began suggesting to parents with children who had academic concerns, that the parents request assessment and it would be done. No pre-referral interventions were required. With implementation of RTI, that avenue is no longer used.

According to RTI Action Network (2011), Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tiered approach to help struggling learners. Students' progress is closely monitored at each stage of intervention to determine the need for further research-based instruction and/or intervention in general education, in special education, or both. Response to Intervention (RTI) has been heralded by many as the long-awaited alternative to using a discrepancy formula for special education eligibility decisions (Esparza

Brown & Doolittle, 2008). Currently in my district, which follows the Minnesota state guidelines, qualification for a learning disability requires that a student show a discrepancy of fifteen points, on average, between their performance and ability level. RTI focuses on intervening early through a multi-tiered approach where each tier provides interventions of increasing intensity. RTI has the potential to affect change for ELLs by requiring the use of research-based practices based on individual children's specific needs (Esparza Brown & Doolittle, 2008).

An appropriate foundation for RTI must include knowledge of each child's particular set of life experiences, and how these experiences may facilitate learning in an American school system. Further, all educators must be knowledgeable in first and second language acquisition principles and culturally responsive pedagogy, as well as have access to specialists who are well-trained in differentiating cultural and linguistic differences from disabilities (Esparza Brown & Doolittle, 2008). I am not saying my students were wrongly qualified, but for the future I want to be sure that the identification process takes into account the issues related to second language development. As the population of speakers of languages other than English increases, it is likely that I will be faced with this situation again.

Disproportionate representation of students from diverse socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds in special education has been a persistent concern in the field for more than 30 years. To date, in spite of continued efforts by educators and researchers to

identify contributing factors and develop solutions, student enrollments in special education range from over to under-representation, depending on the disability category and the specific racial/ethnic group, social class, culture, and language of students (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

Many decisions must be made when trying to determine if a student has a learning disability. The process becomes more complex when the student is also a second language learner. I want to take a closer look at this challenging process, and focus my research on a few aspects of ESL and LD services. The results of my research will be based on data and observations collected through my work in this pull-out program. The terminology used in educational settings and written information often contains many acronyms and terms not known by everyone. Therefore, a few major terms need to be defined.

ESL vs. ELL

The acronyms ESL and ELL, as seen above, are used throughout this document. ESL, or English as a second language, is used to talk about the program or services provided to students. ELL(s), or English language learners, is used to talk about the students. These terms are often mistakenly used synonymously in other works.

Pull-Out ESL program

Collier (2005) defines a pull-out ESL program as one with little cognitive or academic focus, and no L1 support. She says students spend most of their time within

primarily English classrooms with relatively little heritage or English language learning support. They are pulled out for short periods of time for direct ESL instruction. Time is spent in reinforcing English language activities, sometimes tutoring focused on content areas in regular classrooms. It is used to develop school survival skills, acquire and adapt to American school culture, develop threshold level proficiency in the English language, and become cross-culturally competent.

This definition, to some extent, describes the program model that is used in the school district in which I work. I disagree, however, that a pull-out program is one with little cognitive or academic focus. My program addresses both cognitive and academic areas by providing ample opportunities for ELLs to practice and experience the English language in various forms. My classes involve using a standards-based curriculum focused on acquiring academic language consistent with their mainstream classrooms. Specifically, students complete reading and writing tasks, as well as participate in listening and speaking exercises. ELLs usually meet with me in a small group format where they are able to identify with other students that are having similar experiences in their new school. Additionally, communication with mainstream classroom teachers allows me to create activities that complement their mainstream classroom lessons. These supplemental activities are aimed at boosting ELLs' language skills at a greater rate than would normally be achieved without this extra work time.

Learning Disability

My district uses the definition cited below when qualifying a student.

According to Minnesota Rule 3525.1341, a learning disability is defined as:

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. (Minnesota Dept. of Education, 2008)

An understanding of the terms discussed above is necessary, as they will be used throughout this capstone. These terms, ELL, ESL, pull-out ESL program, and learning disability, will aid in the comprehension and processing of the information discussed here, and are a prerequisite for understanding the explanations of the methods and results of this study.

An ELL Referral to Special Education: A Case Study

The goal of this case study is to enhance teaching professionals' understanding of the connections and differences between ESL and special education. To accomplish this, I am studying the educational experiences of an English language learner identified with a learning disability by investigating the process of identification of the learning disability as well as how the student's needs are being met in the classroom. In order to

answer the question, “What is the educational experience of an ELL who is receiving ESL and special education services for a learning disability?” I will observe and examine the strategies that are used with LD/ELL students in the mainstream classroom, special education classroom, and the ESL classroom.

In the next chapter I will review recent research related to the topic of ELLs with learning disabilities. I will discuss the traits and difficulties that may be displayed by each group, including why one might be mistaken for the other. I will continue my discussion by reviewing the process of diagnosing a learning disability, and current practice for working with ELLs with a learning disability.

In chapter three, I will explain my research process and data collection techniques, and describe the participants and setting. Chapter four will consist of my analysis of the data I collected and discussion of my findings. The final chapter will conclude with a brief review of my findings. I will consider implications of the study, indications of how these findings may be disseminated, and reflect on the value of my study as it relates to my position as an ESL teacher.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

I set out to document the educational experiences of an LD/ELL with the hopes of learning what the educational experience is for an ELL who is labeled LD. Many factors must be taken into consideration when this situation arises. In this chapter, I will first review research that discusses the traits and difficulties that are displayed by each group, students with learning disabilities and second language learners. Next, I will discuss the elements of diagnosing a learning disability. Finally, I will go over research of current practices for working with ELLs that have a learning disability. In order to answer the question, “What is the educational experience of an ELL who is receiving ESL and special education services for a learning disability?”, I must first examine existing literature relevant to this topic.

Learning a Second Language

Along this journey of coursework and research, and study of language development, I recall a statement by Steven Pinker and that is “...the most remarkable thing we do with language is learn it in the first place.” (p. 28, 2007) We do this without explicitly taught lessons. Learning a second language is an even bigger feat to accomplish. It requires explicit instruction and practice.

Lightbown & Spada (1999) list some of the characteristics commonly thought to contribute to successful language learning. A good language learner:

- is a willing and accurate guesser
- tries to get a message across even if specific language knowledge is lacking
- is willing to make mistakes
- constantly looks for patterns in the language
- practices as often as possible
- analyzes his or her own speech and the speech of others
- attends to whether his or her performance meets the standards he or she has learned
- enjoys grammar exercises
- begins learning in childhood
- has an above-average IQ
- has good academic skills
- has a good self-image and lots of confidence

Lightbown & Spada (1999) say that all of these are important at some level. Some may be more important than others, but all are factors of good language learners. As I will discuss in the next section, these characteristics are often not exhibited by an LD-labeled student. A student with a learning disability may display a lack of

mastery in areas such as oral language, reading, or math, just as an ELL may exhibit the lack of proficiency in the English language within those same areas.

Learning Disabilities

According to Minnesota Rule 3525.1341, the disorder is:

manifested by interference with the acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval, manipulation, or expression of information so that the child does not learn at an adequate rate for the child's age or to meet state-approved grade-level standards when provided with the usual developmental opportunities and instruction from a regular school environment; and demonstrated primarily in academic functioning, but may also affect other developmental, functional, and life adjustment skill areas; and may occur with, but cannot be primarily the result of: visual, hearing, or motor impairment; cognitive impairment; emotional disorders; or environmental, cultural, economic influences, limited English proficiency or a lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math (Minnesota Department of Education, 2008).

The first indicator of a learning disability often noticed by teachers is the student having difficulty learning and completing their work. LD-labeled students also often display a lack of organization, laborious writing, and an overall difficulty acquiring academic skills. They may have trouble with all skills that are fundamental to learning to read. There are many indicators of a learning disability to be aware of.

Attained from the Job Corps website (2008), the following list displays the indicators of a learning disability as they pertain to specific affected areas as opposed to just general difficulties.

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF A LEARNING DISABILITY BY AFFECTED AREAS

AFFECTED AREA & SYMPTOMS

Academic

- Difficulty in copying accurately from a model
- Difficulty with tasks requiring sequencing
- Easily confused by instructions
- Poor performance on group tests
- Reversals in reading and writing
- Slowness in completing work

Behavioral/Social

- Behavior often inappropriate for situation
- Can be an extra deep or light sleeper; bedwetting beyond appropriate age
- Can be class clown, troublemaker, or too quiet
- Difficulty making decisions
- Excessive movement during sleep
- Excessive variation in mood and responsiveness
- Extremely disorderly or compulsively orderly
- Failure to see consequences for his/her actions
- Had unusually early or late developmental stages (talking, crawling, walking, tying shoes)
- Impulsive behavior; lack of reflective thought prior to action
- Inappropriate, unselective, and often excessive display of affection
- Low tolerance for frustration
- Mistakes and symptoms increase dramatically with confusion, time pressure, emotional stress, or poor health
- Overly gullible; easily led by peers
- Poor adjustment to environmental changes
- Poor peer relationships
- Poor social judgment
- Prone to ear infections; sensitive to foods, additives, and chemical products

- Strong sense of justice; emotionally sensitive; strives for perfection

Cognitive

- Difficulty discriminating size, shape, color
- Difficulty with abstract reasoning and/or problem solving
- Difficulty with temporal (time) concepts
- Disorganized thinking
- Distorted concept of body image
- Lags in development milestones (e.g., motor, language)
- Often obsesses on one topic or idea
- Poor organizational skills

Hearing and Speech

- Difficulty putting thoughts into words; speaks in halting phrases; leaves sentences incomplete; stutters under stress
- Mispronounces long words or transposes phrases, words, and syllables when speaking
- Has extended hearing; hears things not said or apparent to others; easily distracted by sounds

Math

- Can count, but has difficulty counting objects and dealing with money
- Can do math, but fails word problems; cannot grasp algebra or higher math
- Computing math shows dependence on finger counting and other tricks; knows answers, but cannot do it on paper

Memory and Cognition

- Excellent long-term memory for experiences, locations, and faces
- Poor memory for sequences, facts, and information that has not been experienced
- Thinks primarily with images and feeling, not sounds or words - little internal dialogue
-

Vision, Reading, and Spelling

- Complains of dizziness, headaches, or stomachaches while reading
- Complains of feeling or seeing nonexistent movement while reading, writing, or copying
- Confused by letters, numbers, words, sequences, or verbal explanations
- Extremely keen sighted and observant or lacks depth perception and peripheral vision

- Reading or writing shows repetitions, additions, transpositions, omissions, substitutions, and reversals in letters, numbers, and/or words
- Reads and rereads with little comprehension
- Seems to have difficulty with vision, yet eye exams do not reveal a problem
- Spells phonetically and inconsistently
- Can be ambidextrous and often confuses left/right, over/under

Writing and Motor Skills

- Clumsy, uncoordinated, poor at ball or team sports
- Difficulties with fine and/or gross motor skills and tasks
- Prone to motion sickness
- Trouble with writing or copying; pencil grip is unusual; handwriting varies or is illegible

Learning Disabilities and ELLs

To add to the difficulties of learning a second language, we know that in order to successfully acquire proficiency in a second language one must have developed proficiency in their first language. This difficulty may be compounded by the fact that many ELLs do not come into our classrooms having achieved proficiency in their first language – oral or written.

The overrepresentation of English Language Learners in special education classes (Yates & Ortiz, 1998) suggests that educators have difficulty distinguishing students who truly have learning disabilities from students who are failing for other reasons, such as limited English. Students learning English are disadvantaged by a scarcity of appropriate assessment instruments and a lack of personnel trained to conduct linguistically and culturally relevant educational assessments (Valdes & Figueroa, 1996). Following is a list of alternate assessments that can be used with ELLs.

- Portfolios: exemplary illustrations of individual or group work collected from many different potential sources.
- Self-reports: written or oral reports of problem-solving experiences.
- Structured interviews: specific or general questions that can require reflective responses or explanations of what they've done, how they've done something or what they plan to do.
- Hands-on performance tasks: students are required to complete a task or demonstrate a skill.
- Group projects: cooperative learning projects where LEP students do not have the complete language burden placed upon them.
- Self-assessment: these types of reflective reports allow the student to become more involved in their own learning and set realistic goals for themselves with the help of the teacher.

(Fradd, McGee & Willen, 1994; O'Malley & Valdez-Pierce, 1996)

In the early stages of a child learning a second language, we might notice their skills lagging behind their non-ELL counterparts. One study, Lipka & Siegel (2007), takes a close look at the predictors of reading skills from kindergarten to Grade 3 between ELL students and non-ELL students. This study examined the student's phonological processing, syntactic awareness, memory, spelling, word reading, and lexical access skills. Ultimately, they found that performance on two measures – letter identification and phonological awareness in kindergarten – predicted whether students

would be classified in Grade 3 as at-risk or having typical reading development for the ELL and L1 groups.

The Lipka & Siegel study is one example that shows that in a typical ESL situation, students may start out with skills that look like a learning disability because so many of them overlap. They may display a lack of understanding, show confusion with letter sounds, mispronounce words, read and reread with little comprehension, be slow to complete work, and have difficulty following the sequence of work.

For an English language learner experiencing difficulty with English reading skills, patterns such as the following suggest the possibility of a learning disability (Spear-Swerling, 2006, p.2):

- The child has a history of oral language delay or disability in the native language.
- The child has had difficulty developing literacy skills in the native language (assuming adequate instruction in the native language).
- There is a family history of reading difficulties in parents, siblings, or other close relatives (again, assuming adequate opportunity to learn to read).
- The child has specific language weaknesses, such as poor phonemic awareness, in the native language as well as in English. (However, these difficulties may manifest somewhat differently in different languages,

depending on the nature of the written language; for example, Spanish is a more transparent language than English, so children with phonological weaknesses may decode words more accurately in Spanish than English.)

- The child has had research-based, high-quality reading intervention designed for English language learners, and still is not making adequate progress relative to other, similar English language learners.

Many educators seem to be uneducated or misinformed about the similarities and differences exhibited by ELLs or students with learning disabilities. Teaching professionals, especially those that work with primary age to middle school age students, need to be cognizant of the indicators that these students may display.

How Learning Disabilities are Diagnosed

My teaching experience has taught me that regardless if a child is an ELL or not, appropriate and proper special education assessment procedures must be followed. Those procedures call for a sequence of events to occur. First, teachers will notice some of the aforementioned traits in a student. Documentation of these observations will be made and tracked. When little or no progress is observed, the teacher must look into appropriate interventions for that student. This may consist of additional reading help such as a Title I resource group, an additional pull-out group that works to target specific reading difficulties. It could also be assessments in the content area of concern, or other small group or one-on-one instruction as deemed appropriate. These interventions must be

attempted for a number of weeks with documentation of progress. When a minimum of two interventions has been tried without success, a referral for special education assessment can be made. There are numerous tests used throughout the assessment process.

Assessments used in my school district include:

Ability/Cognitive Tests:

Wechsler Series:

Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children Fourth Edition (WISC)

Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scales of Intelligence Third Edition

Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale Fourth Edition

Woodcock Johnson III Tests of Cognitive Abilities

Leiter International Performance Scale Revised (Nonverbal)

Achievement Tests:

Woodcock Johnson III Tests of Achievement

Rating Scales:

Information Processing Checklists

Behavior Assessment System for Children Second Edition

Conners Third Edition

Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale Second Edition

Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function

BASC-II Developmental History

Although IQ tests are still used often, Gunderson & Siegel (2001) point out that most IQ tests, such as the WISC, are neither culture nor language free. In order to do well, an ELL must know a great deal about the second language and culture. They also state that IQ tests marginalize ELLs as they fail to identify true reading-disabled students and are not able to differentiate a first-language learning problem from a second-language learning problem, or from a general language-learning problem. They suggest that teachers rely on their classroom observations and error analysis to identify children having difficulties with reading, spelling, or writing.

Again, this process is relatively similar for each student going through the special education assessment process, with the exception of specific tests given for content areas. Another difference in relation to assessing ELLs for special education services is the need for testing in their native language as well as English. When a standardized test is available in an ELL's first language, it is administered in their first language as well as English. When a standardized test is not available in an ELL's first language, an attempt is made to translate the test to the student's first language. However, when translated it compromises the validity of that test. Some languages are not currently obtainable for test translation.

Once all the assessments have been administered, a trained school psychologist and/or special education teacher must analyze the results. The results must indicate a discrepancy between a child's performance and their ability. If they indicate that a child is performing to their ability level, they will not qualify for special education services.

ELLs must show a discrepancy in their native language. The discrepancy may be hard to identify due to the lack of language-appropriate assessments. It is important to make every effort to assess ELLs as thoroughly and appropriately as possible. Efforts must include documentation of interventions, observations, classroom performance, and student benchmarking, in addition to standardized tests. These efforts will give a more balanced and accurate picture of the students' skills and learning styles.

Current Practices for Teaching ELL Students with a Learning Disability

Lindholm-Leary and Borsato (2006) found that the research base was lacking in specific information about instructional, classroom-based strategies. The lack of verifiable research to support any particular instructional strategy or technique leaves the ESL teacher alone to discover what works best within his or her classroom. So, when there is a lack of research done, in general, we can suspect that there is even less research done, specifically, to guide teaching practices of ELLs also identified with a learning disability. Teaching professionals must use their experience and knowledge of the two areas to create learning experiences appropriate for each child. A review of ESL and LD is the best way to gain insight into the current practices.

ELL students bring special needs to the classroom – all classrooms, not just those of bilingual or ESL specialists. Elfers (2009) reported that the needs of ELLs persist over time. Even when these students exit a formal ESL program, learning challenges continue with the classroom teachers they encounter throughout their educational experience. Most classroom teachers have not been trained to meet those challenges.

Factors that are critical to the success of ELLs include the following: (1) a shared knowledge base among educators about effective ways to work with students learning English, (2) recognition of the importance of the students' native language, (3) collaborative school and community relationships, (4) academically rich programs that integrate basic skill instruction with the teaching of higher order skills in both the native language and in English, and (5) effective instruction. (Ortiz, 2001)

These factors should all be taken into consideration when preparing and planning for ELLs. A major key to the success of ELLs is the shared knowledge and collaboration among teachers. This involves regular meetings or conversations between teachers about the student, addressing concerns and discussing solutions.

Accommodations must be made to ensure success for ELLs. Some accommodations can include: reading work aloud to the student, using visuals (items, pictures, gestures), individual assistance, adapted/simpler versions of assignments, limiting the language involved, and allowing them to perform at their ability level.

Instructional Strategies

Ortiz (2001) and Goldenberg and Quach (2010), analyzed research on ELL instruction. They identified themes common to ESL instruction. In general, what is good for native English speakers is also good for ELLs. As a general rule, all students benefit from a unified instructional approach, specific goals and learning objectives, relevant and motivating contexts, opportunities for hands-on participation, curriculum-rich subject matter, appropriately paced instruction, frequent practice and application of newly learned skills, frequent assessment and feedback on progress made, with re-teaching and modifications as needed. All of this should be done within a supportive environment where school and community recognize the significance of the ELLs culture and native language.

My research question, “What is the educational experience of an ELL who is receiving ESL and special education services for a learning disability?”, will help teaching professionals better understand the difference between a learning disability and a language development issue. This brief overview of the similarities and differences of traits displayed by LD and ELL students, the elements of diagnosing a learning disability, and current practices, will serve as a base to discuss my research plan. The following chapter will discuss my method design and research plan.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Throughout my research I plan to study the educational experiences of an LD/ELL student in hopes of answering the question “What is the educational experience of an ELL who is receiving ESL and special education services for a learning disability?” This includes the student's experiences in the special education classroom, mainstream classroom, as well as the ESL classroom. In addition, I will look at the assessment and evaluation process used to determine a second language student as having a learning disability.

This chapter spells out my research plan to address the question of “What factors contribute to the identification of an ELL with a learning disability?” A research plan must address several things: design, participants, setting, and data collection techniques. I chose a case study design. Also, using triangulation allows me to use multiple methods to collect data. My plan consists of collecting data through observations, examination and administration of tests, interviews, and questionnaires.

Case Study

After much contemplation about the direction of my study, I decided that a case study design would best fit the qualitative data I plan to collect. Case studies tend to provide detailed descriptions of specific learners (or sometimes classes) within their learning setting (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Additionally, the case study format allows me, the observer, to focus my attention on one individual student, in particular learning situations, rather than a group. Also, from my personal experience of reading case studies, they allow the reader to dig in to the research a bit more and compare and contrast it to their own situations.

Participant

My research consists of a close study of a male ELL identified as having a learning disability. I will call this student Juan (not his real name). Part of his identification of having a learning disability has to do with the fact that he displays difficulties in letter-sound correspondence, spelling, and writing. At the time of my research he was in the seventh grade and spoke at a high-intermediate level of English conversationally. He does not require translation of his assignments, but he occasionally needs translation of particular words. However, his academic English would fall in the basic to intermediate level, according to the Stanford English Language Proficiency Test.

Juan was born in the United States, but his family moved back to Mexico shortly after his birth. He lived and attended school there until second grade when

they moved again to the U.S. He enrolled in our elementary school in the second grade when there was approximately one month of the school year remaining.

When he arrived at our school he used only Spanish when speaking and writing. He demonstrated no knowledge of English at that time. He finished the school year in second grade and was registered for third grade for the next year.

Another interesting point about Juan is that his family usually leaves for an extended period of time during the school year. In fact, one year Juan and his family were gone for a four-month period in the middle of the year. This had a great impact on his learning. A meeting was held with his parents to discuss the impact this, and all other extended leave times, has on Juan's learning. His parents were clearly embarrassed during the meeting. They apologized many times and said they were not aware that their time away had put Juan at such a disadvantage. They were mortified at the fact that he could be retained in the same grade for another year. Despite their statements of apology and embarrassment, they continue to leave during the school term each year. However, they have limited their time away to a three to four week absence instead of four months.

His parents speak mostly Spanish in the home. His mother has acquired a great deal of conversational English and is the contact between home and school. His father, on the other hand, still knows little English and requires a translator if Juan's mother is not with him. They are supportive, concerned parents and

cooperative with the school.

Juan is the main participant in my study. However, several others will play a part by participating in interviews and observations. These people are classroom teachers, special education teachers, and a school psychologist. Juan participates in some of the mainstream classrooms, special education classrooms, and ESL classroom.

Setting

The setting is a middle school in rural Minnesota. The school serves sixth through eighth grade students. At the time of my research, approximately 550 students attend this school. The school's student and teacher population is predominantly Caucasian. Currently, in this middle school there are three special education teachers for the area of LD, and one ESL teacher for the entire district. The classroom settings discussed here may offer very different situations. Since they are all school settings, I may not be able to offer generalizations of my findings. However, these findings may be quite helpful for my colleagues, others working in similar environments, and me. This school uses several different academic programs in its classrooms including Everyday Math, College Preparatory Mathematics (CPM), and Accelerated Reading.

Data Collection

Using a sheltered instruction tool, found in Appendix D, qualitative data was collected through two observations of the student in each mainstream core class and special education class, as well as an interview with the test administrator. These observations took place over a three-week period. The unstructured observations offered an opportunity to experience the five W's (who, what, where, when, why) of their learning. Structuring my observations using the five W's offers the opportunity to witness and record particular behaviors that may occur across multiple contexts. One might think my lack of active participation in the classroom would allow for only a limited focus and therefore limited data. However, being able to watch these students as the lessons unfold proved to supply some valuable data. Through my observations I noted the teaching strategies that non-ESL teachers used to assist ELLs, as well as coping strategies the student used. I compared their strategies to the strategies I used and observed in my ESL classroom. These observations were beneficial in adding to the understanding of current best practices.

Observations of Juan were unstructured in the way that I was an onlooker in his mainstream and special education classrooms. I observed what he was doing as well as what the teacher was doing, and how they interacted with each other. Keeping the five W's in mind, I had the following questions forefront while I was observing: What type of action/response/involvement is required of the students?

What approaches does the teacher use to engage ELLs? Is it effective? Is the student's first language accounted for during lesson presentation? Also, I noted the classroom environment and access of materials and resources for ELLs. I took note of the assistance this student received during independent or group work time. After my final observations, I examined all of the information I collected. I then continued my research by conducting several interviews.

Examination of Juan's past assessments offers a close look into possible factors of identification of a learning disability. These assessments included ESL assessments such as the Stanford English Language Proficiency Test, which is used for placement and yearly progress evaluation, Test of Emerging Academic English (TEAE), Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (MN-SOLOM), and Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) tests. Additional special education assessments were reviewed as well, including the Leiter International Performance Scale and the Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey.

As one of Juan's current teachers, I was part of his individualized education plan (IEP) meetings. This was also a good place for me to touch base with his other teachers, gather information about his learning, and hear about the mainstream teacher's concerns and goals for him.

Interview and Questionnaire

Questionnaires were given to the classroom teachers, and an interview was conducted with the school psychologist. Both methods offered important information. The questionnaire conducted with the teachers offered insight into the needs of ELLs within their classrooms. The interview conducted with the school psychologist addressed questions regarding the specific tests administered and interpretation of the results of those assessments, and provided data about the identification process.

Classroom teachers were given a 3-2-1 questionnaire, found in Appendix A. The questionnaire asked the following questions:

1. Tell about two or three things that work well for ELLs in your classroom.
2. What are two things you could improve for ELLs in your classroom?
3. What is one thing you need in order to better serve ELLs in your classroom?

An interview with the school psychologist consisted of questions (Appendix C) pertaining to the technical aspects of testing an ELL student. Questions were asked about the specific tests used, how the tests are administered, how test scores are used, and how test administrators accommodate a second language learner.

Data Analysis

As data was compiled, it was analyzed to help guide my continued research. Observation notes were gathered and reviewed for understanding. Clarification was sought from the interviewee or participant observed if questions arose during the

review. Summary notes were made to aid in organization of the compilation of results as well as looking for themes among the data. On the whole, data was compiled to study the overall experience of a specific LD/ELL student in my district. It was not to study the student's use of a particular part of speech, oral fluency, or anything of that nature. The goal was to gain insight into the classroom experiences for this student and also focus on his participation, lack of participation, interaction of the teacher as it related to that specific student including modifications made during lesson presentation or on assignments, and classroom aids readily available to him.

This chapter has served to provide an overview of the research design, participants, setting, data collection, and data analysis. The following chapter will present my results and analysis of those results. The final chapter will consider implications of the results, dissemination of the information, and reflection on the value of my research.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In an attempt to answer the question, “What is the educational experience of an ELL who is receiving ESL and special education services for a learning disability?”, I completed observations of an LD/ELL student and interviewed other classroom teachers and the school psychologist. This chapter discusses the findings of the research I conducted on this middle school ELL student.

The first section of this chapter describes the task of choosing my subject. The second section recounts some of the data I collected when surveying his test scores. The third section features the data I collected during my observations in his mainstream, special education, and ESL classrooms. The fourth section reports on the information collected from the teacher questionnaires and interview I held with the school psychologist. The last section concludes with a review of my findings and interpretation of my results.

Subject Choice

The selection of my subject was easier than expected since I am currently an ESL teacher. While Juan was a student in my ESL program, he was referred for special education testing to determine his eligibility, or lack thereof, for service in the category of learning disabilities. Hence, he became the subject of my study. My

novice teaching experience and lack of experience with identifying students for special education services motivated me to direct my research in this way.

I am employed as the only ESL teacher for my district, which allows me access to ELL students at all age and ability levels. The principal of the middle school, classroom and special education teachers, and the parents of my student subject all agreed to allow me to do my research without hesitation.

Testing Data

Juan underwent several tests while being assessed for special education. Although this process did not occur during the time of my research, it may be helpful to know which tests were completed as part of that process. In addition, as all students are tested, Juan also participated in the regular state testing done across our district as well as individual tests given for ESL and special education services.

Juan was given formal intellectual and academic assessments as part of the special education evaluation process. The Leiter International Performance Scale Revised was the non-verbal intellectual assessment used. The academic assessments used were the Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey, both Spanish and English Versions, and the Woodcock Johnson III. From these assessments we learned that Juan was performing, in English, at a much lower level than his peers in all areas from oral language to mathematics. When evaluated by the special education teacher using the English version, Juan's oral language ability was

comparable to that of an English-speaking individual at age seven years and two months. Juan's reading and writing ability was comparable to an English-speaking individual at age seven years and eleven months.

In contrast to the scores Juan demonstrated on the English version of the test were the scores he demonstrated on the Spanish version. Juan's oral language ability was comparable to a Spanish-speaking individual at age fourteen years and nine months. Juan's reading and writing ability was comparable to a Spanish-speaking individual at age fourteen years and ten months. This means that Juan demonstrated an overall Spanish competency level of ninety-nine percent on the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) scale and an English competency level of twenty-one percent on the same scale. His oral language showed a ninety-eight percent success in Spanish, but only forty percent in English. When assessed in the areas of reading and writing, Juan continued to demonstrate significant strengths in Spanish and significant weaknesses in English. His reading and writing competency in Spanish fell in the ninety-nine percentile, and his English competency fell in the significantly lower ten percentile.

The following tables show the results of Juan's assessments:

Table 4.1
Intelligence Test

Leiter International Performance Scale Revised	Standard score, average is 100.
Full-Scale Quotient (IQ)	108

Table 4.2
Achievement Test

Woodcock-Johnson III: Tests of Achievement	Achievement is reported in standard scores with an average score of 100 (avg. range = 85-115)
Oral Language	72
Broad math	80

Table 4.3
English Language Proficiency Test

Woodcock-Munoz : Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) scale	SPANISH	ENGLISH
Oral Language	98%	40%
Reading-Writing	99%	10%
Overall Success	99%	21%

I should note that Juan's initial assessments were completed while he was in fourth grade. At that time, I was a new teacher and learning the ropes of ESL. My predecessor was not a certified ESL teacher, so many of the ELLs had gone through special education testing. This seemed to me to be standard procedure in this district at that time. Special education was yet another area that was unfamiliar to me. I was invited to the IEP planning meeting where a plan for assessment was

discussed. At that time, I was not prepared to question the decision to test.

During the evaluation process, Juan's teachers were documenting his behavior and struggles in the classroom. Special education teachers observed him in his mainstream classroom. All of his teachers were interviewed and given questionnaires about Juan. Concluding all the assessments, interviews, and observations, the school psychologist compiled the information and test results and arranged a meeting to discuss all of these results. Juan qualified for special education services and an Individual Education Plan (IEP) was then written for him. Juan's parents were invited to the IEP meeting where goals for his education plan were discussed. The goals for Juan addressed his needs in organization and time management, math skills, and reading and writing skills. Juan's parents agreed to have him receive special education services.

As stated above, upon completion of the IEP results meeting, it was determined that Juan would receive special education services. However, during my current research, I uncovered that Juan did not technically qualify for LD services at that time. His scores were not discrepant in his native language, but he demonstrated that he was significantly behind his peers in English. He qualified by team override, which is allowed if special education assessment professionals agree that the need for assistance is necessary despite test scores. Knowing what I know now, I would have questioned the decision the team made. Based on the test scores,

Juan would not have qualified for special education services as a fourth-grade student. Again, upon further investigation of assessment information and speaking with Juan's current special education case manager, during his three-year re-evaluation, which was done while in seventh grade, Juan demonstrated a discrepancy in both his native language as well as English. Therefore, he now legitimately qualified for LD services.

Observations

Continuation of my study involved observing Juan in some of his classes. As I mentioned before, my observations were unstructured. I had spoken to the teachers beforehand and explained what I would be observing. They had all given me permission to come in at any time. Class periods are forty-five minutes long and students attend seven class periods each day. They are a combination of core classes as well as two elective/exploration courses. Core classes for Juan include math, science, ESL and communications. He also attends physical education, art, and study skills classes.

I observed Juan twice in each of his core classes and once in an elective class. During each observation I paid attention to the teacher's lesson delivery, context, and the students' interactions, specifically noting Juan's interactions. I was mindful of the resources available around the room and how the teacher took into account Juan's first language.

Observation #1 - Math Class

I first observed Juan in his special education math class. The lesson began with the teacher briefing the students about the plans for the class period. She then continued with a bit of morning "chat". She asked how their morning was going and if they were on time to their first class that morning. As was stated in the chart above, a student with a learning disability may have difficulties with organization and time management. The teacher notices that Juan has taken out an assignment from another class and begun working on it. She asks that he set that aside and she will give him time towards the end of the class period to work on it.

While observing this class period, I was mindful of resources around the room. I noticed that she had displayed many visuals on the classroom walls. The teacher began by going over a few terms listed at the top of their page that they would be using in their lessons that week: maximum, minimum, mean, median, mode, and range. Juan sighed loudly. He was having trouble following along. She asked the student sitting next to him to help him find his place. She explained each term and gave an example. While explaining the assignment for the day, she also held up the paper and pointed to show exactly where they were going to begin and what to do, helping them to follow along on their own papers. She prompted them to begin working on the first part of their paper, as it was a review. The teacher rotated around the room and quietly prompted Juan where to write his answers. After a few minutes of individual work time, she called them to follow along as they went over the answers together. She moved to the front of the room and stood at the whiteboard. She began with the first math problem and Juan blurted out the

answer. She acknowledged the correct answer and asked that the students please raise their hands. The next problem Juan raised his hand. After working out a few problems together, she told them to finish the remaining problems by themselves. She again walked around the room to evaluate each student's work and to see how they were progressing. She noticed that several students were struggling with one particular problem and decided to demonstrate it on the whiteboard. I noted that Juan was paying attention and made notes of the teacher's example. She repeated directions and examples as needed. She gave extra wait time for students to think about and complete problems before showing the answer on the board. She checked for understanding several times and addressed individuals that needed extra help.

Looking around the room, I noticed many visuals relating to math terms and functions as well as writing terms. I saw a shelf with dictionaries accessible, but no bilingual dictionaries or signage. She does not speak any other languages so Spanish was not used in any way to communicate to Juan when he was struggling to follow along.

Observation #2 - Math Class

The second observation of Juan in his math class began in the same manner as the first. The teacher greeted the students and asked how their morning was going. She asked them to take out their math books and handed out a worksheet. She reminded them of the new terms they were using this week: maximum, minimum, mean, median, mode, and range. Juan sighed loudly as he did the day before. She asked if anyone could give her an example of one of the words. Two students raised their

hands and gave examples. She gave examples of the remaining terms.

For today's assignment they would be working with a partner. She paired them up at their tables. She gave each group a set of six dice. Their assignment was to use the dice to come up with a number for each of the terms listed above. The worksheet had each word written on it and instructions about how to find, for instance, the range. They were to shake the dice five times for each term and then find the number that represented that term.

Juan seemed to like using the dice, having something tangible. He immediately began working. The teacher circulated around the room, checking for understanding and making sure each student was participating. She asked Juan which term he was working on and watched how he found his answer. He seemed to work well with his partner, taking turns, with a few giggles here and there. The students continued working through the class period and at the end cleaned up their tables and handed in their worksheets. The teacher dismissed them when the bell rang.

Observation #3 – Science

The third observation of Juan was in his mainstream science class. At once I noted that the students were sitting at tables, most tables with groups of four students. Juan sat on the far side of the room facing the door. There was an ESL Educational Assistant (EA) in the classroom during that class period, as there were other ELLs in the class as well. In addition to the ESL EA, there was also a special education EA in the classroom to help Juan and

other special education students.

The teacher prefaced her instruction by telling the class what to expect for that class period. She used the Smartboard, an interactive whiteboard, a new technology used in classrooms. She continued by drawing some visual representations of cells that they would be studying that day. She provided several examples of varied complexity to assist all students in the class. The classroom was quiet and controlled during her presentation. The teacher asked for volunteers for answers. The students would write notes in their notebooks. Juan kept his head down for much of the presentation, but would look up at the doorway occasionally. He did not ask questions for clarification or answer any of the teacher's questions. At the end of her presentation, she directed them to their class and homework assignment. She handed out the papers and continued to walk around the room checking for understanding and answering questions. Juan worked quietly at his table. The special education EA would rotate between tables helping the special education students, including Juan.

Again, looking around the classroom, I noticed that there were dictionaries readily available, but no Spanish-English dictionaries. There were posters displaying science terms, pictures, and diagrams.

Observation #4 -Science

I returned to Juan's science class for my fourth observation. The students came into the room and sat at their assigned tables. The teacher was preparing her lesson sheets at the head of the room. The bell rang and she called for their

attention. She asked them to take out their homework assignment as they were going to check it together. She displayed the answer sheet on the Smartboard at the front of the class and asked them to check their answers against hers. She told them to write their score on the top of their paper. The students worked quietly checking their assignments, including Juan. The teacher gave them a few minutes to finish checking and then walked around the room with her grade book and collected their scores. When she completed that task she returned to the front of the room to begin her lesson presentation.

The lesson for the day included a hands-on experience. There were paper plates and strings of yarn in the middle of each table. The plate represented the cell and the strings of yarn, many different colors, represented the other parts of the cell. The goal was for each student to create a cell using those items, using a different colored string to represent the different parts inside the cell, such as the mitochondria. I noticed that Juan, again, perked up a bit when given a hands-on activity. The assignment was individually graded, but the students were helping each other at their tables. The teacher circulated the room checking for understanding and acknowledging the students' work. At the end of the hour the teacher instructed them to clean up their areas to prepare for the next arriving class. She dismissed them when the bell rang.

Observation #5 - LD Communication Class

The fifth observation was conducted in Juan's communications class. He

attended his communications class in the same classroom as his math class, and had the same teacher. The communications class was a small class. It consisted of four students, each having been identified with a learning disability. The first lesson I observed in the communications class was a vocabulary lesson. The students were more vocal during this lesson, including Juan who was offering answers by blurting them out. The teacher encouraged them to express their answers even if they were not sure or incorrect, but to raise their hands. I also noticed that she would laugh if someone gave a wrong answer. She gave them a new assignment page and gave directions for the assignment. She read all the new words and the directions aloud and went through examples with the class. The teacher used the whiteboard to demonstrate examples for the students. Juan was following along. She asked if there were any questions or words they wanted explained again. Before allowing them individual work time, the teacher reminded them of her expectations: work quietly, individually, raise their hand if they had a question.

During the students' work time, the teacher sat down with each student and checked their work. She helped them work through the questions they didn't know, and praised them for the ones they had completed correctly. I also noticed that she complemented their behavior as well. Since this was a vocabulary assignment, and with Juan being an ELL, I was particularly interested in her explanations of the words and how she communicated the meanings to Juan. I observed that she slowed her pace when working with Juan, and allowed a longer period of time for him to answer. Even though Juan is at an intermediate level of English speaking, he often

requires extra wait time to process everything. I found that the teacher was patient with him. She does not speak Spanish so she was not able to use Spanish terms to assist in her explanations. At the end of the class period, she collected the completed assignments and excused the students.

Observation #6 - LD Communications Class

For the sixth observation, I returned to Juan's communications class. The teacher again greeted the students as they entered her classroom. Juan came in and sat down at his assigned seat. Again, this is a small group setting consisting of four students identified with learning disabilities.

The teacher began by returning their graded assignments from the day before. She then went to the head of the room and began writing on the whiteboard. She presented the list of vocabulary words and asked if anyone could raise their hand and give her an example using one of the words. Juan raised his hand and gave a correct example. She praised him and continued on. Juan offered answers on three occasions. He didn't seem to be intimidated in this small group setting, as he may have been in the larger group settings. She continued the lesson by explaining their activity for the day. It was a partner activity. They were all excited about that. She explained that they would be making their own game using the new vocabulary words she had presented. Each partner was responsible for creating part of the game. She gave them paper, markers, glue, and scissors to create their games. The students were given the remainder of the class period to work on them and were expected to finish and play their games the next day. The students excitedly began

working on their projects. Juan seemed to understand the assignment and offered suggestions about how the game board should look. He seemed to enjoy the artistic part of the assignment and offered to draw the board. The teacher walked between the two groups asking questions and complementing their ideas. At the end of the class period, the teacher asked them to leave their games and supplies on the table so she could collect them. She dismissed them when the bell rang.

Observation #7 -Study Skills

My final observation of Juan took place in his study skills class. This class is designed for all special education students to help them keep pace with their class assignments. There are no lessons presented in this class. The study skills class is comprised of a small group of students with one special education teacher and one special education EA in the classroom. The goal is to help each student understand all of their assignments and give them the assistance they need to complete those assignments. In Juan's case, he struggles to complete his work at home because his parents do not speak sufficient English to understand or be able to help him with his assignments.

Juan came in to the classroom and sat at one of the front tables. The teacher greeted the students and asked them to take out any homework they had. Juan took out his science assignment. The EA sat down next to him and examined his work. She opened his book to the appropriate chapter. Juan was struggling to grasp the concept of the prokaryotic and eukaryotic cells. The EA looked in the book and explained it as simply and clearly as she could. I did not observe him struggling

with the language, but more significantly with the science information. The EA really tried to use the pictures in the textbook to support the information she was trying to convey. She was not Spanish-speaking, so explanations were not provided bilingually. The room remained quiet and controlled as students worked. The EA worked one-on-one with Juan the entire period, while helping the student sitting behind Juan only once. Juan seemed focused and diligent during the class period. The class was dismissed when the bell rang.

ESL Classroom

The ESL room provided at the middle school is a smaller sized room, approximately ten feet by twenty feet in size. Formerly, it was an office space. The far end of the room consists of three large glass panes stretching from floor to ceiling. There are word-family posters on the wall, a map of the world, the lunch menu, as well as our school calendar and other school related activity schedules. Occasionally, I display artwork that the students have created as well. Typically, there are three to four students per class period. At the time of my observations, all students were Spanish speakers.

Juan attended my first period ESL class with three other students. He typically arrived at class on time each day, but not always prepared with necessary supplies. He often moaned at the mention of an assignment, especially if homework was involved. Knowing my students' families, I am well aware of who has family assistance to complete homework assignments and who does not have that support. Families play an integral part in a student's success. If they don't have help at

home, it often comes back to school incomplete. Due to the inconsistency of help at home, I limit the amount of homework I send with them. My focus tends to be on the quality and understanding of their schoolwork rather than the quantity of work they accomplish. Luckily for Juan, he has supportive parents and a mother that has enough English skills to provide assistance at home.

A typical week in my ESL classroom involves many different aspects of learning the English language. A visitor may witness a discussion of idioms, hear me reading a story, see students listening to a story on a CD, or see them work on writing assignments with a focus on organizing thoughts into a story of their own.

Spelling out every little thing Juan did during my observations would not be beneficial or necessary, however a few important details are worth noting. First, I noticed Juan's interactions with other students. He seemed to have a wide range of relationships within the small group. He had a good friend that sat near him. They usually came to class together and were joking a lot with each other. There was only one girl in this class and they often picked on each other. I think most of this teasing was just normal middle-school kid interaction, especially between boys and girls. His relationship with the other boy in the class seemed pretty nonexistent. They rarely spoke to each other, but did not seem hostile or unpleasant to each other.

Secondly, I watched Juan's work ethic. Primarily, I noticed that Juan lacked focus and drive to do his best at anything. For instance, the class was working on a writing project that involved composing a one-page compare and contrast paper. It

was a straightforward assignment set out in their text and practice books. The topic was provided for them and they were required to do minimal research about the selected two items, then compare and contrast them. Following that, they were to write a short paper explaining what they found. As I worked with each student on this, I noticed that Juan did not complete one task while I worked with other students. He often sat quietly or I would hear him groan about having to do this work. When I worked one-on-one with him, he was able to stay focused in order to complete his work.

Now, skipping ahead to another writing assignment, the students were asked to focus on creating cohesive paragraphs, but also convey a timeline through their writing. They were instructed to research and write about someone of interest to them. Every student chose to write about a sports figure. Juan chose to write about his favorite professional soccer player. I watched him converse with the other students, telling them all about this player even before he wrote one word on his paper. He was clearly excited about this topic! As I worked with the other students, I watched Juan work diligently without adult assistance. I frequently checked in with him to see how he was doing, and whether or not he needed any help. He always responded, "No, I'm good." I almost thought someone had stolen the Juan I knew. This Juan was a totally different kid!

That leads me to discuss his attitude towards participation during my ESL classes. Juan typically, as mentioned above, moans and groans at the mention of schoolwork or homework. He rarely volunteers to participate or offer answers. If he

chooses to offer an answer, he often begins by blurting them out instead of raising his hand or at least waiting for a turn to speak. Juan is a charming and amiable kid. He enjoys laughing and talking with his friends. He loves to talk about soccer and video games, at times to the detriment of his studies.

Juan's attitude definitely affects his quality of work. I have seen Juan produce great stories on paper. He has great imagination. However, most of that is lost because of his focus on the negative aspects of schoolwork. That in turn affects the quality of his work in a negative way. It is a daily effort to encourage Juan to produce his best work.

Implications Drawn from the Sheltered Instruction Tool

Throughout the course of my observations in Juan's classes, I made note of several points. One thing I noticed was Juan's enthusiasm for hands-on activities. While being observed in science and math classes, the teachers were providing information using verbal presentations as well as hands-on exercises, thereby simultaneously addressing two learning styles, and following best practice guidelines. When observed in a communications class, the teacher's presentation was primarily in lecture format. Juan did not demonstrate a high level of involvement, which one could surmise was the absence of the hands-on component. In all classes, teachers verbally presented new vocabulary pertinent to the lesson, but none of them did more than that. It is my opinion that the lack of manipulatives or hands-on experience was the difference when compared to Juan's involvement in classroom activities or projects when visual aids and manipulatives are offered

along with the verbal presentation. Juan also seems to enjoy the creative aspect that hands-on experiences provide. Based on Juan's performance on graded assignments, Ortiz (2001) and Goldenberg and Quach's (2010) ideas that all students benefit from a unified instructional approach, specific goals and learning objectives, relevant and motivating contexts, opportunities for hands-on participation, curriculum-rich subject matter, appropriately paced instruction, frequent practice and application of newly learned skills, frequent assessment and feedback on progress made, with re-teaching and modifications as needed, are validated.

A second thing I noted was the teachers' approaches to instruction. The approaches used were mainly straightforward explanations. All of the teachers I observed used a visual when possible, but none used Spanish, Juan's native language. In most of my observations, and again in my opinion, I would say using Spanish was ultimately not necessary. In addition, I feel certain that Juan has experienced some subtractive bilingualism. Juan has lost some of his first, or native, language (L1). I have observed some of my new students, who are limited English speakers and still use a lot of Spanish, speaking to Juan in Spanish and Juan having to try to remember what they mean. Or he would state, "I don't know what you're saying." The teachers simplified their explanations when needed and all circulated the classroom to gauge the students' understanding.

During Juan's communications class, I noted that the explanations given for the new vocabulary focused on the meaning of the word and how to use it in a sentence. However, no explanations were given about the type of word such as

noun, verb, or adjective. I believe that these explanations are necessary as well if Juan is to achieve full competence in the English language.

Juan's class participation during the time of my observations did not prompt me to feel that a translator was necessary for him, nor did I feel that his needs were not being met. The teachers were using the tactics they knew to assist Juan. That being said, even though I felt that his needs were being met, I also feel that he could be helped to a greater extent. At the time of my observations, Juan was making above average grades. His classes had modified requirements allowing him success in each discipline. I felt that there were other resources available that were not being used. For instance, they did not use any type of technology other than a Smartboard in his science class. Smartboards are terrific tools in the classroom and can be used interactively in so many ways, and yet it was used much the same as a regular whiteboard. I felt the teachers may have lost opportunities to engage Juan, as well as other students, by not allowing student participation with available technology during the class period.

Upon reflection at this point and relating back to Ortiz (2001) and Goldenberg and Quach (2010) I found a handful of similarities. I felt teachers used techniques that were good for all students. Many teachers incorporated hands-on activities. Overall, teachers appropriately paced their instruction and incorporated visuals and modifications when appropriate. While their efforts were commendable, I also noticed that even though I felt their goals for each lesson became clearer as the class time progressed, none ever stated the objectives for the lesson. When needed,

all teachers included an explanation of new vocabulary, but none explicitly stated or taught a specific language objective.

Questionnaire, Survey, and Interview

Questionnaire

When concluding my classroom observations, I approached the teachers in whose classrooms I had observed, and asked them to complete a questionnaire for me. The majority of the teachers did return the survey, and I let them know that their input regarding the ESL program was important to me. I want and need to know what they expect and need from my program as I plan to continue in this field for years to come. Prior to my arrival, the person serving the ELL students who had the longest tenure had been there three years. In the past fifteen years, there have been six ESL teachers. I have served this population five of those fifteen years. Lack of continuity in a program can be costly for the students and staff involved because it hinders student growth and the credibility of the program suffers.

The questionnaire consisted of the following three questions:

1. What are two to three things that work well for ELLs in your classroom?
2. What are two things that could be improved for ELLs in your classroom?
3. What is one thing you need to be better able to serve ELLs?

One of the questionnaires I received was from a science teacher. In response to the first question she stated that hands-on activities work well for ELLs as well as having the help of educational assistants. Her response to the second question was that she would benefit from receiving prior knowledge of the student's abilities

and appropriate expectations, as well as more concentrated assistance with research projects. Her response to third question was the request for a "cheat sheet" of common phrases used by ELLs, in their native language, to use in her classroom. Being able to "tune in" to frequently used terms and phrases could improve her responses in terms of appropriateness and speed.

Another teacher that returned a questionnaire was Juan's special education teacher for math and communications. Her response to the first question was that one of the approaches that works well for her are teaching the same concept using different explanations, repeating directions and checking for understanding, speaking slowly and clearly, and having them share things about their culture that pertain to what the class is learning. She felt one strategy that could improve the participation of ELLs in her classroom would be frequent use of visual aids. She also felt that if she could incorporate more subject-specific vocabulary words into her classroom, she could broaden the students' knowledge of English while better serving her ELLs in both subject areas.

These teachers provided me with unique snapshots of their classrooms' atmosphere. The first being that even though I regularly communicate with my colleagues throughout the school year, they feel they would benefit from more specific information about the ELLs that are in their classrooms. Also, providing visual aids and quarterly language samples would benefit the teachers. Thinking about all of the received responses, I am encouraged by learning that the teachers have a number of wonderful techniques that are being used with the ELLs.

Although none of them have any training in the ESL field, they are incorporating teaching techniques and approaches that are appropriate no matter what field you teach in. My experience has taught me that all students can benefit from simple adjustments such as speaking slower and more clearly, repetition, and having additional help whether it be from an EA or another student. All of these strategies can aid any student in grasping a new concept when presented.

Survey

Thinking about the information I had gathered from my classroom observations and the questionnaire, I decided I wanted to investigate a bit more at the elementary level. This is the level where most special education referrals originate. In an effort to learn more about the teachers' thinking in regards to special education referrals, I conducted a survey. This survey was given to all elementary classroom teachers in my district, and it was anonymous.

The survey consisted of a list of twenty factors that were recognizable in a typical student who is diagnosed with a learning disability. Several of the same factors are often seen in English language learners. The directions for the survey were as follows: "Check the boxes of factors that may prompt you to refer a student for special education testing." Of the thirty-six teachers that were offered the survey, twenty-three completed the survey.

The factors that received the most votes, fourteen or more, included: confused by letters, words, or verbal explanations; difficulty putting thoughts into words; reads and rereads with little comprehension; poor performance on tests; and reading

and writing show substitutions or omissions. As demonstrated in these results, the top-scoring identifying factors for LD are the same factors that identify concerns in the area of language development.

Interview

In the course of my research, I also had the opportunity to interview our school psychologist. When asked about the process of testing a student for a learning disability, she detailed the tests used within our district, as I listed above. She conveyed that she works closely with the special education teachers throughout the district when assessing a student.

The school psychologist completes a portion of the intellectual and behavior assessments and the teachers complete the academic portion of the testing. Once testing is complete she compiles her test results as well as assessments completed by others and examines them to determine if a student falls within the qualification guidelines necessary to receive special education services. She is an integral part of the meetings. When assessment and IEP meetings are conducted she shares with teachers and parents the results of the testing and helps to make recommendations for how best to serve the student. She said it can be “tricky” when assessing an ELL because there can be areas that are hard to discern due to deficient oral and written English skills. It is important to assess in both English and the student's primary language if at all possible. However, she did say that she has encountered situations where the student's primary language is so unique that standardized tests are not available in that particular language, and some tests become invalid if

translated by a layperson. However, all testing avenues are explored when assessing an ELL.

A brief overview of the special education referral process may run as follows: first the classroom teacher must document a student's academic progress or lack thereof, any behaviors exhibited, and interventions that have been implemented – successfully or unsuccessfully. Second, the student is referred to the Student Assistance Team (SAT). If the SAT recommends further analysis, there is a meeting set to plan the student's assessment process and gain parent approval. Once parents have approved of the testing, the school district has thirty school days to complete all assessments. Finally, the results are examined and discussed with the parents. If it is determined that the student is eligible for services, an IEP is created for that student and, again, shared with the parents for their input and approval. After speaking with the school psychologist, I had a better understanding of the procedures and felt compelled to be part of every referral and assessment process involving my ELLs in the future.

Interpretation of Results

Reviewing the observations, questionnaire, survey, and interviews, my question of "What is the educational experience of an LD/ELL student?" is becoming more comprehensible. As an ESL teacher I am involved with my students' classroom teachers and I communicate with my students daily about their other classes. However, it is a contrasting experience to be in the room observing their interactions with other students and teachers. Their needs are broad and

diverse as they move from one subject area to another. Strengths demonstrated in their first language do not consistently transfer as strengths in the English language. For example, in the English language, the adjective, or descriptor, typically precedes the noun in simple sentence structure. As the English sentence structure becomes more complex, the descriptors can fall before or after the noun. This is just one of the challenges the ELL encounters.

ELLs who struggle in both languages are particularly vulnerable to underachieve or even fail without deliberate and frequent communication among their teachers. It is crucial for me to witness some of their experiences beyond my classroom in order to and grasp the challenges that an LD/ELL student faces on a day-to-day basis. My goal was to expand my understanding of an LD/ELL's struggles and strengthen my connections with the classroom teachers.

Reflecting on my observations, and considering my focus on learning about the educational experiences of an LD/ELL student, I feel that Juan's diagnosis was perhaps a benefit to him. During his initial evaluation in fourth grade he did not actually qualify based on his test scores, only by team override. The consensus was that Juan would truly benefit from the additional assistance of the special education team in addition to the limited one-on-one and small group help he had been receiving in the ESL classroom. Juan was negatively impacted by attendance gaps and had academic ground to make up.

As I deliberate about the information I have gathered, I understand that the solutions are not clearly labeled or easily defined, and I am drawn to focus on

specific discoveries made while observing my students and studying the teacher questionnaires.

First, I noted that even though classroom teachers are equipped with a variety of strategies to enhance the learning styles of many students, they are not necessarily equipped with strategies for *every* student. This motivates me to seize opportunities for input on behalf of my students and even obligates me to intervene on their behalf when having ideas and strategies that may be useful to fellow teachers. Whether it be teaching strategies or providing L1 aids for use in their classrooms, sharing ideas would be invaluable.

Despite the fact that not every teacher participated in completing my questionnaire and survey, the responses received alerted me to the fact that deliberate and frequent communication between me and other teachers is of utmost importance. I am now determined to educate my fellow educators regarding the factors displayed by a student with a learning disability versus a student developing English skills. It also creates an opportunity for me to join forces with the special education department to discuss and field questions about this issue with our colleagues. My hopes are that all teachers, when considering a special education referral for an ELL, will look closely at that individual child, make note of the factors being displayed, and ask themselves questions such as: Are they overlapping factors? If so, what interventions can be used to assist this learner? I expect that teachers will find that focused support and collaboration will greatly benefit any ELL displaying behaviors or characteristics typical of a child with a

learning disability. If the interventions show no growth for the student, then perhaps further assessment is needed. However, all other bases should be covered before a referral is made for special education testing.

The results from the questionnaire and my observations also made me more cognizant of Juan's situation. I am now more aware and confident in Juan's ability to participate in varied classroom settings as long as he has appropriate support and accommodations. A scheduled meeting time with each classroom teacher would benefit any student, but especially LD/ELL students. It would foster a more seamless transition between classrooms and keep an open line of communication flowing between colleagues. In turn, it is presumable that we would see an increase in LD/ELL students' participation and overall improvement in all academic areas.

This chapter has presented my results and analysis of those results. The fifth and final chapter of this capstone considers implications of the results, dissemination of the information, and reflection on the value of my research.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The previous chapter included the results of my observations and faculty questionnaire, as well as a discussion of the implications and findings. This information was gathered in hopes of answering the question, "What is the educational experience of an LD/ELL student?" This final chapter will consider implications of the results, dissemination of the information, and provide reflection on the value of my research.

Implications of Results

Upon reflection of the information gathered, one overriding theme has emerged. That theme is communication. It is vital to an LD/ELL student's success. My beliefs were reaffirmed when Elfers et al. (2009) called for a strong system of support to help teachers work effectively with ELLs. They also identified four key components: support for professional learning; staff support (for example, coaches and paraprofessionals); access to curriculum and materials appropriate for ELL students; and a school community that supports teacher sharing of knowledge, materials, and encouragement. Elfers et al. (2009) also found that:

“Having a critical mass of teachers with common training around ELL issues facilitated collaboration and instructional improvement efforts across the school ...” (p.39)

I feel it's safe to say, based on my personal experience in my school district, that there is a shift in the belief that ELLs are the sole responsibility of the ESL

teacher(s) toward the belief that the responsibility is shared among all content-area teachers. This belief, then, follows my thoughts about building a bridge of communication between teachers.

This vital communication can be accomplished in several ways. One way is to schedule regular meetings to allow for continual communication between colleagues. Making the students' transition between classrooms as seamless as possible would improve overall academic achievement.

A second avenue for communication would include special situations, such as IEP meetings. In addition to regularly scheduled meetings, IEP meetings are designed to include all parties involved with the student. This allows for conversations between teachers and administrators regarding one particular student, but adds the valued input of parents. Only good things should come from this type of collaboration.

Curricular and visual aids provided to classroom teachers by the ESL teacher also help to facilitate worthwhile communication between the LD/ELL student and the teacher. These aids could be anything deemed useful by those involved with the students, including "cheat sheets" in the student's L1, as one teacher suggested on the questionnaire.

Lastly, the dialog between the LD/ELL student, the ESL teacher, and the special education teacher must be conveyed to the regular education classroom teacher. The student can provide clarification of needs and wants. In turn, the teachers can better accommodate the student and create the supports needed for the

student's success.

The ESL teacher is in a position to advocate for the students and provide resources such as interpreters, technology, and other materials of value to the education of LD/ELL students. In addition, the special education teacher can offer resources as well. The cooperation between colleagues should guarantee positive results from LD/ELL students.

Dissemination of Information

Sharing the information I have acquired will primarily be dispersed on a one-to-one basis, or in small group sessions. The greatest benefit of this study will be witnessed in the transformation of varied classroom atmospheres when teachers of assorted disciplines communicate and collaborate within an organized framework to stimulate growth and foster tolerance of all students' unique abilities. Providing education about LD/ELL students, resources, and creating a system where teachers determine and obtain the aid needed in their classrooms, will only secure the results educators have always aimed for.

Reflections

The results of this study were genuinely satisfying to me. My goal was to place myself in the shoes of an LD/ELL student in order to get a sense of their educational experiences. I also wanted to gain a better understanding of the entire special education referral and assessment process. I feel I captured a realistic picture of what that is in my school district. I am confident the knowledge I acquired from this study will only give merit to my district's ESL program as well as me.

Throughout my observations, I was glad to find the classroom teachers using a variety of strategies. Not only does this assist LD/ELL students, it engages all students in the learning process. Although my questionnaire found teachers requesting more L1 aids and information, I was pleased with the efforts I observed. All licensed teachers have received education and training in different learning styles, but that doesn't always mean they have determined which strategies are most appropriate for individual students. This knowledge is applicable to all students whether they are a typical or traditional student, an LD/ELL student, a student with physical limitations, or any other category of student. Students come with many kinds of struggles and teachers need to be prepared to support all students appropriately.

Although none of Juan's teachers were able to communicate to him in his L1, I felt they were willing to do whatever was necessary to support him. Speaking his L1 is certainly helpful at times, but how is one supposed to know all ELL students' first languages? Goldenberg and Quach report, "ELLs in the United States come from over 400 different language backgrounds. What may come as a surprise to many readers is that most ELLs were born in the United States." (p.2) This is an ongoing controversy, not exclusive to my district. The fact that the majority of our students are Spanish speaking, does not discount the fact that we have several students that speak African languages or Chinese. So, best practice teaching using a variety of approaches plays a huge part in student success.

The data I gathered came, primarily, in the form of written information rather than numerical information that we often associate with the term 'data'. This information will

prove to be valuable as my teaching years continue. I will be able to draw on this knowledge and offer effective recommendations for LD/ELL students when collaborating with my teacher colleagues.

Finally, I am able to make recommendations based on my studies. Teachers need to keep open lines of communication throughout the school year. The information shared is invaluable to the support and success of our students. Using best practice approaches and varying the strategies in their classrooms will allow teachers to reach all students. My job, as the ESL teacher, will continue to evolve as an advocate for my students and a resource for all teachers. Collaborating with the special education teacher regarding LD/ELL students is imperative in order to create the scaffolding for those students' successes. I am hopeful that my studies will create an atmosphere of collegiality among my peers and keep honest and supportive communication flowing, which in turn will open the door to great achievements among LD/ELL students.

Appendix A

Questionnaire

**ELL Classroom Assessment
School District #564 – Thief River Falls**

I am interested in your ideas and opinions about students who are learning English in your classroom.

What are 2-3 things that work well for English Language Learners (ELLs) in your classroom?

What are 2 things that could be improved for ELLs in your classroom?

What is 1 thing you need to be better able to serve ELLs?

THANK YOU!

Appendix B

Survey

Student Concern Survey

.....
 In regards to special education referrals:

Check the boxes of factors that may prompt you to refer a student for special education testing.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> poor/illegible handwriting | <input type="checkbox"/> poor/inconsistent spelling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> confused by letters, words, or verbal explanations | <input type="checkbox"/> uses primarily pictures, not words |
| <input type="checkbox"/> difficulty putting thoughts into words | <input type="checkbox"/> mispronounces words or transposes phrases |
| <input type="checkbox"/> can do math, but fails word problems | <input type="checkbox"/> poor organizational skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> poor adjustment to environmental changes | <input type="checkbox"/> class clown, troublemaker, or too quiet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> easily confused by instructions | <input type="checkbox"/> poor performance on tests |
| <input type="checkbox"/> slowness in completing work | <input type="checkbox"/> easily distracted by sounds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> reads and rereads with little comprehension | <input type="checkbox"/> trouble with writing or copying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> low confidence | <input type="checkbox"/> often guesses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> speaks in halting phrases | <input type="checkbox"/> reading and writing show substitutions or omissions |

Appendix C

School Psychologist Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What steps are involved in the LD identification process?
2. What special education assessments are used in our district to identify a learning disability?
3. Who is involved in the IEP writing process?
4. What tests does our district use specifically for ELLs? What other languages do we have tests for?
5. What areas do the special education tests assess?
6. Are accommodations made for/during testing?
7. What is the total amount of time allowed for the special education evaluation process?
8. What struggles have you had in relation to testing ELL students?

Appendix D

Sheltered Instruction Observation Tool

SHELTERED INSTRUCTION TOOL: ELL

Name of Teacher:

Date:

OBJECTIVES*: Content Objectives Language Objective: Vocabulary Language Objective: Grammatical Structure Written for students to see Read out loud for students to hear**We assume objectives are linked to standards.***CLASSROOM CHECK (How the environment supports learning.):** **dynamic** words visible from current instruction visuals that support content objectives of **current instruction** accessible references, meta-cognitive strategies that support student learning (thinking maps, steps to solve problems, order of operations, dictionaries and other word resources available in L1 and L2) visually balanced**TEACHER:** Is flexible in grouping students & capitalizes on a student's L1 when appropriate***Multimodal Instruction -*** Reinforces oral language with written cues, written material on the board or overhead, and visual representations of academic concepts Uses pictures, charts, graphs, maps, diagrams, props, and realia to support instruction Gestures, & uses facial expressions and actions to demonstrate meaning Uses multi-media and objects related to the subject matter Models and guides instructional concepts***Active Learning -*** Plans activities that support objectives Creates opportunities for language production Provide practice with hands-on materials & manipulatives***Modifies speech*** Adjusts rate and pace

- Paraphrases, repeats
- Adjust language to the level of the student
- Limits idioms or slang

Notes:

UNIT:

- Activating prior knowledge (linking to what students already know)
- Building Background (plugging holes)

VOCABULARY (Bricks & Mortar):

- Words selected are relevant to content objectives
- Defines words in student friendly terms, max 10/week
- Grammar structure supports students' use of language related to the content objective

STUDENTS:

Are using modalities:

- listening speaking reading writing

Are doing the following:

- hands-on
- meaningful work
- linked to objectives
- engaged

ELLS:

in class: _____

Approx ELP: Bgn Int Adv

Instruction is differentiated appropriately.

Students have the opportunity to work with language:

- words related to the objectives
- language structure
- academic language function
- content, CALP.

POST-OBSERVATION DISCUSSION:

- Teacher knows and plans for ELLs' varying backgrounds in L1 literacy, previous education, etc.

___ Teacher addresses the changing language proficiency of ELLs during the year.

Three areas to work on & evaluation of the skill: (* **4 – highly evident, 2 – somewhat evident, 0 – not evident**)

1. _____ 4 3 2 1 0

2. _____ 4 3 2 1 0

3. _____ 4 3 2 1 0

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