

On the Incorporation of English Language Learner Instruction into Special Education in Teacher

Preparation

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### **Introduction**

English Language Learners (ELL) joining Special Education in instruction is a rather new innovation, largely brought on by the increasing number of students who are recognized as falling into the categories of both ELL and Special Education. In the 2010-2011 school year alone, there were approximately 4.7 million students in U.S. public schools who were identified as ELL, which accounts for 10% of the population participating in the public school system, and 8% of which fall into both ELL and Special Education (More, Spies, Morgan, & Baker, 2016). The growing question has become one of pondering how teachers can best support these complex individuals; evidence demonstrates that honing in on teacher preparation is the most effective way to meet their needs.

Moving forward, pre-service teachers specializing in Special Education must be exposed to the various evidence-based formulas that exist surrounding the integration of ELL into their field of study. Starting with a base in ELL instruction, the most effective way to incorporate the two fields in pre-service preparation is by accounting for and preparing for the sociocultural, cognitive, and linguistic needs of future students, and how the three needs can tie together to create a comprehensive curriculum.

### **Sociocultural Needs of Students Identifying as ELL & Special Education**

Sociocultural considerations that a pre-service teacher must consider include both the responses that students have in relation to their new environment as well as an understanding of the influences affecting their responses. In order to best serve these students, pre-service teachers must be instructed on and apply practice to understanding student feelings related to language

learning, familial structures, school contextual factors, and societal expectations and perceptions related to language development (More et al., 2016). These factors combine to curate a completely new environment for the student, thus resulting in anxiety or fear, and the teacher must be prepared to acknowledge and face these situations.

Some students may feel embarrassed about learning a new language in a new place full of new people, especially if their family has been separated. For a young person to process alone, this is monumental, and the instructor must be able to comprehend the emotions the individual may be experiencing. Family who live with the student may have altered expectations of the United States education system, thus causing confusion between family and teacher. This means that families may need clarification on items such as teacher role and family roles in the education of their student. Lastly, students face prejudice daily coming from a place outside of their new home, and combating the discrimination they face can be daunting for a young person to experience alone. Together, all of the factors that fall into the sociocultural needs of the individual student combine to create a confusing, frightening environment that the ELL and Special Education teacher must be prepared to handle.

### **Cognitive Needs of Students Identifying as ELL & Special Education**

ELL students who also identify as having a disability confront a variety of difficulties when it comes to learning in a new language at the same time as attempting to learn the new language. These students are expected to achieve in subjects in their second language and need various support systems in place to successfully do this. Suggested by More et al., “pretesting and assessment...in the native language can help teachers understand what skills and concepts

students are bringing to the school environment,” (2016). There are a large range of strategies that students can use to be successful in their courses and acquisition of their new language. Essentially, by understanding what students already know and how they know it, teachers can support ELL and disabled students by looking at their individual profile and recreating these strategies in the context of new information, while simultaneously exposing them to a variety of new strategies that may support their educational growth.

### **Linguistic Needs of Students Identifying as ELL & Special Education**

Students hold within them a wide variety of linguistic experiences both from their primary language and their secondary language. Through this, there are two types of bilingualism, that of simultaneous bilingualism (students learn both their new language and their primary language at the same time) and successive bilingualism (students learn a second language after the development of a first language) (More et al., 2016). This results in a number of possible experiences for each individual student. While the techniques of the types of bilingualism differ, the background knowledge required to meet the learning needs of students is the same (More et al., 2016), thus resulting in a way for pre-service teachers to better prepare for their future students.

In addition to these strategies in comprehending bilingualism, pre-service teachers must understand the theories regarding perspectives on second language acquisition: behaviorism, innatist perspectives, cognitive and developmental perspectives, and sociocultural perspectives (More et al., 2016). These theories strengthen the way that teachers can effectively assess the needs of their individual students and practically apply them to lesson plans.

### **Conclusion**

It is absolutely essential that future educators invest in the individual needs of their students. By doing so, future educators strive to create a unique educational experience for each of their students. Therefore, it can be concluded that by mastering the base knowledge and theories surrounding the individual, such as through sociocultural, cognitive, and linguistic needs, and by applying these needs to each student, that students who are identified as both ELL and Special Education will see greater success in their courses and personal goals. This will be a result of better teacher preparation in order to meet these needs and a step in the direction of comprehending that student education must be tailored to the individual in order to see the strategies take off. Lastly, Special Education programs that integrate ELL base knowledge and evidence-based techniques into their practicum will better meet the needs of their students.

References

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Incorporating English Language Learner Instruction within Special Education Teacher  
Preparation. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 51(4), 229-237.