

Book 8 Training Handout

Part 1 - Stories

“I already know how to read in Spanish”

The first student who I am going to talk about was in high school when I was asked to complete a bilingual evaluation. I was invited by the building school psychologist after this student told her, “I don’t know why you people have me in this class, I already know how to read and write in Spanish.”

This student came to the United States in the seventh grade and was placed into special education. There was more to the story and the original team didn’t get everything wrong; however, nobody looked at what this student could do, only at what he “couldn’t do in English.” It didn’t take long until they moved this student into a self-contained special education classroom. In this classroom, he was working on letter sounds and letter names. The school psychologist was impressed by this young man and his conviction, enough so that she believed he might be telling her the truth regarding his skills. However, she had no way to measure them.

I completed the evaluation. This student was reading at the 10th grade level in Spanish, and his math was at the highest level in which he had instruction (the 6th grade level). Therefore, he was spending day after day in an environment that was totally inappropriate for him. I wonder what his teachers were thinking along the way? How was it that nobody noticed this until now? If it were not for his efforts to self-advocate, nobody would have ever known about his skills, just his deficits in a language he had only recently started to learn.

He wants to be a teacher someday.

Learning disability in one language and not the other?

This little boy was in the second grade in a bilingual education school. The school psychologist invited me in to complete core academic testing with this student. The teachers were convinced that he had a learning disability. The testing showed his core academic skills, when testing was completed in Spanish, were at the third-grade level. Still, the teachers struggled to believe that he didn’t have a learning disability. It would be pretty darn hard to have a learning disability in one language and not the other.

Part Two --- LE³AP Examples

Example 1:

This student was a 6th grade student who was performing well below grade level expectations. He is from a Russian background and he is one of many siblings. The majority of his siblings were doing well in school, yet a few were doing poorly. All indicators were leading toward a special education referral. The school psychologist was in the process of interviewing the student’s mother, and the information continued to support the possibility of a special education referral. Then, his mother stated, “You know he can read and write in Russian, right?” This information

was not known to the team, so the school psychologist asked if they could use the interpreter to get an example of her son's reading and writing skills in Russian.

The student came into the school psychologist's office and the school psychologist opened a webpage in Russian, asking the student to read the information and provide a summary. The student did this and the interpreter stated that the summary was accurate. Then, the school psychologist wrote questions in English that the interpreter did not get to see. The student wrote responses to the questions in Russian and the interpreter read these. She stated that the written responses were easy to understand, just with some misspellings. The school psychologist asked the student's mother about the family's emphasis on English versus Russian. The student had 1 hour per week of class in Russian. The mother made it clear that it is very important to the family that the student learns to read and write in Russian, and that it is not so important that he reads and writes in English. They have a family business in which all of the boys are expected to work, and they need to be able to speak, read, and write in Russian for the business.

Exposure: The student has been exposed to English since very early in his life.

Experience: The student has been in an English school since Kindergarten, and was participating at a low level.

Expectations: The family expects Russian skills to be learned and mastered, not English skills.

Practice: The student had a long history of completing very little work within the school setting.

Knowing all of this, is it really reasonable to expect him to have grade level skills in English???

And, a student who can read/write in their native language at a higher level than in English (with far less exposure and experience) is not a student with a learning disability.

Example 2:

This student was also a fourth-grade student, and actually happened to be in the same classroom as student number 3*. This student was having a very specific problem, he was struggling greatly with phonics and phonemes when reading. His parents were reading to him in Spanish and trying to work with him on these issues. His little sister (same environment as him) was in the second grade and already reading at a higher level than this student. Also, his parents were the only people in his world who spoke Spanish 100% of the time, his other relatives usually spoke English.

*This is actually example 4 in our books.

Exposure: He had been exposed to reading in English and had multiple years of intervention for the problems/concerns he was demonstrating.

Experience: He was trying to read in English and in Spanish, with support in both languages.

Expectations: His parents and school staff all had high expectations of him. His writing was at grade level, if spelling was not taken into account, his math calculations were at grade level independently, and his math problem solving was at grade level when the problems were read to him.

Practice: He had had several years of intervention that was designed to target his problems with phonics and phonemes.

This student was referred for a special education evaluation. His problem was very specific in nature and was showing up across both languages. He had been exposed to the skill that he was not developing, he had experience with these skills, he was expected to learn these skills, and he was given an intervention (practice) designed to improve these skills. These facts, along with the fact that his sister (same environment, two years younger) was reading at a higher-grade level than him, were all factors that helped determine that he was a student in need of special education services.

Part 3 --- Determinant Factor

Specific Learning Disability

NOTE: These examples only cover a portion of an evaluation and the focus in this chapter is on providing some examples that build toward determinant factor, not attempting to be all encompassing. Our workbook provides a more complete example of one case.

ELL Critical Data Information Example

In Johnny's previous educational setting, in his homeland, concerns regarding the rate of learning to read, write and do math were documented. The parents report frequent conversations with his teachers regarding the lack of progress in reading, math and writing. The parents report that Johnny attended school just like the older siblings, who did not struggle to learn these skills. The parents had one report card, and the report card documents very low performance in these areas and the teacher's comment was that he was attending regularly, well behaved, and putting forth a consistent effort in class.

The state testing scores for language acquisition for Johnny were compared to the scores of three other students in the same grade who have been learning English for the same length of time and speak the same language as Johnny. The language acquisition rates for the other three students all demonstrate a strong upward growth curve for English language learning, yet Johnny's growth in English language learning is well below that of the comparison students. Also, compared to other students who have been evaluated in the past, he is demonstrating English language acquisition rates similar to the students who were eventually qualified for special education services.

District Data Information Example

It is important to note that Somewhere Elementary has evaluated its data regarding qualification rates of ELL students and has one of the lower qualification rates within the district and has no areas of disproportionality. Therefore, the comparison to previously evaluated and qualified students is deemed to be an appropriate comparison.

Standardized Testing Information Example

Johnny was administered the Woodcock-Johnson –IV (WJ-IV) and the Bateria. These are commonly used tests to measure reading, math and written language skills. The WJ-IV was administered in English and the Bateria in Spanish.

The results from the WJ-IV are indicative of a student who is functioning well below standards in reading, and the testing indicates that Johnny's skills demonstrated during this testing are similar to the standards for a student who is in the middle of the first grade. For example, Johnny does know many 3-4 letter sight words, he can sound out simple words that either have blends or have multiple syllables, but not both. Also, Johnny can read text from a book as long as the text is well supported by pictures on the same page.

The results of the Bateria, and informal assessment in reading in Spanish, indicate that Johnny does not demonstrate the ability to read in Spanish. Johnny's parents also reported that Johnny has not demonstrated the ability to read in Spanish and only knows a small number of common sight words in Spanish.

Johnny is a sixth-grade student at Somewhere Elementary. In Johnny's grade, there are two other Spanish speaking students who entered the school at the same time as Johnny and these students are also in reading intervention groups. However, these students are in intervention groups in which the materials used are at the fifth-grade reading level and these students are demonstrating strong abilities to utilize their reading skills within their general education classrooms.

Determinant Factor Example

Johnny was referred for a special education evaluation due to significant concerns regarding his development of reading skills. The team processed information regarding Johnny using the ELL Critical Data Process, in which Johnny was compared against like peers in many areas and Johnny's academic history, language development and overall social and developmental history were examined. Johnny, as noted in the report, is demonstrating significantly more difficulty than his like peers within his school in the area of reading. Also, Somewhere Elementary data was examined, and the majority of the language learners are performing at or above the average performance for language learners within the state. Johnny's rate of growth in reading is well below the average for language learners both within the school and across the state. Additionally, Johnny has been provided reading intervention along with two like peers, and Johnny's growth on this intervention has been much slower than his like peers. The standardized testing that was completed indicated that Johnny's reading skills are significantly delayed. These factors, when taken together, indicate that Johnny's difficulties in learning to read are not primarily caused by difficulties related to being a language learner. Therefore, although being a language learner may be an additional impact on the delay in reading, the determinant factor for the delay in reading is a learning disability in the area of reading.

Part 4 --- Report Example:

The following section contains additional information that specifically addresses the fact that Esteban is an English Language Learner and that the difficulties he is demonstrating could be primarily related to this fact or could be primarily related to being a student with a disability. Additionally, the following information is meant to provide the reader context when trying to determine if language acquisition or disability is the determinant factor for Esteban's academic difficulties.

- 1)** When Esteban is compared directly with two of his peers who speak the same language and entered kindergarten with similar ELPA-21 (language acquisition test) scores, Esteban has lost ground relative to his peers each year. That is, Esteban's test scores have actually decreased and their test scores have increased. Esteban, when compared to his same age peers on this test, is not advancing. In contrast, one of his peers has made average growth and another has made exceptional growth within this environment. All three students speak Spanish, were born in the United States, and none of them have formal education in Spanish.
- 2)** Esteban's younger sister is a student here at Somewhere Elementary. She is currently performing within the average range, and she is demonstrating skills similar to or stronger than Esteban's skills, even though she is two years younger.

5) On the MAP testing in reading and in math, Esteban has consistently scored at the 1st to 4th percentile in reading and in math. Of the two comparison students, both of whom entered Somewhere Elementary at the same time as Esteban and had similar ELPA-21 scores, one of the students has progressed from very low percentile scores to scores in the 35-45 percentile range, and the other has reached into the 55-65 percentile range. Each of these students has received similar intervention in reading over time, and the other two students in this direct comparison, have responded positively to the interventions.

7) Esteban's teachers and parents have been able to establish and reinforce high expectations for Esteban, and the interviews indicate Esteban works hard to meet these expectations (see teacher comments as an example). Esteban's parents also commented that he is a very hard worker and that he is eager to learn in school. Esteban has been engaged in the learning process each and every time the school psychologist has entered the room.

10) Esteban, during observation, remained engaged in the learning environment.