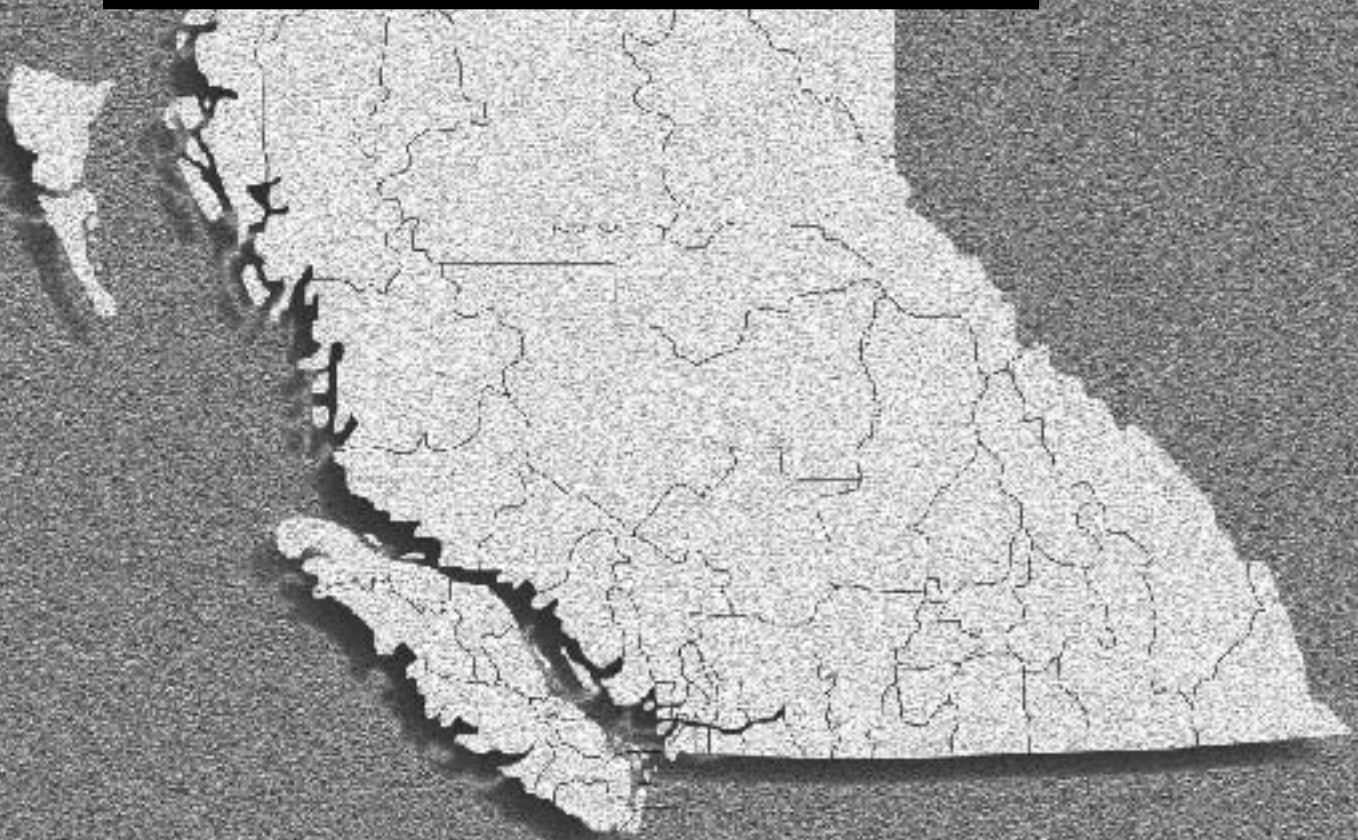


ESL

**Learners With Special Needs
In British Columbia:
Identification, Assessment,
and Programming**



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In British Columbia:
Identification, Assessment, and Programming**

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Carlos (age 15), a refugee from Central America, is not learning English as quickly as his teachers think he should be. He has been in Canada for two years and is falling far behind in his studies.

Is it because he:

- has a language disorder?
- is depressed over his brother's death?
- is developmentally delayed?
- does not want to be in Canada?
- is finding it difficult to learn English?
- has limited literacy skills in his first language?
- left school in his native country when he was 10 years old?
- has a learning disability?
- has not made the adjustment to living in Canada?

Or is it a combination of the above?

Students like Carlos raise questions about how we identify, assess, and provide program support for ESL students with special needs. There are no ready-made answers. There is no single professional who can answer all of these questions.

This report is intended to support the efforts of educators in providing appropriate methods of identification and assessment and in developing appropriate program support. For students like Carlos all over B.C., it is critical that we take action.

Preface

In 1994, the B.C. Teachers' Federation (BCTF) sponsored a comprehensive ESL Research project. Following this, a colloquium of lower mainland educators was held to provide an opportunity to respond to the research findings. Individuals representing the BCTF, the Vancouver School Board (VSB), the University of B.C. (UBC), the Ministry of Education, Skills, and Training, and the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies (AMSSA), met to design a proposal for how the needs of ESL students with special needs identified in the research and colloquium might be met.

This report is the result of the proposal drawn up, and was prepared as part of a contract between the BCTF and the Ministry of Education. The report contains:

1. A description of current issues and best practices for ESL learners with special needs in the areas of identification, assessment, and program support.
2. Recommendations for improving identification, assessment, and programming.

Current research/literature and innovative local practice are considered throughout this paper and support understanding the range and complexity of issues that surround ESL students with special needs.

We offer this report as one step in developing understanding of issues affecting ESL students with special needs. In suggesting recommendations for improving identification, assessment, and programming, we intend not to be directive, but to state what we believe to be feasible and appropriate directions.

This report was influenced by the philosophy and experience of an inter-disciplinary group of educators who have worked with ESL students with special needs and who have provided leadership in developing techniques and strategies. This report therefore blends what we can learn from the literature and from innovative local practice in School District #39, Vancouver. The ESL Special Needs Ad Hoc Committee was supported by Hugh Hooper, the former ESL District Principal for the Vancouver School Board. Group members included:

Marilou Carillo — Speech Language Pathologist
Debbie Clarke — ESL Research Co-ordinator
Jean Fowler — Speech Language Pathologist; VSB ESL Special Needs Resource (1996-97)
Mariam Gruman — Psychologist
Veronica Hooker — Special Education Consultant
Anna Ma — Area Consultant
Pat Palulis — Psychologist
Edna Schuerhaus — Secondary ESL Consultant
Rosalie Tully — Elementary Consultant
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We acknowledge Debbie Clarke for her review of the literature in this area.

The views expressed in this document reflect the perspectives of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the perspectives of the Ministry of Education.

Introduction

In recent years, British Columbia has received an unprecedented number of students for whom English is not their first language (Naylor, 1995). Eight lower mainland school districts enrol approximately 90 % of the province's 71,000 ESL students (estimated 1998 enrolments). In the Vancouver School District, ESL students comprise approximately 50 % of the student population. Gunderson (1995) reported that students in the Vancouver School District came from more than 100 different countries and spoke more than 100 different languages.

In the midst of these dramatic demographic changes, lower-mainland school districts have struggled to provide appropriate social and academic support for ESL students. It is commonly understood that ESL learners, on average, will take four to eight years to acquire the academic English skill they need to be as successful as their English-speaking peers (Collier, V.P., 1987; Cummins, J., 1984). Learning an additional language is a complex process and it means, among other things, "learning to use a language to socialize, to learn, to query, to make believe and wonder" (Rigg, Allen, 1980). On a social and emotional level, these students might take anywhere from one to ten years to adjust to their new culture and language. How the student fares with each of these factors will contribute to his or her school success. In addition to the challenges mentioned above, various groups of professionals have identified several factors, including: settlement/adjustment, astronaut parenting, trauma and bereavement, level of previous schooling, literacy in first language, appropriate pedagogical approaches, identification and assessment of special needs, and curriculum adaptations (ESL Special Needs Workshop Participants — Lower Mainland High School ESL Teachers/Support Staff, February 1995; ESL Special Needs Mini-Forum Participants — ESL Metro Co-ordinators, May 1995; Psycho-educational Research and Training Centre Self-Study Workshop, March 1997; VSB Area Counselors' Report, May 1997; VSB and Vancouver Health Board (VHB) Speech Language Pathologists' Report, June 1997).

One of our biggest challenges in supporting culturally and linguistically diverse learners is that our school system is primarily designed to support students who have English as their first language, which is what many would argue to be a Euro-centric school system. This can and will result in marked cultural gaps between the school system and the needs of some students for whom English is not a first language, which can put some ESL students at risk. Failure to adapt the educational system to reflect its multi-ethnic community is to discriminate in favor of certain groups while alienating and depriving others (Clarke, 1994).

“The literature is replete with studies reporting the advantages to students of coming from homes that share common beliefs with schools about the use and value of literacy, while students whose family literacy practices differ from those operating within the school environment are disadvantaged (Auerbach, 1989; Early, Gunderson, 1993; Heath, 1983; Samuda, 1991; Weinstein-Shr, 1990),” as cited in Clarke, 1994.

The needs and issues described above are to a large extent the challenges faced by the majority of our ESL students who come to B.C. In many cases, these students have experienced schooling prior to arrival in Canada, have supportive parents, and demonstrate a solid foundation of first-language literacy skills. Even with this type of background, however, the obstacles they face in our school system can be numerous and challenging.

Within the overall ESL population it has become clear that there are students who have special needs, as defined in the Ministry of Education, Skills, and Training “Special Education Policy,” including disabilities of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional, or behavioral nature, and learning disabilities, and exceptional gifts or talents. This includes students who have suffered some degree of trauma, or some combination of needs described in the Ministry definitions. It is an enormous challenge for the present educational system to meet the academic and social needs of ESL students. To meet the challenge of supporting ESL students with special needs is even more challenging and exceedingly complex.

Based on our analysis of the literature, and as a result of dialogue with local educators, the issues to be resolved include:

1. Identification/assessment guidelines, and programming for students with special needs, have traditionally been designed for a mono-lingual (English), mainstream population (Euro-centric).
2. The degree to which identification, assessment, and programming services may culturally discriminate against many ESL students.
3. While both the literature and best practice show that effective assessment utilizes a range of instruments and processes, there exists evidence that there is an over-emphasis or reliance on standardized tests as the measure of assessing ESL students' cognitive development and academic progress.
4. Current assessment practices, which continue to be diagnosis and placement driven, with special educational designations and funding reinforcing this practice.
5. The current support model, where students are referred to "experts" for analysis and diagnosis, can lead to a limited understanding of the complexity of the issues surrounding these learners, because no single professional has all the necessary skills and knowledge to identify/assess and provide program support for ESL students with special needs. While the structures of collaboration (school-based teams) may exist, effective collaborative processes and practices are limited.

In this report, these issues are individually discussed for the sake of clarity. In reality, these issues are woven together, which requires an integrated and multi-disciplinary approach to meeting students' needs.

Identification, Assessment, and Program Services for ESL Students With Special Needs — Issues

Issue 1:

Traditionally, guidelines for identification of, assessment of, and program services for, students with special needs have been designed for a mono-lingual, mainstream population.

A delivery system based on such guidelines puts culturally and linguistically diverse students at risk for either over-referral or under-referral to special education. Much of the literature is concerned with avoiding inappropriate referrals (or over-referring) to special education (Baca, Almanza, 1991; Garcia, Oritz, 1998). “ ‘Different’ is sometimes mistakenly interpreted as meaning ‘deficient,’ and ESL students are often unnecessarily referred to special education for assessment” (Clarke, 1994). Some differences are cultural and linguistic in nature, or involve other extrinsic factors (e.g., adjustment, trauma, and social-emotional issues). In contrast, “failure to refer students for assessment [or under-referral] is usually the result of...attributing poor academic achievement to a lack of English language proficiency or fear of testing before the student has had adequate time to acquire the level of L2 (second/additional language) proficiency that would enable them to take tests” (Clarke, 1994).

Issue 2:

Current identification, assessment, and programming instruments and processes may culturally discriminate against many ESL students.

Consideration of diverse linguistic and cultural groups is rarely made in standardized identification and assessment instruments and processes. However,

- students’ background and exposure to life experiences and school curriculum may differ from that of the standardization sample
- cultural rules of speaking and interacting with others are different than the “mainstream” population
- child-rearing practices may differ
- co-operation versus competition is viewed differently. There is cultural variation to the value of competition as opposed to co-operation among individuals.

- time is viewed differently across cultures
- rules regarding proximity, touch, and eye contact differ across cultures
- gender expectations differ across cultures
- individual versus family, or community orientation, varies across cultural groups (Hamayan & Damico, 1991; Roseberry-McKibbin, 1994).

While such factors should be taken into account when developing culturally appropriate identification, assessment, and program practices, they rarely are. Hence current instruments and processes may culturally discriminate.

Issue 3:

There is a danger in the over-emphasis or reliance on standardized tests as the measure of assessing students' cognitive development and academic progress.

Although standardized assessment can reveal some information, these tests must be used with caution. The misinterpretation of such test results (which are normed on middle-class English-speaking children) has been the cause of mis-diagnosing and labeling many ESL students as having special needs (Cervantes, Baca, 1979; Mattes, Omark, 1991). Standardized tests have been strongly criticized and deemed both inappropriate and inadequate as the sole measures of assessing students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Adler, 1991; Cummins, 1991; Hamayan & Damico, 1991; Mattes, Omark, 1991; Roseberry-McKibbin, 1994; Samuda, 1991) as cited in Clarke, 1994.

There are a number of factors that contribute to the inadequacy of standardized tests in first (L1) or second/additional language (L2) when assessing students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. These may include:

1. Test translation difficulties (i.e., English tests that have been translated into the student's first language.
 - differences in structure and content across the two languages

- makes comparison of scores an issue
- assumption of similar cultural and life experiences
 - words often having a different frequency or difficulty in L2. Similarly, grammatical forms may have several or no equivalents in the second language (Damico, 1994; Roseberry-McKibbin, 1994).
2. Lack of developmental data on languages other than English (Mattes, Omark, 1991).
 3. Heterogeneity of diverse populations makes standardized L1 tasks problematic. As an example, many dialects of Chinese and Spanish exist (Roseberry-McKibbin, 1994).
 4. Situational bias
 - student's adjustment to the artificiality of the testing environment
 - student's familiarity with test-taking situations in general (Hamayan & Damico, 1991; Roseberry-McKibbin, 1994).
 - students from one culture may not be comfortable with an examiner who is from a different culture and who is also a stranger to them (Roseberry-McKibbin, 1994).
 5. Examiner bias
 - an examiner may be making some assumptions and/or misinterpretations about an ESL student from another culture.

Issue 4: 

Current assessment practice continues to be diagnosis and placement driven, with special education designations and funding reinforcing this practice.

This approach to assessing students is being questioned in the literature (Baca, De Valenzuela, 1994; Cummins, 1991; Hamayan & Damico, 1991; Roseberry-McKibbin, 1994; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, 1983). Such authors find using a special-education diagnosis and placement approach with students from diverse cultural/linguistic backgrounds who may present complicating factors (e.g., adjustment and/or trauma issues, educational gaps, limited literacy skills in L1) to be even more problematic.

The literature suggests that identifying a deficit within a student does not necessarily help teachers provide appropriate learning experiences for that student. What should be the goals of the assessment process? The authors listed above suggest that if a standardized system were the goal, then educators would continue to assess in order to obtain a diagnosis and profile of student deficits, prior to placing students into standardized programs with transmission-oriented teaching methods. If, however, the development of the whole child is the goal — which is the current mandate in B.C. — then assessment should involve obtaining information regarding student strengths to form the basis for developing teaching strategies, including curricular adaptation. Such an assessment concept assumes inclusion, classroom teacher/support, staff/family collaboration, and a reciprocal interactive model of pedagogy. Cummins (1986) refers to this teaching model requiring “a genuine dialogue between student and teacher in both oral and written modalities, guidance and facilitation rather than control of student learning by the teacher, and the encouragement of student/student talk in a collaborative learning context.”

Issue 5:

The current model, where students are referred to “experts” for analysis and diagnosis, can lead to a limited understanding of the issues surrounding ESL learners with special needs. No single professional has all the necessary skills and knowledge to identify, assess, and provide program support for ESL students with special needs.

Most school-based staff (ESL teachers, learning assistance teachers, counsellors, psychologists, and speech language pathologists) are from Euro-centric cultures and are mono-lingual English speakers. Further, many of these professionals received no training in identification/assessment of students from diverse cultural/linguistic backgrounds. However, when considered collectively rather than individually, they bring different knowledge and skills which address many areas of identification, assessment, and programming.

ESL teachers bring:

- knowledge about second language learning
- knowledge about settlement and cultural diversity issues
- knowledge about ESL teaching methodology

Learning Assistance teachers bring:

- knowledge and resources about academic learning difficulties
- knowledge about curricular adaptations suitable for students with special needs

Counsellors bring:

- knowledge and resources about social-emotional development and mental health issues

Psychologists bring:

- knowledge and resources about cognitive development and how this relates to academic achievement

Speech Language Pathologists bring:

- knowledge and resources around acquisition of communication processes (e.g., phonology and language) and communication disorders

In addition to specialized knowledge, each group of educators has a number of professional needs which should be met if ESL students with special needs are to be appropriately identified, assessed, and provided with appropriate education.

ESL teachers need:

- support in identification, assessment, and programming for ESL students with special needs

Learning Assistance teachers, Counsellors, Psychologists, and Speech Language Pathologists need:

- support around settlement, second-language acquisition, cultural diversity issues, and ESL teaching methodology.

This description of knowledge and needs by group is itself a generalization: knowledge about cultural/linguistic diversity and special education varies within and across the groups.

Currently, in spite of the existence of many school-based teams, collaborative processes between the above-listed professionals are not well-established, perhaps because of the isolated nature of training and professional practice and our limited knowledge of effective collaboration in general. In analyzing the literature, we argue that it would be beneficial to develop the collaborative skills of professionals in order to learn to integrate the different knowledge they bring to the identification/assessment/programming process and to develop new models of service delivery.

Guiding Principles of Best Practice for Working Within the Context of Cultural/Linguistic Diversity

Following a review of the literature, principles were identified, compiled, and adapted by speech language pathologists from the VSB and the VHB in June 1997. Work by Early and Hooper (in press) also informed the development of the principles. Input from the VSB Area Counselling Services for ESL/EAL Learners, May 1997, was also incorporated.

Key guiding principles:

1. **Diversity across/within cultures, and the uniqueness of the family's world, affect the child (Barrera, 1994; Sue et al, 1992).**

With “diversity” we are concerned about the difference of meanings and values; there is no such thing as “objective” observation or stereotypes (a student’s family cannot be judged solely by group membership). We cannot limit our understanding of culture to being only ethnicity and race. While recognizing these as essential, the family’s unique view of the world affects the child and those who interact with him or her. Awareness and sensitivity about our own cultural/family values and biases are a necessary template in order to understand others.

2. **Use of the culture and language of the child’s home and family enhances rather than diminishes his/her learning (Cummins, 1976; Wastie, 1995; Wong-Fillmore, 1991).**

a) It is crucial to recognize the value of maintaining first language skills.

Communication in its broadest sense is the goal in education, regardless of first or second language (L1/L2), or first or second culture (C1/C2); we build on already-existing skills in L1 or L2; and create a welcoming environment that supports a philosophy of valuing cultural/linguistic diversity. The literature states that proficiency in first-language learning is essential for the successful development of additional languages. We also know that proficiency/competency in more than one language is an advantage. “The ability to switch linguistic codes and eventually think in more than one language increases conceptual development...and gives bilingual people the mental flexibility and openness that produces cognitive and social benefits” (Wastie, 1995).

b) *Inter-generational cultural transmission is essential to maximal learning (Brown, 1996; Jensen et al, 1988; Wastie, 1995; Wong-Fillmore, 1991).*

Language, cognition, and the development of social skills will likely be impeded by any significant disruption in the communication of culture and language within a family and between generations. “If children are not given the opportunity to learn their parents’ language(s), then their sense of personal identity and culture may be at risk” (Wastie, 1995).

3. *Student learning and identity in a multicultural environment is best promoted through collaboration between school and home (Cummins, 1986; Roseberry-McKibbin, 1994; Westby, 1990).*

This can best be achieved through the active participation of parents and teachers. It is important to have school staff who can liaise with family and community in a culturally/linguistically relevant manner (i.e., cultural/linguistic mediators). Collaboration should also occur with community groups, universities, government, and other agencies.

“ESL students’ academic achievement and social development are significantly increased when schools actively encourage parental participation. To achieve excellence as well as equity for our students, parents and teachers must become partners in the learning enterprise” (Early and Hooper [in press]).

4. *Use of advocacy-oriented assessment acknowledges the child’s abilities, potential, and cultural differences including C1/L1 knowledge (Baca, De Valenzuela, 1994; Barrera, 1994; Cummins, 1986; Hamayan & Damico, 1991; Roseberry-McKibbin, 1994).*

Cummins (1986) states that instead of assessors accepting a role definition and an educational structure that makes discriminatory assessment virtually inevitable [with culturally and linguistically diverse groups]...[they need to] challenge a socio-educational system that tends to disable minority students. Assessors need to become advocates for the child in scrutinizing critically the societal and educa-

tional context within which the child has developed. An assessment that is advocacy-oriented acknowledges the child's abilities, potential, and cultural differences, including C1/L1 knowledge. It also recognizes that second-language learning is a normal process. This approach assumes that the learning problem lies in interactions between the student and the educational context and reserves as a last possibility the assumption that the problem lies within the child (Baca, De Valenzuela, 1994).

5. **Assessment is an ongoing and interactive process (Baca, De Valenzuela, 1994; Barrera, 1994; Cummins, 1986; Hamayan & Damico, 1991; Roseberry-McKibbin, 1994).**

Appropriate assessment in the literature involves communication that reflects collaboration and reciprocity. This approach involves moving towards dynamic, ethnographic, descriptive, contextual assessment (see Glossary for explanation of these terms) that informs instruction and includes collaboration with the student, teacher(s), family, cultural/linguistic mediator (see Glossary) and other professionals involved. Assessment informs instruction and is ongoing. Assessment is contextually-based, involving a collection of data that are representative of the child's learning across multiple events and relevant settings. Assessment involves the teaming of family and school personnel, allowing the pooling of different perspectives and knowledge.

6. **It is important to develop an interactive, reciprocal, and culturally-responsive educational environment to promote learning and empowerment of the student (Baca, De Valenzuela, 1994; Cummins, 1986, Hamayan & Damico, 1991; Jensen et al, 1988).**

This includes honoring the learning styles of ESL learners, building on the L1 and C1 experiences of students, enhancing their cognitive development, and providing opportunities for building understanding across cultures through cross-cultural education. These concepts are briefly described below.

a) *Honoring Learning Styles*

ESL students show considerable individual variation in their rates of development of oral proficiency and writing. Thus all teachers (not just ESL specialists) need to address the learning needs of ESL students and to adjust instruction to accommodate different levels of English proficiency, and the different learning rates and styles of their students (Early, Hooper [in press]).

b) *Building on L1 and C1*

“The teaching of ESL students should build upon the educational and personal experiences the student brings to school. In language learning, students should be encouraged to use their previous experiences with oral and written language to develop their second language and to promote growth to literacy. Cultural identities should be honored by instructional practices that recognize the knowledge and experiences that students bring to school” (Early, Hooper [in press]).

c) *Enhancing Cognitive Development*

If ESL students are to develop cognitively, their intellectual growth should continue to be challenged while they are learning English. Careful, systematic, and planned integration of language teaching with the teaching of academic content in thematic units helps to simultaneously develop students’ language, subject area knowledge, and thinking processes. Thematic units provide opportunities to use language interactively across different situations, modes, and text types (Early, Hooper [in press]).

d) *Providing Opportunities for Cross-Cultural Education*

Kehoe (1993) has developed goals for cross cultural education which include:

i) *ensuring equality of opportunities:*

“All cultural groups represented in the school should on average have the same levels of achievement. If they do not, it may be because the process of learning in their home culture is different from that of the school.”

ii) developing more positive attitudes toward members of other cultures:

“Place more emphasis on similarities between the host culture and the culture being studied. Develop cognitive and perceptual abilities in children. Research tells us that providing children with a greater differentiation of emotions assists them to see people as individuals and increases acceptance of cultural diversity. Research also tells us that prejudice is based upon an ego-centric judgment that only one way of experiencing the world is the right way. Learning through the development of critical thinking skills, that there are many ways of being right, increases acceptance of cultural diversity.”

iii) developing pride in heritage:

“If people are encouraged to be proud of their own culture, they will have more positive regard for other cultures... People who judge another culture as wrong simply because it is different from their own are not likely to evaluate any other cultures positively.”

Summary 

Identification, assessment, and programming support for ESL students with special needs is a complex, ongoing process. It should ideally involve the collaboration of an inter-disciplinary team of school personnel with family to provide descriptive information that supports learning and informs instruction. It should be a dynamic process that allows for a continuum of support depending primarily on the needs of the student, but also in support of the classroom teacher. Collaborative identification and assessment processes will require a range of approaches involving groups of educators and personnel.

In this report we have identified challenges facing professionals working with culturally and linguistically diverse populations and we have described guiding principles of best practice for working within the context of diversity. How then do we identify, assess, and program for ESL learners with special needs? We suggest a number of recommendations for improving identification, assessment, and programming.

Identification and Pre-referral Intervention

The identification or pre-referral phase has the dual purpose of (1) identifying students at risk, and (2) implementing a series of instructional intervention procedures (Garcia, Oritz, 1988), within the regular or ESL classroom (Baca, Armanza, 1991) before students are referred to special education (Clarke, 1994).

Identification and Pre-referral Intervention: Recommendation

- **Re-think and re-design identification processes**

The identification or pre-referral phase involves the collection of information from a variety of sources (e.g., teachers, parents, cultural/linguistic mediators, support staff) using a variety of procedures (e.g., ethnographic interviews, observations, checklists) to produce a descriptive profile of students' backgrounds including:

- family history and transitions
- developmental and health histories
- first-language development and language dominance
- previous schooling and literacy levels in first language
- social-emotional development
- cultural/familial attitudes toward the value of education
- learning styles
- modifications the teacher has made to the curriculum and/or materials
- the student's responses to these modifications
- pedagogical approaches
- student's current academic ability

Assessment

It is the objective of fair and appropriate assessment to document any potential difficulties, and then to differentiate between those due to intrinsic disorders and those due to cultural and linguistic differences and other extrinsic factors (Hamayan & Damico, 1991).

Assessment procedures currently designed for mono-lingual, mainstream populations should not continue to dominate school systems with growing numbers of diverse students. “Only through the flexible use of the best from both traditional and non-traditional approaches can meaningful linguistically and culturally sensitive assessment emerge. Designing the students’ optimum learning environment should be the ultimate goal of the evaluation process” (Hamayan & Damico, 1991).

Assessment: Recommendations

1. **Develop a comprehensive assessment process.**

This includes:

- valuing a broad range of culturally and developmentally relevant information
- facilitating and encouraging the collaboration of parents, educators, cultural/linguistic mediators, counselors, psychologists, speech language pathologists, and ESL specialists (i.e., an interdisciplinary approach)
- determining and acknowledging L1 competency
- moving toward dynamic, ethnographic, descriptive, contextual assessment that shapes instruction. This assessment is advocacy-oriented and acknowledges the student's abilities, potential, and cultural differences, including C1/L1 knowledge. It also recognizes that second-language learning is a process with understood stages of development. For example, when learning English as an additional language it takes two to three years to become proficient in conversational skills, and four to ten years to approach grade-level competency in academic skills (Collier, 1989; Cummins, 1981, 1984).
- viewing assessment leading to interventions as an active process — continuous and ongoing
- involving performances in rich and engaging contexts
- examining a variety of sources of evidence
- looking for the student's optimal capabilities (i.e., Vygotsky's zone of proximal development)
- finding paths and building bridges for students' success
- updating, revising, and rechecking decisions (Lewis, 1991; Hamayan & Damico, 1991; VSB ESL School Psychologist Sub-Committee, 1996).

2. Create and explore alternative assessment processes building on existing best practices.

Good practice occurs locally. We must learn to build on local expertise and inquiry. In the Vancouver School District a number of assessment projects have been initiated by educators at both elementary and secondary school levels (Britannia Secondary, Gladstone Secondary, Sir James Douglas Elementary, Dr. Annie B. Jamieson Elementary, Oakridge Reception and Orientation Centre). These projects have all used dynamic assessment techniques to understand students' strengths and weaknesses and to provide teachers with information that could be applied to instructional strategies. Each of the projects used collaborative professional teams for the assessment processes. For an example of this work, refer to Appendix — Report on Jamieson Elementary Pilot Project.

3. Continue to question our own contextual and cultural assumptions.

By questioning our own cultural assumptions we are aware of and sensitive about our cultural background and we value and respect differences in others. We are willing to contrast our beliefs and attitudes with those of people from diverse cultural heritages in non-judgmental ways.

By questioning our contextual assumptions within the school we are willing to question our assumptions about:

- how children learn
- what background knowledge and experience children should bring to school
- how parents should relate to the school and to their children's learning
- how parents should communicate with their children.

Programming for ESL Learners With Special Needs

Traditionally, special education instruction has been based on the paradigm that “learning is linear in nature and successful learning of any skill requires a sequential mastery of sub-skills or components of the task. [This suggests] more control and structuring from teachers, more review, drill, and practice, and more lower-level questions” (Hamayan & Damico, 1991). In contrast, the literature is stressing “the purposeful nature of learning, where the learner actively seeks to learn skills or information in pursuit of a relevant goal.... The way to make tasks easier is to adjust the context by increasing the number of contextual cues to meaning, rather than fractionating the task to simpler and less meaningful segments” (Hamayan & Damico, 1991).

Within the context of cultural and linguistic diversity, it is important to move towards educational practice that not only honors cultural and linguistic diversity, but avoids the linear paradigm described above and is more compatible with the B.C. education mandate.

Programming support for ESL students with special needs is an extension of the assessment process combining information from pre-referral intervention and assessment.

Programming for ESL Learners With Special Needs: Recommendations

1. **Develop appropriate program support which includes:**
 - developing instruction that is reciprocal and interactive (e.g., mediated learning). This involves “a mutual exploration of ideas rather than one-way transmission from teacher to student...[and stresses] the necessity of building new abilities on skills already possessed by the student, without rejecting what the student brings to the classroom” (Hamayan & Damico, 1991).
 - empowering students through a cross-cultural educational framework; that is, a framework that moves beyond Euro-centric teaching processes, content, and perspectives.
 - developing intervention strategies with sensitivity around familial and cultural contexts.
 - focusing on purposeful and contextualized learning. For example, “in both writing and speech, the focus of instruction should be on meaning and ideas rather than the correction of surface errors, as these ultimately will self-correct for the student who has sufficient meaningful interaction with adult models” (Hamayan & Damico, 1991).
 - exploring different models of service delivery (i.e., combined studies in subject areas; integrated units of study; instruction in L1).
 - building cognitive and academic skills while the second language (English) is developing. “Efficient language instruction integrates the building up of subject matter, knowledge, thinking, and language skills” (Early et al, 1986). An example of this is the knowledge framework which organizes both teaching and learning of content and language. One of the essential elements of the knowledge framework is the use of key visuals which create a context for facilitating ESL students’ understanding of thinking, content, and language (Mohan, 1986).

2. **Move toward an inter-disciplinary team model of support which incorporates the above concepts and strategies. (Refer to Appendix for an example of an inter-disciplinary team.)**

Unlike the school-based team which consists of brief discussions of a group of professionals meeting to problem solve and develop action plans, the inter-disciplinary team works together with the classroom teacher, ideally within the classroom context, to develop programming support that fits the classroom culture and becomes an extension of the assessment process.

Conclusion

Addressing the issue of ESL students with special needs has been a major concern for many educators who believe that the needs of such students are not being met. This document recommends directions for how we can better address these needs. In examining the literature and building upon innovative local practice it is feasible to move away from a deficit model of identification, assessment, and a transmission form of programming, to one that is advocacy-oriented and learner-centred.

In proposing these concepts and strategies to meet the needs of ESL learners with special needs there is a risk of dual systems of identification and assessment; one for ESL learners with special needs and one for other learners with special needs. We tentatively suggest that the recommendations here might also be applied to students with English as a first language as well.

Although we have been able to outline challenges, principles of best practice in the context of cultural and linguistic diversity, and recommendations for practice in identification, assessment, and programming for ESL students with special needs, we have not outlined a process for systemic support. We therefore recommend that significant provincial leadership be provided to support the implementation of the recommendations of this report.

Such support should include:

- enabling local innovation through finding/promoting sites that are aligned with these concepts; documenting and disseminating the information developed
- promoting action research to refine and improve practice
- developing an inventory of best practices that have been identified in this report and which will emerge from future action research projects
- creating in-service for professional development
- providing conferences for the dissemination of information

Appendix

Report on Jamieson Elementary Pilot Project

The VSB ESL Special Needs Committee, under the leadership of Hugh Hooper, ESL District Principal, initiated a research project to develop a broader, more comprehensive understanding of the social, cognitive, and academic challenges facing ESL students. Members of the committee decided to conduct a pilot study at Dr. Annie B. Jamieson Elementary. A group assessment of one intermediate ESL class was conducted using dynamic assessment techniques to determine whether students considered “at risk” could be identified using this methodology.

A researcher and the classroom teacher met to document the teacher’s concerns for five students considered “at risk.” In addition to the Learning Propensity Assessment Device (LPAD), members of the assessment team decided to include reading, writing, and oral language activities using mediated learning techniques. Team members were a Research Co-ordinator, a Speech Language Pathologist, a School Psychologist, and a Classroom Teacher with LD/ESL background.

The Jamieson Project took place from April to June, 1996. Team members met in August 1996 to write individual summaries of strengths, needs, and suggestions for each student. Assessment results and observations offered evidence that dynamic assessment techniques provided information beyond what observational checklists had made available. In addition, the responses of students to mediational strategies provided valuable insights for future programming. Students were highly motivated and very much engaged in the assessment process. Students previously considered to be “at risk” for second language acquisition and school success demonstrated strengths that had not been apparent through regular class activities

and observational procedures. As team members met to interpret and discuss results, the classroom teacher reported that the original intent to identify “at risk” students for referral to assessment shifted to a focus on pre-referral intervention using instructional strategies to which students had responded during the mediated learning process. Cognizant of the fact that there were two students for whom further assessment might be necessary, the teacher had seen strengths in the students and was eager to try out new strategies with them, before making the decision to continue formal assessment. The goals and objectives of the pilot study were re-framed to focus on pre-referral and classroom intervention.

Glossary

Contextual Assessment: This approach involves observations in a variety of contexts familiar to the student (home, school, community).

Cultural/Linguistic Mediator: The cultural/linguistic mediator provides language and cultural mediation by facilitating clear communication and understanding about home and school cultures. This role facilitates access and empowerment of ESL students and their families who are culturally/linguistically diverse, while bridging and connecting the needs of the students/families and their communities to the school context. Conversely, this role also involves bridging the school needs and context to the student, family, and community.

Dynamic Assessment: Dynamic assessment provides at least three types of information: insight into the child as learner (how the child approaches tasks, how she or he self-corrects); the modifiability of the learner (the extent to which a child is capable of change in response to a modification); and the potentially effective directions for instruction.

Dynamic Group Assessment: Provides individual dynamic assessment profiles of learners in a group situation. It can also provide class and school profiles.

Ethnographic Assessment: This assessment identifies and reflects cultural, familial, and social factors that may affect the student's performance.

Ethnographic Interview: This process allows for discovery of the culture of the family — their perceptions of the world, behaviors, values, and beliefs — and their strengths and needs (Westby, 1990).

Reciprocal and Interactive Teaching: This involves “a mutual exploration of ideas rather than one-way transmission from teacher to student...[and stresses] the necessity of building new abilities on skills already possessed by the student, without rejecting what the student brings to the classroom,” e.g., mediated learning (Hamayan & Damico, 1991).

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