

Mini-Grant

English Language Learners (ELL) and Learning Disabilities Research and Teaching Strategies

New Hampshire Adult Education

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**Robin C. Letendre, M.Ed.
Learning Disabilities Consultant**

Rationale for the Mini-Grant

This mini-grant topic was chosen because there seems to be a need in clarifying the issue of identifying adult English language learners with a learning disability. The question also arises of the student's learning occurring at their own individual rate of learning, and knowing that there will be struggles, and that this is not a learning disability. Educators need to know that there might not be a need to identify an adult language learner with a disability because of multiple other factors impacting their learning that will be discussed within this mini-grant.

I have had the privilege of attending two workshops that have focused on this topic. One workshop was given by Robin Lovrien-Schwarz who is the premier voice on English Language Learners, or ELL, and the connection to learning disabilities, or LD. The workshop that I attended with Robin Lovrien-Schwarz was titled, "Why Aren't My English Language Learners Making Progress? Is it a Learning Disability or Something Else?" I have also attended a conference sponsored by the National Institute for Literacy, or NIFL, titled, "Learning to Achieve". In this workshop, the focus was on adults with learning disabilities. There were nine modules of training that needed to be covered, and one of the modules was on English Language Learner's and Learning Disabilities. One of the main researchers that was asked to contribute to the NIFL study was Robin Lovrien-Schwarz.

From these two workshops that I have attended since becoming a Learning Disabilities Consultant for the State of New Hampshire, I would like to share with you the research surrounding adults who are learning English and the question of identifying a student with a learning disability. I would also like to share with you as well the teaching strategies that I learned about so that you are able to use these strategies with your adult language learners.

One of the guiding principles that I have found in my years of teaching is that what works well with students with learning disabilities works well with all students. Good teaching strategies are good teaching strategies, regardless of the population that you are working with. This concept is reinforced at the end of the mini-grant in the teaching strategies section. Many of them can be used with all students in their learning, not just students who have learning disabilities or students who are learning English. I hope that you find the research and techniques helpful to you and the students you work with.

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Section 1

Overview

English Language Learners and Learning Disabilities

The discussion surrounding English Language Learners (ELL's) and Learning Disabilities (LD) is prevalent among adult educators. The problem with the discussion is that there is limited research on this topic in the field of adult education, and the research that is disseminated is either focused on children who are learning English with an identified learning disability, or adult English Language Learners without an LD diagnosis. As a result of the lack of research on the population of adults who are learning English, research is cautious in recommending testing and evaluating for a learning disability. Of the adult learner population, 44 percent are ELL's, so it is a significant portion of our adult education students that we work with.

As educators of adults who want to master the English language, there are many issues that make it difficult for the adult to learn English. Some of the barriers that students who wish to learn English encounter are: current problems with work, health, or family issues; stress or trauma experienced early in life; social and cultural identity issues; schooling in two different countries; incomplete secondary school education; frequent absences from school; poor instruction in school; and, limited practice outside of the instructional setting.

Mastering a new language requires hard work, diligence, and practice. It is difficult even for students who are capable and have the cognitive ability to learn another language. Mastery of a new language requires developing competency in two different areas, which are known as BICS and CALP.

BICS is defined as:

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills

- learners able to carry on conversations orally and write about daily life
- it is usually acquired in 2-3 years by children in school.

If BICS is mastered, then a student is able to carry on spoken conversations and write about day-to-day life.

CALP is defined as:

Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency Skills

-learners able to perform academic tasks with the proficiency of native speakers

-it is usually acquired in 5-7 years by children in school.

If CALP is mastered, then the student will be as proficient in the second language as they are in the first.

As teachers of students who want to learn English, we must remember that theories and norms that describe the normal process of language and literacy development in English Language Learner's have yet to be established. Without an understanding of normal language development, determining what might be considered evidence of a learning disability is very difficult.

Researchers know that the role of school in influencing language development exerts a powerful influence on language learning, and it is known that early schooling has a great impact on learning language. Researchers also know that the country in which early schooling takes place is crucial to later language development or the mastery of other languages. Research also points out that the prevailing pedagogy, which is defined as the theory of the science of teaching, the amount of school years completed, and the characteristics of the school all impact language learning. The caveat to all of this is that researchers do not know which of these factors is the most important factor to language learning.

Assessing for a learning disability is a complex issue for students who want to learn English because there are so many other circumstances that could be the cause of their difficulty in learning English. Knowing a student's school history helps adult educators deal with adequate language development. Adult educators also need to remember that individual and social factors also influence language development in critical, but poorly understood ways. Trauma and poverty also affect the learning process.

As adult educators, we must realize that the relationship between language, learning, and testing is complex. Limited language proficiencies in English may prevent learning, or mask a learning disability at the root of learning problems. Limited language proficiency may cause learners to perform poorly on assessments used to identify a learning disability. According to research, there are so many unanswered questions about how adults learn

English, and because of this lack of information, it makes it difficult to make an accurate diagnosis of a learning disability in adults. To date, there are no well developed theories on how adults acquire language and what steps must be taken to mastery. Because of this, it is difficult to diagnose a student with a learning disability who is learning English as their second language. Diagnosing a student with a learning disability takes concrete evidence, and when there is no concrete evidence due to the lack of research, it is difficult to say at what point there should be mastery of the English language.

Section 2

English Language Learner Participation in Adult Education and the Difficulties Associated with Assessing and Adult for Learning Disabilities

According to the most recent research conducted by the National Institute for Literacy, or NIFL, English Language Learners represent a significant portion of the enrollment in adult education classes across the nation, about one million learners in all. In some states, the adults who are trying to learn English are the largest majority of learners. In California and Nevada, statistics for those states put English Language Learners at about 70% of the adult education enrollment. For adult educators, these are the people that need our help, and their attendance in our adult education classes drive the purpose of adult education in our individual states. Some statistics point out that English Language Learners are averaged at about 44% of the adults who are part of adult education. Because of their large numbers in adult education, their learning needs bring a challenge to adult educators that must be met.

Learning a new language is a challenge for everyone, but some adults find learning English to be very difficult. There are many reasons that a person may struggle with learning English. Some reasons an adult may have a difficult time learning English are:

- ❖ Limited academic skills in their primary language.
- ❖ Current problems with work, health, or family.
- ❖ Stress or trauma experiences early in life.
- ❖ Social and cultural identity issues.
- ❖ Schooling in two different countries.
- ❖ Incomplete secondary education.
- ❖ Frequent absences from school.
- ❖ Poor instruction in school.

- ❖ Limited practice outside of the educational setting.
- ❖ The possibility of a learning disability. This is stated in this way, because certainly there are students who are learning English that have a learning disability, but finding out who they are and assessing them properly is a difficult and complicated process.

Difficulties in assessing an adult who might have a learning disability are many. There are many unanswered questions about assessing an adult for a learning disability who is trying to learn English. This lack of information makes it extremely difficult to make an accurate diagnosis of a learning disability in adults who are trying to learn English.

According to research, there is a great deal that we do not know about how normally developing adult English language learners acquire English language and literacy skills. This lack of knowledge of basic information has consequences for diagnosing and identifying an adult for a learning disability. An example of this would be: without well developed theories proposing how the process of learning English is done, it is difficult to know at what point a student is to have developed certain skills. There are no guidelines that say, at this point, this skill should have been developed and at this point, this other skill should have been developed. What research is saying is, without a clear standard of what the learning process for learning English is in normally developing students, it is very difficult to know what is not normal, and what is indicative of a learning disability. Without knowing what might suggest a learning disability, it is impossible to find or develop appropriate assessments.

Researchers are trying to pinpoint areas that are necessary to locate the specific areas that affect learning English. Researchers know that a learner's previous experience with schooling exerts a powerful influence on how the learner is able to learn English. Researchers also state that the country in which the schooling took place, its prevailing pedagogy, or the science of the theory of teaching, the years of schooling completed by the learner, and other school characteristics impact the English language acquisition for the learner. However, researchers do not know which components of prior school learning affect the level to which a student is able to learn English,

and how this would be most helpful for assisting educators in classroom instruction.

Researchers also understand that previous schooling experiences are not the only factor that impacts learning English. There are individual and social factors that are recognized to play roles in English language learning, but as with research on previous schooling experiences, the exact characteristics and ways in which they impact the English language learning process are not clearly understood.

The relationship between language and learning is complex. The relationship between language, learning, and testing is even more complex. Limited language proficiency in English may prevent learning, or mask a learning disability at the root of learning problems. Limited language proficiency may cause learners to perform poorly on assessments used to identify learning disabilities. The question that must be asked in this process is: “my learner with low English language and literacy skills is not progressing much, but is the lack of progress a direct result of limited English proficiency, or is the poor proficiency disguising a learning disability, which is the true cause of the learning problems?”

English language learners who are assessed for a learning disability may perform poorly on assessments. Again, some questions that need to be asked here are: is that the result of a learning disability? Or are the language and literacy skills not developed enough for the assessment?

Some factors have been identified by researchers that affect the ability to learn English. These factors are: previous school experiences, trauma, and lack of practice of the English language. There are significant gaps in knowledge that educators have when teaching students English since the educators may not have a complete “picture” of the student in front of them. Introducing the issue of testing English language learners intensifies the lack of clarity about the presence or absence of learning disabilities.

Educators need to know that there are risks associated with testing English language learners for a learning disability. The risks that have been identified are:

- ✓ Assessments are mostly in English. Testing in the native language may be available, but typically is expensive and time-consuming to

have the test translated. The tests reliability and validity may also change during the course of the translation.

- ✓ Assessments may not be culturally appropriate. Tests developed in the United States reflect our culture and our system of schooling. A student who is from another country may do poorly on the test, and this is not a true indicator of a learning disability since a student may test poorly because of the unfamiliarity of the testing process, the test format, and the test content.
- ✓ Assessments are normed on English-speaking children. English language learners have fundamental linguistic and cultural differences from native speakers, and those differences will be reflected in their test results. When comparing the test results on English-speaking children, is this a fair comparison to the adult who is not an English speaker?
- ✓ Personnel administering the assessments may not be qualified.

Before an adult educator decides to refer an adult student who is learning English for a learning disabilities assessment, the educator should carefully consider why the student would benefit from this assessment. A diagnosis of a learning disability might lead to more directed intervention or specific accommodations on high-stakes tests. In addition, the adult might be helped to better understand his or her learning strengths and weaknesses. However, the greatest barrier for an adult who is learning English to get an assessment through adult education is the high cost of the assessment.

When considering testing for a learning disability, some factors to be considered are:

- ✓ The cost of the assessment.
- ✓ Prior schooling.
- ✓ The purpose of the assessment.
- ✓ Consider the cultural implications of being identified with a learning disability.

When suspecting a student has a learning disability, some questions to ask yourself about the qualifications of the person administering the assessment are:

- ✓ Is there an understanding of the English Language Learner's background and culture, for example norms in the mother country and local community?
- ✓ Does the examiner have adequate credentials for conducting assessments?
- ✓ Does the examiner have experience evaluating adolescents and adults with LD?
- ✓ Does the examiner have fluency in English and the native language?

If an English language learner wants to have an assessment done to see if they do have a learning disability, and to be able to get accommodations on the GED, for instance, it would be important for an assessment and evaluation to include the following:

- ✓ A comprehensive interview, which would include an English interview, and native language interview, a developmental history, and academic history, a language proficiency with home language, influence of cultural experiences on testing.
- ✓ Consideration of the characteristics of the home language.
- ✓ Consideration of the characteristics of the target language.
- ✓ Data to support the language assessment.
- ✓ Identification of reliable and valid standardized assessment measure given the adult's background.
- ✓ Assessment of important processing areas for identifying a learning disability.
- ✓ Professional judgment critical to any decision making process.

As research shows, identifying an adult who is trying to learn English with a learning disability is a difficult process. Many factors need to be taken into

consideration, such as their prior education, gaps in their education, and their life within their home country. Deciding to assess an adult student with a learning disability is a decision that needs to be made carefully, and it needs thought and dialogue between the student and the teacher. As educators, we want to help our students to the best of our ability, but that needs to be tempered with the knowledge that identifying a student with a learning disability might not be the solution to the students learning challenges.

Section 3

Seven Factors That Interfere with Learning and That We Can Address

According to research, there are seven clear factors that impact learning for students who are trying to learn English. The seven factors are:

1. Health, physical functions and mental health.
2. Adult language-learning needs are not met.
3. First language interference.
4. Cultural differences.
5. Educational levels not responded to.
6. Poor or undeveloped phonological skills.
7. “Pedagogically-induced learning problems”

1. Health issues that impact learning can be defined as:

- Vision function issues, either near or far vision acuity
- Visual stress syndrome, which is the sensitivity to light
- Hearing loss or diminution

Both vision and hearing decline with age. Adult English language learners typically neglect vision care, and adults in general, do not pay attention to hearing loss until it is severe.

- Stress
- Culture shock

Cultural factors may prevent the adult language learner from telling you and the school about issues that impact learning. Adults, especially those that are not very educated and out of their native country for the first time, have a hard time adjusting to new culture. Culture shock is estimated to last up to three years or longer for some students.

- Depression
- Illness
- Medication problems

2. Adult language learning needs are not being met. Adult language learning is different from the process in which children learn English. An adult brain processes language sounds differently than a child's brain. Adults need to learn in different ways than children. There needs to be explicit instruction versus passive learning through conversation and reading. Explicit instruction in critical sounds, discrimination of sounds, vocabulary, phrase and sentence model must be taught. Extensive proactive hearing and production minimal pairs must occur. Students need to learn how to be active language learners. Adults in English classes must spend at least 60% of their time producing sounds.

3. First language may influence English learning in many ways. There are differences between first language and English that impact learning. The phonological structure of the first language can make learning English difficult. It may sound very different and there may be different tones, stress and intonation patterns. There may be grammatical and syntactical differences. The first language may not have tenses, prepositions, articles, and so on. Many languages do not have subject-verb focus. If the first language is unwritten, the student will lack terminology of literacy, writing conventions and so on. The first language of the learner influences all reading processes. Orthography, the actual writing system, can get in the way of reading the new language easily. The first language can influence the way the word are processed and how sounds differ. The first language can be different from how text is organized. The grammar of the first language impacts how grammar is understood in the new language.

4. Cultural differences may get in the way of learning
Cultural conditioning affects everything related to learning. Some examples of this are:
 - Expectations of the teacher and the class, which can include, who makes the decisions and what do the students do.

 - Understanding of learning and study, which does not only mean memorizing.

 - Classroom and training interactions, which means for the student not wanting to affront the teacher with disagreement.

- Understanding and interpretation of materials, which means taking into consideration cultural content, organization, and that the demands of the task will be different.
 - The notion of goals and goal orientation, learner directed decisions about learning.
 - Time management-when things should be done, deadlines.
 - Copying from the board, but no information is being processed.
 - Teachers need to be made aware of cultural differences and how this impacts learning.
5. Learners' actual educational levels and experience have not been adequately taken into account.
- Many adult English language learners have not had much or any prior education.
 - Problems arise when non/pre-literate learners' rate of learning is measured with tools designed to measure learning of literate students. Non/low literate learners are started in reading or phonics programs without adequate pre-literacy preparation.
 - Visual discrimination, visual-motor skills and phonological skills are assumed to be in place or to develop faster than they actually do.
 - The long term and profound effects of non-literacy are not recognized as learners learn to read and write English.
 - Probe to find out what the students schooling was like, how many years they attended, if they had gaps in their learning, and what they liked and didn't like about school.
 - As teachers, we cannot assume anything about our students. We need to teach them everything.

6. Phonological skills may be underdeveloped.
 - Phonological skills, which include phonological awareness, which is being aware of the sound system of language and what to pay attention to in a new language.
 - Phonological skills are only transferable to the level the learner is literate at in another language.
 - Phonological memory, which is being able to remember new sounds, words, string of words, grammatical structures and phrases, may not be developed in the adult learner.

7. Pedagogically-induced learning problems, or PILPS
 - This occurs when programs and classes are not set up for learner's needs but rather to serve a curriculum a teacher's vision of what ESOL should be.
 - Teachers use methods and materials not suited to English Language Learners.
 - Learners are not permitted or helped to master fundamentals and learning problems begin to compound.
 - Learning goals are not meaningful, clear, and measure.

Section 4

Why do Adults Learn Language? When do they learn language? How can a teacher do more?

Adult language acquisition is different from child language acquisition. Adults learn language for specific purposes. The purposes that they learn English for are:

- ✚ To do or get a job.

- ✚ To communicate with specific people, such as their boss, a doctor, their child's teacher.

- ✚ To satisfy relatives.

- ✚ To gain status in their social community.

- ✚ To gain citizenship.

- ✚ To be able to get more education.

A child in comparison learns language so they can communicate with peers.

Adults use language for many different reasons. They use language:

- ✚ When they feel confident that they know what to say and can say it correctly. When they can perform according to what they perceive to be teacher's expectations. In this situation, it becomes a cultural process in which the adult is determining what the right answer is.

- ✚ When it has some positive outcome.

- ✚ When they **MUST**, such as in certain situations for their job, for talking with other staff, for communicating with their child's school.

- ✚ When they are brave enough to take risks.

The vast difference between language acquisition for children and adults is that children do not worry about how they speak, whereas adults listen to the

language and digest information before they take the chance to speak English.

As a teacher, remember always why a student comes to class. They come to class because:

- ✚ They use garbled English ALL week outside of class and they want to improve on this.
- ✚ They come to class to get help with being understood and using English effectively.
- ✚ Once a student is in your class, correct their pronunciation vigorously.
- ✚ Keep track of grammar errors to give ideas about what needs to be practiced in LISTENING.
- ✚ Use class time to focus on specific ways to improve pronunciations, to extend listening comprehension, to improve phonological memory, and vocabulary.
- ✚ Teach students to repeat several times, use a mirror, phonics phone, and pronunciation software.

Section 5

Adult second/other language acquisition-Facts and Implications

1. One theory of second language acquisition says there is a common underlying language proficiency, or CULP, for first and subsequent language acquisition.
 - ❖ If your brain has learned one language, it can learn others.
 - ❖ Your brain can organize language input and make sense of it.
2. Widely believed that second and other language acquisition is similar to, although, not identical to, first language acquisition; similarity diminishes dramatically as second language acquisition occurs after about age 10.
 - ❖ Learning language gets more difficult.
 - ❖ For children, language learning is unconscious and effortless.
 - ❖ Children gain language through a natural process that is effortless.
 - ❖ For adults, language learning is conscious and effortful. As we age, learning a language becomes work.
 - ❖ The brain rapidly loses capacity to accurately perceive unfamiliar human speech sound and convert that into speech gestures, known as speaking. This is why: adult language learners have accents, and language learning, especially oral-aural skills, (listening-speaking), is more difficult for older learners than younger learners.
3. Because language acquisition is developmental, teachers and learners cannot hurry it up.
 - ❖ If you try to teach material that is beyond the current stage of language acquisition, the learner will not “hang on to it”.

- ❖ Teachers need to aim class material at what they are ready to learn.
- ❖ Explanations must be given at this point.
- ❖ Learning must be facilitated at this point.
- ❖ Models must be provided at this point.
- ❖ Language will be acquired in systematic order of the hierarchy of language, for example, nouns, nouns-verbs, nouns-verbs-adjectives.

4. Language is acquired, not taught or learned.

- ❖ Language teachers can help by providing practice and information at the needed level for the brain to use. You will not directly affect the language acquisition process.
- ❖ For language to be acquired, it has to go from the conscious level to the unconscious level.
- ❖ Language is a skill that must be taught with slow speed, decoding of words, and then writing.
- ❖ The brain cannot pick up fast speech and “see” the beginning and ends of words.
- ❖ Speech needs to be slow and enunciated clearly.
- ❖ A student needs to hear every word in the speech stream.
- ❖ Patterning of sounds is so important and it must be modeled to be heard correctly.
- ❖ Speech has to be practiced.
- ❖ Needs to become automatic.

- ❖ The role of the teacher is to help the student learn and reactivate brain pathways to facilitate this learning.
5. The critical variable in language acquisition is not which language the learner speaks, but the quality of the interaction the learner experiences with native speakers of English.
- ❖ To help with language acquisition, provide learners with plenty of chances to hear and speak to native speakers of English, speaking language they can manage.
 - ❖ English language learners have to process a massive amount of input of speaking, hearing, and writing English. Students have to practice producing these forms of English communication.
 - ❖ Interaction is a must.
 - ❖ Obligatory participation in class activities.
 - ❖ Only the material that is being presented should be spoken about.
6. Learners must have a high level of competence in at least one language to be communicatively and academically successful. In the case of limited English proficient learners, (LEP), the native language is the foundation upon which English competence is built.
- ❖ Their level of proficiency and education in language one must be fully taken into account when mastering proficiency in English.
 - ❖ Talk frankly with the student about what areas need to be worked on.
 - ❖ Stress that time and practice are necessary for improvement.
 - ❖ Stress that the “basics” have to be in place to move to mastery.
 - ❖ Discuss the difference between literacy skills and speaking. A student might be a medical doctor with great literacy skills, but

their speaking is incomprehensible. Speaking is different than being able to read.

- ❖ Explain to the student that thinking has to begin in English, not a transfer of the English word to their native language.
 - ❖ Discuss with the student that the more critical variable in language acquisition is NOT which language the learner speaks, but the quality of the interaction the learner experiences with native speakers of English.
 - ❖ Speakers of another language should be encouraged to use English in meaningful situations with native speakers of English and to continue to use their first language with those who speak it.
 - ❖ If learners attempt to use English with others who are not proficient in English, they may limit their acquisitions of English. Many adult learners may have learned incorrect models of English by interacting with others who have not mastered it.
7. The different skills of language learning are impacted by the strength of phonological skills, which are the underpinnings of language learning. Phonological skills are defined as: phonological awareness and phonological memory, which is the ability to hear sounds, process what the sounds are, turn those sounds into letters, and then put the letters into words. This is auditory language learning.
- ❖ Phonological skills support BICS/CALP
 - ❖ BICS: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills. Listening, speaking skills developed for survival, and communication. BICS is commonly known as “survival language”, the language you need have to be able to ask for information at the grocery store, the pharmacy, work, and on the street. It is the language that you need to survive in a particular setting, such as in the health care setting, the work setting, and in class. It is the

language that is used to carry on conversations and write about daily life. BICS is highly contextual, and “embedded” in the setting. It is supported by body language and other non-verbal cues. A person can develop a very specialized and developed vocabulary. Research conducted on children finds that a child can develop BICS in two to three years in school.

- ❖ BICS develops quickly because it is the language that we need to survive. A student will develop enough oral language to “survive”. A person with BICS has the ability to have conversation, but is unable to know the meaning of vocabulary. Because of this, BICS develops at different levels of accuracy in different people. A professional will want to acquire and will hear in context language of their profession. An uneducated learner will acquire BICS at a level similar to that in their first language. Learners will assimilate with people that have a similar BICS and language level.
- ❖ CALP: Cognitive academic language proficiency.
Phonological awareness is necessary for developing CALP.
- ❖ CALP is broadly defined as language needed for understanding any non-contextual language, such as text books, tests, forms, directions in books, and street signs. In discussing CALP, learners are able to perform academic tasks with the proficiency of native speakers. In CALP, the learner needs to know what is going on to understand what is going on. Educational advantages and disadvantages impact CALP.
- ❖ CALP can also be understood to include: idioms, inferential language, deep vocabulary, which can be described as multiple meaning words, multiple pronunciations, multiple spellings, or multiple synonyms, background information and vocabulary learned in early childhood reading, and discourse of educated persons. Research on CALP conducted on children states that a child will acquire CALP in five to seven years of schooling.

- ❖ Phonological memory supports BICS/CALP. If this is present in a learner, then the learning of English can become part of their long term memory.

- ❖ BICS, or oral/aural skills, are dependent on the learner being able to physically hear and discriminate sounds of language. If a student is having difficulty with being able to discriminate sounds, ask about potential hearing loss. To be able to develop phonemic language memory, sounds must be able to be discriminated.

- ❖ Phonological awareness and phonological memory take into consideration speed, enunciation, and comprehensible input, which is defined as content that has meaning as well as meaning of what is being said.

- ❖ Patterning of sounds is so important to be modeled and to be heard correctly. Patterning of sounds has to be practiced to mastery. It needs to become automatic.

- ❖ What is commonly overlooked in ESOL classes is that BICS happens quickly, but CALP does not keep pace. In BICS, learners can achieve very quickly high levels of oral competence, whereas CALP takes a very long time to develop, and the learning is not equivalent. This is normal in any language acquisition, not just in learning English.

- ❖ Building CALP depends on how much education the learner has had, and this is probably the most influential factor. CALP also depends on what type of education the learner has had. Rote learning may not enhance CALP in the first language, and those students who have limited CALP in their first language have a difficult time developing CALP in their second language. Put simply, if there is high CALP in the first language, it transfers to the second language. If there is low education in the first language, there is low language transfer in the second language. If there is low education in the first language, but high conversation in the second language, there is a disconnect between the two.

- ❖ Academic problems, for example struggling with reading comprehension or content learning or with becoming literate, are more likely to be the result of undeveloped or developing CALP rather than cognitive or learning disabilities.

The understanding of BICS and CALP may help educators see that it is a long process for the adult student who is trying to learn English. It is important to understand this so that the teacher realizes that the process of learning English will be a slow one and that the student will have to do much work to master the English language.

8. Many language minority learners are not considered ELL learners because they are apparently proficient in English.
 - ❖ They may still need language support.
 - ❖ They may not KNOW they need support until they begin to fail.
 - ❖ Stress to the learner that oral proficiency does not equal literacy proficiency. Just because a student can read English well, does not mean that they can speak English well.
 - ❖ Stress to the student that they are literate people acquiring language.

9. ELL learners can transition into Adult Basic Education, or ABE, as they acquire English language competence in READING, CALP, and also in speaking.
 - ❖ Learners with low CALP will “crash and burn” in Adult Basic Education, or ABE.
 - ❖ They can’t make sense of the readings because ABE/GED readings are geared towards native English speakers.
 - ❖ CALP depends on the language community and environment the learner exists in and operates in. If there is a community of educated persons, the CALP in the first language will be high. This does not mean that a person from a low-educated environment will not be able to achieve high CALP; it just

means that they will have to work hard and struggle with language acquisition. It does mean that the learner will have to have extensive exposure and practice with the learning of language.

- ❖ To evaluate CALP, a teacher must get a complete picture of the learner's educational background and home environment. The teacher needs to understand what country, or countries, the learner grew up in. The teacher must know how many languages the learner is able to communicate in. Discuss their education and what it was like. Probe to find out as much information you can get about their learning process. Much schooling is not measurable, so you have to have this conversation. Have the learner self-evaluate their own ability. Students have to see themselves as learners to be able to make progress. The control of learning has to be seen from the perspective of the student. The goals of the English language learner have to be specific. Their goal cannot just be to "learn English"; it must go deeper than that.

10. Learners come to adult education programs with language skills which are appropriate and functional for their speech and language community.

- ❖ If they are educated, maybe 7th grade or higher, the student should function well in an academic setting.
- ❖ If they have had little or no education, their language skills will not be adequate for academic settings. This means that the language skills need to be built up.
- ❖ This means that they do not have language to talk about language, like grammar, literacy terms, and school behavior. (This is referred to as metalinguistic skills, the knowledge of talking and knowing about language.) This can create a bias among the class, since there is no conceptual framework to talk about language. Students do not need to know all the rules and names of all the grammar to learn English.

11. English language learners have a right to expect appropriate education.

- ❖ Because language acquisition is developmental, teachers and learners cannot hurry it up.
- ❖ Learners must be given adequate time to acquire English skills.
- ❖ Learners will make many errors in the process of acquiring all skills in English. These are normal developmental errors and are not indicators of a disability unless the skills fail to improve with practice.
- ❖ Language is acquired, versus taught and learned.
- ❖ Teachers should facilitate acquisition rather than attempt to teach language as a subject with drills and practice.
- ❖ Learners have to be asked to do tasks that they are developmentally ready to do. They need to be asked to do tasks in which they have the skills to do so.

Section 6

Teaching Strategies

According to research, there is a dictum stating, “Remember the second language acquisition rubric”.

The second language acquisition rubric is “the most important factor in language acquisition is the quality of interactions with native speakers”.

As a teacher, we must keep in mind two key questions pertaining to this rubric: how can we increase those interactions for our students, and how can we make them even more useful for the learners?

Some thoughts to keep in mind while working with adults who are trying to master English:

- A learner can only succeed at his or her language learning level. For example, don’t give an open ended description to low-intermediate learners and expect complex, correct sentences.
- As teachers, we need to set up learners for success.
- Controlling vocabulary and grammar must be done at low and intermediate levels.
- Provide clear models and examples in the class and make sure that the learners know what to do with these models.
- Have learners produce one or two utterances using models before working alone or in pairs.
- Provide some opportunities for authentic, and uncorrected, opportunities to use English, such as a project based learning activity, or even a field trip.
- Model the questions and the answers that we are looking for.
- Writing down responses to these questions is a must so that students get used to the idea of speaking and writing, writing and speaking.

- Modeling has to be learned to further increase the brain connections of English language learning.
- Always set up opportunities to communicate with the students during class time.

There is one caveat to all of this: NEVER correct unstructured activities. The only time that a student should be corrected during unstructured activities is if THEY want to be corrected and have told you so. The primary goal of a teacher to students who want to learn English is knowing that the learners need to be helped. The learners need to learn to compare what happens in their culture versus what happens in the classroom. The students need to learn expressions and vocabulary to ask for help and for clarification of material. The student needs to practice following directions, finding examples of the work that is being taught, and then using those examples in real world practice. As teachers, we have to work systematically so that the students have a foundation that is solid. We cannot assume anything. Every step of the learning process needs to be clearly explained. Teaching English language learners how to learn is probably an educator's most important job. We cannot have expectations that the learners will be able to learn independently. Learners of English often lack that insight. If a teacher can teach the skill of learning, then there will be much less direct teaching. Student centered teaching should be the goal.

Section 7

Ideas for Talking to Native Speakers

➤ **Interviews: classmates, other teachers and other English speakers.**

This is a prepared process in which students take notes about what they want to ask each other. The first step can be learning names of classmates, followed by other teachers, and then other students within adult education programming at your center. In the interview process, the student is held accountable for gaining information about the person that they are interviewing, and then reporting back what they have learned.

➤ **Surveys**

➤ **Reporting**

This should be done in every class.

For low language learners, they should report on something that they did.

For intermediate language learners, they should report on someone they talked to or an assignment in which they talked with someone.

For higher language learners, they should report on news that was listened to, movies seen, TV show that they saw or an article that they read. Higher language learners may also complete a simple sheet about what did they learn, and have to write in short answers as to what they learned. Get the students to commit to this homework so that they can practice learning English.

➤ **Games and structured activities**

For all of the above activities, the student must be held accountable. They need to know that all of these tasks are important to their language learning. They need to understand that to learn a new language they need to practice everyday so that their brain can make new connections.

➤ **TPR, or Total Physical Response**

In this activity, the class learns script, and then one by one they tell another student to pantomime it. This activity is a listen, responds to the command activity. The student listens and acts out what is happening. For example,

washing hands. The command is given to “wash hands”, and then the student will “act out” washing their hands.

➤ **Question-Answer Chains**

In this activity, sentences are written on the board and oral answers are given to the questions. Ask questions that students will have answers to. Correct errors if need be.

➤ **Descriptions**

One minute about something familiar, such as a pencil, friend, and so on. Anything counts, and do not correct what is being described. In the classroom, repeatedly talk about the particular item being described in many different ways. In this activity, vocabulary is “being dragged up” from the brain that needs to be used. Start out this activity with only 15 seconds of description, and then increase to one minute. Challenge the students to bring in something from home to describe.

➤ **Role Plays, with or without props**

➤ **Using Model Sentences**

In this activity, you might list three things that the student did last weekend, providing a list of verbs.

Model a sentence on the board.

List the name of a student on the board with a command to do something, such as open the window.

Two Ways to Improve Speaking in Meaningful Ways

1. **“I can say it!”**

- a. Student identifies a specific utterance she or he needs or wants to master. The student writes it down, maybe with help, and there are no corrections of spelling, but grammar is correct. The student practices this with a tape recorder or partner. The student asks the teacher to check when they are ready, and it must be 100% correctly pronounced. The student tries the utterance out in the community after they have mastery in the class. The student sets a new goal when the first goal is met.

2. “I can (speaking task)!”

a. There is a class speaking goal. This goal might be, describe what a person is wearing, how to get to school from your house, the weather, clothing, and so on. The structure of the learning has to be real, and it needs to be applied. The goal is posted on flip chart paper in class. The students have tightly controlled sentences models with variable vocabulary. Students practice with each other or at home. The student makes an appointment with the teacher to check, again, it has to be 100% correctly pronounced. The student signs the flip chart sheet so the accomplishment is made public. The can be adjusted so not all students have the same goal or students can choose among the goals. This should be posted in a general area where all students can see it. In this activity, students can make a choice about what they are learning.

- Use any auditory resources you can find, such as CD’s that come with text books, text reading programs such as Kurzweil, and reading groups, study groups, and study buddies.
- Establish core vocabulary for your class.
- Record pronunciation and example uses on audio system, such as Powerpoint, other computer-based programs, or CD if the learner has a CD player.
- Learner can listen to the recordings and self-test.
- Set up clear expectations and goals. Clarify what this means. Goal setting is an American cultural idea. Many English language learners do not have this concept because of their cultural background. It must be explained and modeled so that they understand what is being asked of. Goal setting sheets need to correspond to lessons that are being taught. English language learners need to have a reason to engage themselves in the lesson and to learn. Expect that learners will become independent.
- Routine must be established in the class so that the students know what is coming and why. Be consistent in following this posted routine.

- Clear guidelines of the classroom agenda need to be posted. Daily schedules should be done in 15 minute blocks of time. Allow time to do homework in class. Model how to do homework and how to study.
- Teach organizational skills. Teach students how to keep an organized notebook.
- Explain the concept of “meta-cognitive” thinking.
- Define what it is: “thinking about thinking”.
- Ask the students “why are we doing this activity?”, “why do we need to do this homework?”, “why do we need to know how to ask questions?”
- Teach students to ask themselves: “what is hard for me”, “how do I learn best”, “what do I need to learn”, “why are we doing this activity”
- Teach students how to organize and think. Show patterns and practice patterns with everything. Use charts and graphs. Use graphic organizers with students who are able to understand them. Use thinking games.
- Teach strategic thinking.
- Help learners go through daily schedules to find time to do all of their activities.
- Teach them how to have “student behaviors, such as working in study groups, finding information, how to do homework, and how to set up goals and work on them step by step.
- Explain the concept of brain neurology and that it is not their ability to learn. Explain to the student that their brain is like a road being traveled. A new activity that is being learned is like a small foot path that has never been traveled by them before. Whereas, an old activity that they are skilled at is like a super highway.

➤ **Individual learning folders**

- This concept is linked to a multi-level class. In this type of classroom, individual learning folders might be a suggestion to help lead your students to progress.
 - In using individual learning folders, the teacher needs to set up folders for each student in the class.
 - Once that is done, the folders are filled with work that the student can do independently. This means that the teacher needs to have multi-levels of work to be placed in each folder.
 - When class begins, the teacher will have the students get their folders, and select the first task that is in their folder.
 - Once that has been done, the teacher will circulate among the class and help out students with problems that they may have.
 - Students work at their own pace and can complete their work at the speed that they are able to.
- Skill and drill.
- Learning centers to review and produce language.
- Develop surveys and questionnaires, interviews, and little short plays. This type of work helps structured language become automatic language.
- Idea for spelling: a student needs to spell the word one more time than they have spelled it wrong. For example, if a student has misspelled “apple” 172 times, they need to spell it correctly 173 times for mastery.
- Exaggerate sounds until it becomes comfortable.
- Look at a mirror and see mouth and tongue placement.
- “Whisper phone”-speak into it and hear self speak.

- Phonetic spelling of the word is fine to help learn the English spelling.
- Books on tape SHOULD NOT be used because they go too fast.
Books on tape should only be used when there is a companion story to follow the text of the story with correlating print.

Section 8

Activities to Develop BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiencies)

- Leveled materials
- High interest materials
- Inquire what the student wants to learn
- Discuss the difference between grammar and conversation and what the student needs first.
- Put out three different Cloze activities, and have the student choose the one that they want to do. Cloze activities are sentences that a word missing, and the student needs to fill in the correct word. For example, “The _____ cat is sleeping on the couch.”
- Have the student write three sentences in their native language. If they are able to do this, they are literate, and ready to take on the challenge of CALP.
- Have the student write in their first language, and then have them translate it into English. Having them write freely in their first language demonstrates their knowledge and their opinion about the topic, and allows them to use their best vocabulary and ideas.
- Do extensive reading at the student’s comfort level.
- Provide plenty of opportunity to learn basic vocabulary.
- Have students label everything in the room. Have them repeat this activity from time to time to reinforce their word knowledge.
- Use picture dictionaries, software, picture/word matching activities.

- Challenge the student to “dig deep” in their brain for the vocabulary that they are looking for.
- Use project based learning, which allows learners to deepen vocabulary on a particular topic. The learners must choose their own topic so that they can deepen the language connections that they want to make.
- Consider bringing in medicine labels, forms, voter registration cards, and other real world activities that will help strengthen their vocabulary.
- Teach higher level reading skills, such as inference, using context to guess meaning, how to find subject and verb agreement in long sentences, vocabulary for relationships, (cause and effect, comparison, time) as you go along.
- Have “sponting” experiences, which is described as spontaneous following of a trial that enhances language”.
- Teach students the idea of “mental velcro”, or the ability “to stretch and grab on to” to make brain connections for the new learning.
- Teach how language works, by showing the student parts of words, origins of the English language, different levels of language (formal versus informal), how to decode impersonal language, and using grammar terms according to education levels.
- Have pictures, objects, and “realia” or real life products on hand. Talk about forms, tools, clothes, anything that the student has an interest in.
- Have multiple ways for learners to show what they know or understand. The students must show what they know. They need to be able to demonstrate that they have an understanding of the material. Give learners plenty of time to practice, review, and practice.
- Rephrase, restate, slow down, and enunciate.

Section 9

Game Ideas

Games are perfect for learner driven classrooms. A learner driven classroom is defined as “a classroom where learners decide what they will practice and how.” When thinking of game ideas, have students help you in thinking of topics and ideas of what they would like to reinforce with games. Games can help students learn a variety of concepts and it allows them a different format to practice the concepts that they need to learn.

Games that are designed for the classroom must be highly relevant to the learner’s needs. If it is not what a student wants to learn, they will not engage in it, and there will be no educational gains made.

The game must be needed for mastery of a skill. You do not want the game to just be time filler.

As a teacher, do not be afraid to try to use a game, since it can show mastery of a particular skill. If you design a game in which the student needs to make pairs of short vowels sounds, and at the end of the game they have seven pairs of short vowel sounds, then both you and the student know that they have mastered short vowel sounds.

Go-Fish

- Players collect sets, or “book” of three or four cards. The deck, therefore, is made up of six or more sets of three or four cards, not more.
- Have 2-4 players only.
- Deal 5 cards to each player, the remainder of cards go in the “go fish” pile.
- One player asks the person to the right for a card that matches something in his or her hand. (For example, do you have something that goes in the living room? Do you have a word with the /ch/ sound?) NOTE: the cards do not have the question on them. The student would have to generate the question that would allow them to get a match in their hand.
- If the player gets the match that they were looking for, they get to go again. If the player to the right did not have the card that the player

- was asking for, the person to the right says, “go fish”, and a card is picked from the pile.
- When a player has all the cards of the set, he or she can put them down. The first player to put down all their cards is the winner.

Concentration

- No more than 2-3 players. If you play with more people, the game takes much longer, and the wait time between turns increases significantly.
- Use six or more pairs that logically go together. The categories can be simple, capital R with lower case r, or they can be complex, long-lengthen, which would show adjective to verb tense change. The category can be picture to picture, word to word, or picture to word. Be sure that pairs are exclusive; no other match can be possible.
- Spread out cards in rows face down.
- One player turns over two cards. If they match, the person collects them. If they do not match, they are turned back over face down.
- If the player gets a match, they get to go again. Play continues until the player is unable to get another match.
- Once a player cannot play, another person takes a turn.
- The idea of concentration is to learn to remember where the cards are so you can make matches. Some learners never get this idea. This is a great game to teach meta-cognitive thinking skills, since they are “concentrating” on where the matches are.
- The player with the most matches wins.
- The more matches you have in the beginning of the game, the longer the game will take.

Bingo

- Use your imagination to create the object of the bingo game. You can use bingo for verbs, nouns, prepositions and so on.
- Use a 5x5 grid, so that you can have the traditional free space.
- Don’t make the object of the game too difficult though, because scanning can be difficult for low literacy learners.

Section 10

10 Ways to Practice Phonological Skills

Adult ESOL learners fail to learn in educational settings for a number of reasons. Addressing their phonological skills will help in their learning. Phonological skills include phonological awareness and phonological memory.

Phonological awareness is defined as: the general, often unconscious, understanding that language consists of chunks of sound that can be manipulated in some way. Early phonological awareness skills, which are necessary for pre-reading, are hearing individual words in sentences, hearing syllables in words, awareness of rhyme as a construct of English, and an awareness of stress and intonation patterns. Later phonological skills, which develop as one learns to read, include, awareness that words have individual phonemes, which are sounds that make up words, awareness that phonemes can be manipulated to change meaning, awareness that written symbols represent individual phonemes, and that awareness that many sounds in English can be represented by many graphemes, for example, /sh/=sh, ci, ti, su.

Phonological memory is defined as what is needed to hear, remember and reproduce new sounds. Strong phonological memory is associated with being able to learn a foreign language easily. When you have good phonological memory, you can repeat unfamiliar words easily, remember long string of words or numbers easily, hear unfamiliar words and tell which are similar and which are different, and repeat words easily.

1. Construct game-like activities to repeat longer and longer words accurately.
2. Do the same kind of activity repeating sentences accurately. Start out with three word sentences if necessary. Start with sentences that the student would hear in real life. Add words as they master sentences completely.
3. Do activities to hear syllables in words. Use rubber bands to help learners to learn how to count syllables. Vary this type of syllable counting activity with tapping, stamping, walking, and

using objects. Have students point to words and see if they can identify how many syllables there are in the word. Work in pairs in the class to see if they can challenge themselves to this task. Low level readers can look at pictures and sort the pictures by syllables.

4. Hearing stress in words can be difficult. Some activities to help learners hear stress in words are: as for minimal pairs, say words the same or differently and see if they can tell the difference, for example, refuse and refuse. Give syllables unaccented and slowly and tell them to say the word with stress. As the learners begin to hear stress, have them identify the syllable with stress with colored markers, as for minimal pairs.
5. Moving sounds around in words. Use colored pieces of paper, one color for each different sound. For example, say the word “pat”. Have the student put the colored pieces of paper in order, and then have the student tap out the sounds following each color.
6. Blending. Use a guessing game. In this type of guessing game, students can hear individual sounds in words. Then as they progress in blending, give them three separate sounds and see if they can blend it into a word. Use familiar words and names.
7. When they become very proficient at number 6, have them identify sound in the middle of words, reverse the process and have them segment words into component parts.
8. Rhyme. All English language learners and readers of English need to be able to hear and manipulate rhyme. It is a very important part of the English language. Teach the concept of rhyme before you practice it. Use familiar words first when teaching rhyme. Giving a choice when first beginning rhyming is a good idea. For example, you might ask, “What rhymes with cat? Big or hat?” Once the student has mastered one syllable words, move on to two syllable words, and so on. Poetry helps with rhyme.

9. For students who have mastered rhyming, you may have them try “spoonerisms”. This means that trucks and busses become bucks and trusses. Mary Poppins becomes Pary Moppins. This is extremely high level phonemic awareness.

10. Deletion. This is another high level skill. In this skill, you remove a syllable or sound from a word. Start with compound words. You would say, “football. Now say, foot without ball.” When that is mastered, move to two syllables where the one that is left makes a real word. For example, “rebound. Say it without re”.

Section 11

Conclusion

If after all of the teaching strategies that you are familiar with have been tried and you still suspect a learning disability, consider the reasons that you are thinking of assessing the student. Is there a real reason for the student to be identified with a learning disability? How does the student feel about being identified with a learning disability? Are you considering the cultural ramifications of the student being identified with a learning disability? Are you testing for a learning disability because of the hope of getting accommodations for a high stakes test?

One major driving question an educator should ask him or herself is, “If you are testing language of someone with no education in their own language, what are you measuring?”

If a student is struggling:

- ❖ Find out about his/her educational background.
- ❖ Evaluate reading skills with a test for native English speakers.
- ❖ Teach them about metacognitive thinking skills, which is commonly known as “thinking about thinking”. Ask the students to think about “what is hard for me”?, “how do I learn best”?, “what do I need to learn to do that hard thing”?, and “why are we doing this activity”?
- ❖ Find out how much formal learning they had in their native language. This impacts the ability to learn a second language.

To help:

- ❖ Provide support for building vocabulary around the topic you are studying.
- ❖ Use the internet for support of your lessons.
- ❖ Use books for English Language Learners.
- ❖ Use academic vocabulary building.

- ❖ Use books for young people on the particular topic that is being studied to help the adult student in your class.
- ❖ Use films or other video resources to help the student better understand the topic at hand.

Always remember that the adult student who is learning English comes to class with all of their prior knowledge and experiences that they possess and this will shape their ability to learn English. As an educator, we must have patience with each student, and we must explain this to the student. The student needs to know that they will have to learn English in a different way than they may have had experience with in their native country, and that most importantly, the students also have to have patience with themselves and the process of learning.

Teaching the student how to learn is beneficial to both the teacher and student since the learning will become learner driven rather than teacher driven. With patience and understanding from both teacher and student, the learning process will be a rich experience for all involved.