

## **ESOL & LD**

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#### **Accommodations Naturally Occur In the ESOL Classroom**

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By definition, a learning disability refers to a person's difficulties in the acquisition of one or more of the following skills: listening comprehension, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or performing mathematical operations. The English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program, by definition, serves students who are limited in the four language skills in English. If such students show an unexplained delay in progressing at a "normal" pace, it may be suspected that their non-English proficiency could be compounded by LD. With the growing diversity of languages and cultures represented in our schools, the ability to diagnosis learning disabilities in our K-12 students for the purpose of obtaining accommodations and services, as prescribed through Federal law, becomes a daunting challenge. That challenge is even stronger for adult students. Few instruments exist that have been validated for adults, much less instruments validated in the many languages of our student population.

In April 2000, a conference was held in San Antonio, TX to address the issues of identifying LD among ESOL adults. The report entitled, "Learning Disabilities and Spanish-Speaking Adult Populations, The Beginning of a Process," is indeed the beginning of a very complex process. The US Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) and the Division of Adult Education Literacy (DAEL) agreed to begin studying the protocols for Spanish-speaking populations. Hispanics are the largest group of limited English adults in ESOL programs, and there is some work in this area from which to build.

Some recommendations generated from this meeting include:

- 1) An initial assessment of language ability normed on Spanish-speaking adults, called the Woodcock Munoz Language Survey of the Woodcock Language Proficiency Test,
- 2) A highly recommended screening called Neuropsi developed in Mexico,
- 3) A key diagnostic test, the only one available in Spanish, called the Woodcock Munoz Psycho-Educational Battery,
- 4) A full-scale IQ test must be administered in order to meet the requirements for accommodations on the General Education Diploma (GED), and
- 5) A bilingual and bicultural diagnostician, preferably someone from the same country of origin as the student to be responsible for the assessment.

The estimated time for this process was calculated to be between eleven and eighteen hours, and the cost somewhere between \$600-\$900. The difficulty in staffing "ideal assessors" was also noted.

In light of this, program managers should carefully consider the needs and reality of the individual student. Just as with children, there could be a stigma attached to being labeled learning disabled. What exactly is there to be accomplished by such a lengthy and costly assessment, if at all available? The availability of instruments even for Spanish speakers is extremely limited, and the diversity of cultures among Hispanics is another unresolved issue as it might relate to bias. Finally, instruments for speakers of other languages have not yet been investigated.

Adult ESOL learners take placement tests using approved instruments. Interviews and surveys are conducted regularly in the intake process to identify the educational background and individual needs of the learner. Reasons for slow progress include the pressure of adjustment, caring for family members; immediate survival needs that cause poor attendance and lack of opportunity for practice.

A multi-sensory approach to teaching ESOL includes using visuals, games, graphic organizers, maintaining a slow pace, repetition, rhythmical use of language, varied kinesthetic activities, project-based learning and achieving consistency in the classroom structure. These accommodations that naturally occur in the Adult ESOL classroom would be beneficial for the LD learner.