

EDSP 250 CONTEXT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION
Spring 2009
Language Development, Differences, and Disabilities

Case Study #3: English Language Learners and Learning Disabilities

The third case study focuses on the challenge of determining whether a student's learning differences are based on being an English Language Learner or if a specific learning disability is present. Cases such as this make us think about the limits of labeling as well as being sure that students are provided with the help that they need.

This case study is based on an action research project by Sharon and Alexis Schoen. As you read the case study, complete the four sections of the analysis of Andy who is a 10 year old boy from Korea. You may use the ideas that the authors used as well as add your own strategies for intervention. Use the information from the following sources for additional ideas:

- Handout: Schema on for Understanding ELL & LD
- NY Times article, Where Education and Assimilation Collide by Ginger Thompson
- Webinar – ELL and LD
- Educational Leadership article – Linked to Prior Learning by Yu Ren Dong
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Complete the four sections of the analysis as preparation for holding a Child Study Meeting. Then write notes for a script for your child study meeting using the guidelines attached. We will be using the format that we used earlier in the semester

I. Developmental Analysis

This section demonstrates your ability to distinguish between receptive and expressive language as well as the components of language including the form (phonology, morphology, syntax), the meaning (semantics), the function (pragmatics), and the fluency (discourse). Your analysis should show that you understand the distinction between speech articulation and other more complex language differences.

Phonology (receptive and expressive)

Phonology is a deficient processing of the sounds of language. Receptive language is the interpretation of spoken or written communication and problems with receptive phonology may include the processing of certain similar phonemes, misinterpreting words, or holding language sounds in short-term memory and manipulating them in active working memory. Informal assessments revealed functioning in phonetic comprehension skills. Expressive language is the production of spoken or written communication and problems with expressive phonology may include producing visually close by phonetically improbable spellings. Andy doesn't seem to possess any trouble with expressive phonology.

Morphology (receptive and expressive)

Morphology is poor appreciation of words roots, tenses, and inflections. Receptive language is the interpretation of spoken or written communication and problems with receptive morphology may include weak decoding skills and word interpretation. The case study does not mention Andy

having any trouble with receptive morphology. Expressive language is the production of spoken or written communication and problems with expressive morphology may include weak spelling as well as weak vocabulary in speech and writing. Although the case study does not address this directly, it states that the Korean language does not use plurals, so Andy probably has trouble with tenses in his written work, yet not necessarily.

Syntax (receptive and expressive)

Syntax is weak understanding of grammar and how word order affects meaning. Receptive language is the interpretation of spoken or written communication and problems with receptive syntax may include interpreting passive tenses, understanding certain prepositions and conjunctions, and interpreting certain clauses in sentences. Andy has trouble with receptive syntax in the English language and avoids answering questions if he does not understand them. Expressive language is the production of spoken or written communication and problems with expressive syntax may include responding accurately to “wh...” questions, speaking and writing with clauses, and speaking and writing in complex sentences. This is where Andy is having the most trouble with his language learning. Andy is having trouble with the grammar of the English language and is having a hard time expressing himself in English both verbally and in his writing. He is having trouble understanding where words are supposed to be in the sentence and to use pronouns.

Semantics (receptive and expressive)

Semantics is limited understanding and relating of words to each other. Receptive language is the interpretation of spoken or written communication and problems with receptive semantics may include interpreting word meanings, associations with word meanings, rapid word recognition, or they may interpret word meanings too literally. The case study mentions that Andy has some trouble with rapid word recognition and could have trouble interpreting word meanings because he is not understanding some questions that he is being asked. Expressive language is the production of spoken or written communication and problems with expressive semantics may include not being able to elaborate on the meanings of words or speaking and writing with a limited vocabulary. Andy is having trouble with expressive semantics in his writing and a goal is to expand on his English vocabulary.

Pragmatics (receptive and expressive)

Pragmatics is poor understanding of language in social contexts. Receptive language is the interpretation of spoken or written communication and problems with receptive pragmatics may include interpreting the purpose, goals, or intent of speech or writing. Andy may have trouble with receptive pragmatics because he loses focus during instruction and frequently needs redirection. Expressive language is the production of spoken or written communication and problems with expressive pragmatics may include communicating in speech or writing “why” questions. The case study mentions that Andy has a hard time answering questions that are asked of him, and either refers to a joke, asks for it to be repeated, or mimics peers’ answers. This could be a sign of troubles with expressive pragmatics.

Discourse & Fluency (receptive and expressive)

Discourse and fluency is trouble interpreting language beyond the boundaries of sentences. Receptive language is the interpretation of spoken or written communication and problems with receptive discourse and fluency may include interpretations of narratives and expositions and

recognition of structure. The case study doesn't mention Andy having any trouble with receptive discourse and fluency and seems to understand sequences of events or facts well. Expressive language is the production of spoken or written communication and a problem with expressive discourse and fluency may include speaking and writing with a good flow of ideas. Although the case study doesn't mention it directly Andy is most likely, but not necessarily, having trouble with expressive discourse and fluency as a result of other expressive literacy troubles.

II. Cultural or Experiential Factors

The impact of cultural or experiential factors can be complex and subject to personal bias and interpretation. The section emphasizes the importance of posing questions and hypotheses that lead you to culturally sensitive responses as an instructional planner.

Cultural and experiential factors play a huge role in Andy's learning. Understanding cultural differences is essential in figuring out why students are acting in a certain way or responding in certain ways. These actions or responses could be a result of their cultural or experiential factors. It is definitely not safe to assume that every child within a teacher's classroom is brought up in the same way with the same customs or beliefs, and a teacher must not be quick to assume that an action or response is because of behavioral or learning problems. These actions or responses may be a result of a student's culture or experiences before the school environment. Levine suggests that children from families that speak in a dialect different from that of the school may be at a disadvantage (Levine, 2002). These students are not only learning a new language, they are learning a new culture and what is appropriate and inappropriate within the classroom setting. It is also important to look at the language of the student's first language and look at the differences. In Andy's case, the grammar of the Korean language is much different than that of English, so his expressive syntax problems may not be the case of a learning disability, but just confusion and misunderstanding of the two very different languages. Socioeconomic status may also be a factor in some cases, as not all students have the opportunity for the same experiences. It is important for a teacher not to be judgmental about a student's cultural or experiential factors and especially not to be quick to attribute them to learning and behavioral problems. In Andy's case, it is important to understand the Korean culture before assuming anything, and also to understand that learning a new language may also be attributing to differences. When asked a question, Andy frequently refers to a joke, asks for the question to be repeated, or mimics his peers' answers. He is sensitive about his language acquisition and is frequently losing focus. These differences most likely are attributed to his English language learning or cultural factors. It is important for a teacher to be very educated as to the different cultures with the classroom and work with the students and families to give every child the opportunity to succeed.

III. Impact on Learning

Learning differences or disabilities in receptive and expressive language can impact academic and social/emotional development. In this section, you should make inferences based on your readings of the texts and journal articles. Academic areas can include reading, writing, mathematics, or other language based subject areas. Social/emotional development can include interactions with peers, teachers, and family members. It can also impact the ability of a student with exceptional learning needs to express one's needs and feelings and thus influence his/her behavior.

English language learners that do not get extra help in their language acquisition, or are quick to be labeled as learning disabled and held back from their full potential can impact much more than just reading and writing. Without fully understanding the English language, academics and social or emotional development would most likely follow and continue throughout schooling. Learning

differences in receptive and expressive language can impact academic and social/emotional development. Especially in English language learners, this difference can severely impact all other areas of school along with impacting the student's social development both in and out of the classroom. Literacy is the core of all subjects in academics, and with Andy having trouble with his expressive language; he is concurrently having trouble in all subjects within the classroom. Writing is essential in every aspect of learning at his level, and without a solid foundation of the English language, Andy will continue to have trouble in school. Andy seems to be doing fine with his reading ability, but is having a hard time expressing himself expressively. This is most likely affecting his being able to explain doing word problems in math. Being an English language learner is also affecting Andy in a social and emotional context. When talking to him outside of the school setting, he is very funny and seems as though he is enjoying himself. When asking Andy questions in the school setting, he rarely answers and is very sensitive about his language limitation. It is affecting him socially because he is having trouble communicating with other students as well as the teacher. He is also having a hard time expressing himself, which is very frustrating for him and is most likely affecting his emotional state.

IV. Strategies for Intervention

In this section, you should specify strategies that teachers, other professionals, paraprofessionals, and family members can use to strengthen language development through direct instruction or support the student through the use of accommodations/ modifications that can enhance language abilities.

There are many strategies that teachers, paraprofessionals, and family members can do to help English language learners to strengthen receptive and expressive language. English language learners within the classroom may have a need for silence (Schoen, 2002). Students may need time to listen and reflect before answering questions. Moving quickly through questions can discourage second language learners from participating. Another strategy within the classroom would be avoiding immediate correction (Schoen, 2002). Instead of quickly correcting a student's grammatical mistakes, a teacher should model the correct way of saying something so the students have a model to go by and doesn't get discouraged. Another strategy within the classroom that could be used is to provide specific goals for the student (Schoen, 2002). The ESL standards provide three main goals, using English to communicate in a social setting through verbal and written English, using English to achieve academically in all the content areas, and using English in culturally appropriate ways (Snow, 2000). It is also important to provide strategies within the classroom to accommodate and enhance language development of English language learners. Some strategies for Andy include practice on priority sight vocabulary words, reading of sentences of these priority words, identification of classroom-related words and use of articles in speech, use of pronouns in complete sentences, modeling appropriate language, playing games, and composing interactive journals (Schoen, 2002). For Andy, he seems to do better with physical and hands-on activities to keep him interested in the learning material. The use of word games or word cards may be beneficial for his learning.

Format of Written Script of Child Study Meetings

1. The teacher shares the name of the student and the background information about the student's family. Remind the team that all the information is confidential and only those staff members who have a "need to know" should have this privileged information.
2. The teacher describes the student's strengths, interests, and ways in which the student is "smart" so that the other teachers understand how best to find an entry point for the student's learning. The teacher shares cultural and experiential background that is relevant to the child's progress in the classroom.
3. The teacher describes the most important characteristics of the student's exceptional learning needs at this time.
4. The teacher describes the impact of the learning difference on learning in the general curriculum.
5. The teacher shares research 4-5 *strategies* based on research that teachers can use in their classrooms to enhance the learning of the student and include the student in the general curriculum. Include two more ideas on ideas that the teacher might suggest that the family uses at home (seven all together).
6. The teacher invites discussion from other team members and ensures that everyone participates in the discussion. [We will role play this in class.]
7. The teacher summarizes the decisions, concludes the meeting, and thanks everyone for participating. [We will role play this part in class.]

Script of Child Study Meeting

1. Thank you for being here today on behalf of Andy. I can speak for all of us when saying that we want Andy to succeed and will do everything in our power to see him achieve his full potential. Andy's parents are here today; they are of Korean decent and can help us understand what we need to do to help and support Andy in his learning needs. Today we are going to see what we can do to help Andy and work through some of our concerns. Andy is an English language learner and we believe that his learning difficulties are deriving from learning the English language. I would like to take this time to remind everyone that information shared today is confidential and only those staff members who have a "need to know" should have this privileged information.
2. I would like to share some of Andy's strengths and interests at this time so to understand how best to find an entry point for his learning. Andy loves playing with LEGOS, watching the Disney channel, eating cake, reading books with funny plots, and choosing green as his favorite color. His demeanor is illuminating and gives facial expressions to show his emotions. He has a good sense of humor and loves doing hands on activities. He is also engaged in extracurricular activities such as karate class and boy scouts. Andy has a Korean cultural background. The language is very different as the verbs appear at the end of the sentences, there are no articles of speech, plurals are not required, and there is no agreement between predicates and the subjects of the sentences. Social relationships are greatly recognized in the Korean language.
3. At this time, the most important characteristics of Andy's exceptional learning needs deal with the English language. Andy needs practice on sight vocabulary words and the reading of sentences with these priority words, identification of classroom related words and the use of articles of speech, the use of pronouns in complete sentences, and modeling appropriate language. We believe that with these most important characteristics, his other learning needs will fall into place, such as being confident enough to answer questions and speaking in social settings.
4. There is a large impact that Andy's learning difference is having on the general education curriculum. Without being able to express himself well through speaking and writing, he is hesitant to answer questions in all aspects of his learning. He is also not following directions well and is frequently zoning off. His learning difference is also having an impact on him socially as he is not able to express himself and is sensitive about his language limitation. He is having trouble receptive and expressive development, which is the core concept around all of his learning, and therefore must be quickly addressed.
5. I would like to share some researched strategies that could enhance Andy's learning and include him in the general classroom.

1. Involving the issue of Andy's language learning and frequently zoning out, a strategy that can be used is the use of technology, media, and multisensory devices. Using objects, models, and pictures to illustrate vocabulary words provides concrete models, and role-playing and games can help illustrate difficult concepts. This would help Andy use hands on activities and stay focused on his learning. Andy could use a computer to help him stay focused, or play word games with other students. It is important here to not put Andy on the spot, and to make directions simple and provide demonstrations (Schoen, 2002).
 2. Involving the issue of Andy's English writing struggles, it might be beneficial for Andy to keep a dialogue journal. Since Andy needs more work on his writing, it may be beneficial for him to feel comfortable writing without correction, then having the teacher write back and model English language. This would enhance Andy's confidence in his writing and give models for him to learn, as well as providing a means of assessment (Schoen, 2002).
 3. Involving the issue of Andy's understanding questions, a strategy that the teacher could use is to give Andy time to work through the question before he is required to answer. An example of this would be the teacher telling him that they will ask him to answer after two other students, so Andy would get more time to work through the question before being required to answer.
 4. Involving the issue of Andy's recessive learning, a strategy would be to use organizers to help develop thoughts and directions. This would be a visual way of Andy to understand information, and also gives Andy smaller pieces of a whole concept to work through at once.
 5. At home, a strategy that Andy's parents could use to help with Andy's vocabulary would be to label places in the house with name labels. This would help him enhance his vocabulary in a fun way and remind him of words in a visual way.
 6. Another strategy that Andy's parents could use to help him at home would be to encourage Andy to recap his day in English when he gets home from school. This would be an assessment on how well he is understanding material as well as giving him practice speaking in English in a systematic order.
6. At this time I would like to invite discussion from other team members. I would like everyone to participate in this discussion to make use we are doing what is best for Andy at this time.
 7. At this time I would like to summarize this discussion. Andy is a smart student that is having trouble with his English language learning, especially his expressive learning. We believe that his learning difficulties are deriving from his recessive and expressive learning of the English language and are going to try some

strategies to help him succeed in the regular classroom. Andy does well with hands on and visual activities, so we will make use of the technology provided to enhance his learning, as well as organizers and playing games to help him with English learning. We are going to keep a dialogue journal to practice writing in English without the fear of corrections, as well as giving Andy more time to work through questions that are being asked. At home, Andy's parents are going to label things around the house as well as encourage him to recap his school day in English. A follow up meeting will be scheduled to see how our interventions are working with Andy. I want to thank everyone for participating in today's discussion and for being here to support Andy.

Works Cited

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- Snow, C. (2000). *Language Development Studies with Connections to Literacy Issues*. Kansas Reading Academy.
- Schoen, S. & Schoen, A. (2002). *Action Research in the Classroom: Assisting a Linguistically Different Learner with Special Needs*. Ebsco Publishing