

School Psychology Assessment of English Language Learners

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Introduction

One of the most challenging professional tasks that school psychologists face in their daily work is the evaluation of English language learners (ELLs). Although having bilingual school psychologists available to assess ELLs would be best practice, in reality there are few bilingual examiners available to call upon (Noland, 2009). When districts don't have a bilingual examiner available, school psychologists are faced with having to proceed with an evaluation doing the best that they can. Research into how school psychologists are navigating this challenge would be helpful for identifying ways to improve practices so that ELLs are being evaluated fairly and appropriately. With current concerns regarding the over-identification and under-identification of ELLs in various eligibility categories of special education (Sullivan & Proctor, 2016) additional research into current practices and school psychologist perceptions of current development is needed.



Research Question 1: How many ELL assessments are school psychologists in WA doing?

Seventy-eight percent of respondents reported that they have conducted an ELL evaluation during the previous academic year. For those who did conduct an ELL evaluation, they reported an average of 11 evaluations with a standard deviation of 14, ranging from 2-60.

Research Question 2: How frequently do school psychologists use interpreters, and how do they use them?

Use of Interpreters	Mean	Standard Deviation
During interviews	2.52	1.41
Directs for standardized tests	3.84	1.19
Actual test items	4.10	1.19
Student responses	3.86	1.16
Provide clarification	3.97	1.12

Note: 1 = Always, 2 = Mostly, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Seldom, 5 = Never

Research Question 3: What type of training and experience do WA school psychologists report in the area of ELL assessment?

Type	Percent of Responses
Attended sessions on ELL assessment at conferences (i.e. NASP, WSASP)	24.76%
Read articles in professional journals	23.81%
Consulted with a bilingual school psychologist	15.24%
Read articles on the internet	15.24%
District provided training on ELL assessment	15.24%
Other (i.e. summer college courses, grad school training, book discussion)	5.71%**

Research Question 4: What procedures do WA school psychologists report using when assessing an ELL student?

Type	Percent of Responses
Interviews (i.e. parent, teacher, interpreter feedback)	26.67%
Home language survey	10%
Classroom data (i.e. OSPI peer analysis data)	23.33%
Professional judgement (i.e. speech language pathologist, bilingual assessor)	3.33%
Standardized cognitive assessment- Spanish (i.e. BVAT, WISC-IV, DAS, WMLS-R)	13.33%
Standardized cognitive assessment- English (i.e. WMLS-R, WJ-III, WJ-IV OL, WIAT, WISC, nonverbal, RAIS, DAS)	33.33%
Standardized cognitive assessment – Nonverbal	26.67%
Standardized English Language Proficiency (i.e. WMLS, WELPA, ELPA21)	56.67%
C-LIM	6.67%
Speech/language instruments (i.e. SLP screener, SELF,	26.67%
Curriculum Based Measures	6.67%

Research Question 5: What are WA school psychologists' perceptions of the usefulness of the various models?

Usefulness of Concepts for Evaluating ELLs	Mean	Standard Deviation
Response to Intervention	3.77	1.15
Curriculum Based Assessment	3.70	1.06
Standardized Measures of English Language Proficiency	3.63	.97
C-LIM	3.59	1.14
ELPA-21	3.41	.87
Acculturation	3.39	1.10
Universal Screening & Progress Monitoring	3.28	1.03
MAMBI	3.19	1.03
Gils Critical Data Matrix Process	3.05	1.47
Cross Battery Assessment	3.00	1.09
CHC Theory	2.74	1.02

Note: 1 = Not useful at all, 2 = Slightly useful, 3 = Moderately useful, 4 = Very useful, 5 = Extremely useful

Method

- 154 school districts were randomly selected from a list of WA school districts (295)
- Districts with 0-5% and over 10% Transitional Bilingual were selected, leaving a total of 132 School districts. Due to the low response rate to the survey, comparisons between districts with low and high numbers of Transitional Bilingual students were not completed.
- Research team members collected e-mail addresses for school psychologists in each of the districts by searching school and district webpages.
- E-mail invitations were sent out through the Qualtrix survey system to 305 school psychologists.
- 37 completed the survey, for a response rate of 12%.
- Data were downloaded to SPSS for analysis.

Discussion

- *There were a wide variety of methods and assessments reported for ELL evaluations.
- *There is little consensus on the best assessments and methods to use.
- *RTI rated highly for usefulness. Professional development on RTI for ELLs may be important.
- *The C-LIM was rated highly for usefulness. Considering the open research question on the validity of the C-LIM (Kranzler et al., 2010) this is an important area for future discussion and research.
- *In general school psychologists followed best practices in the use of interpreters. They didn't use interpreters for standardized testing, but did use them for interviews

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