ESL Students & Students from Diverse Cultures

April 2012

Newfoundland
Labrador

ESL Students and Students from Diverse Cultures: Guidelines for Comprehensive Assessment

Newfoundland
Labrador

Education

April
2012

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

In recent years there has been an increase in cultural diversity in our school system. Some immigrant students are coming from developed countries and have a strong educational foundation, while others are arriving from refugee camps or war torn countries and may have limited exposure to formalized education.

Culturally diverse students fall into three categories:
- English Second Language (ESL) students: Students whose first language is not English.
- English Literacy Development (ELD) students: Students who, due to limited prior schooling, have an achievement gap in literacy and/or numeracy skills. Most of these students will be ESL students but some may speak English as their first language.
- Students who speak a dialect of English that varies significantly from the Canadian standard and/or come from a cultural background that differs considerably from the Canadian norm.

Throughout this document, the term 'students from diverse cultures' will be used to describe students in all three categories. These students have unique needs in regards to programming and the comprehensive assessment process.

In the Newfoundland and Labrador school system, the comprehensive assessment process generally involves an assessment team which is led by the Guidance Counsellor or Educational Psychologist. The composition of this team may vary based upon the needs that are identified during the pre-referral and referral stages. For students from diverse cultures, this team should include an ESL teacher/specialist or someone knowledgeable about second language acquisition and issues related to acculturation. In addition, all members of the assessment team are expected to have or develop a knowledge base that will allow them to approach the assessment in a culturally fair manner.

While the main focus of this document is the comprehensive assessment process for students from diverse cultures, important precursors to this process are also discussed. The intent of this document is to provide all members of the assessment team with guidelines to help ensure that the comprehensive assessment of students from diverse cultures is approached in a culturally fair manner.

While there is much that remains to be learned regarding the comprehensive assessment process of students from diverse cultures, there are certain practices and procedures that are widely recommended in current research. We have attempted to incorporate the best practices and procedures for our population at this time. This

document represents a starting point to establish some basic tenets for culturally fair assessment.

Important Precursors to the Comprehensive Assessment Process

When a student from a diverse culture enters the NL school system, there are certain practices related to the reception and orientation, initial assessment, grade placement, and programming which are recommended; in addition, every teacher working with the student is expected to employ classroom strategies which will aid the student's language development and acculturation. These are outlined in the documents *Meeting the Needs of Students from Diverse Cultures: a Handbook for Administrators* and *Teaching Students from Diverse Cultures: Information and Strategies for Classroom Teachers of English Second Language Students,* both available on the Department of Education website.

During the pre-referral, referral and comprehensive assessment process, information gathered through the implementation and documentation of these practices and procedures helps to guide decisions regarding assessment and recommended programming. Therefore, it is important that the assessment team consult with teachers involved in the student's education to gain information and documentation regarding the strategies and interventions that have been employed and their impact. For ESL students in K – 9, much of this information is documented using the *ESL Learning Plan*, (found in *Guidelines for Delivery of ESL Services in K-6,* and *Guidelines for Delivery of ESL Services in the Intermediate School).* For ESL students in Senior High and other students from diverse cultures, teachers working with the student are encouraged to keep a similar record of strategies and interventions tried and progress observed, to be kept in the student's cumulative file.

Factors which Impact Learning and Suggested Strategies and Interventions

Many factors can impact the ability to learn, including English proficiency, lack of prior educational opportunity, culture shock, posttraumatic stress disorder, or any of the exceptionalities recognized by the Department of Education. Determining the exact cause(s) of the student's difficulties is not always straightforward. Identifying the needs of the student will involve input from teachers and parents/guardians, and may involve an interdisciplinary team of professionals.

Some factors which may impact the ability to learn and suggested strategies and interventions are described below.

- **Limited English Proficiency**
  Limited English proficiency is an obstacle in classroom success. All teachers working with ESL students are expected to employ teaching and assessment strategies which are conducive to second language learning. Most ESL students

will acquire English language skills in a predictable way and will gradually integrate into the provincially prescribed curriculum. ESL courses and guidelines, as well as professional learning resources which will aid all teachers working with ESL students, are available on the Department of Education website. In addition, the "Benchmarks for ESL Developmental Stages", found in *Guidelines for Delivery of ESL Services in K-6* and *Guidelines for the Delivery of ESL Services in the Intermediate School,* may be helpful in determining the student's stage of English language acquisition and in setting realistic expectations for ESL students.

- **Lack of prior instruction**
  Lack of prior instruction has been clearly identified as an issue for some students, particularly those from countries and/or refugee camps where educational opportunities are limited. These students may be unable to experience success in age-appropriate curriculum due to their lack of prior schooling or lack of quality schooling. In this case, prerequisite skills need to be taught. Curriculum guides for *Literacy Enrichment and Academic Readiness for Newcomers (LEARN)* courses are available on the provincial Department of Education website. Guidelines for the initial achievement assessment of newcomers can be found in *Meeting the Needs of Students for Diverse Cultures: A Handbook for Administrators.*

- **Lack of readiness skills for school related tasks**
  Some students from other cultures may lack school readiness skills. For example, a student may have had little or no exposure to activities such as pencil and paper tasks, matching shapes, doing jigsaw puzzles, etc. and may need support in developing visual and fine motor skills. Likewise, the student may have had no exposure to school related activities such as multiple-choice, fill in the blanks, writing in your own words and timed tasks. The student will benefit from ample opportunities to develop such skills. Lack of exposure to such school tasks may impact formal assessment results.

- **Lack of schooling behaviour/ knowledge of school expectations**
  Some students from other cultures may not have developed behaviours and habits conducive to school success. Families may need instruction and support in implementing effective study habits and organization of time, materials and tasks.

- **High achievement**
  When a curriculum is not challenging enough, behavioural issues, boredom and/or frustration may result. A newcomer may have already achieved outcomes beyond Canadian peers. Outcomes for students must be matched to the student's achievement level.

- **Culture shock**
  Culture shock can affect the way a student learns. Culture shock often displays itself as a kind of excitement at the novelty of everything but can turn to sadness as the novelty wears off. All students will need time to adapt to the new environment. Encouraging classmates to be inclusive in their friendships in and outside the school and involving the newcomer in extra-curricular activities can help in the adaptation process.

- **Cultural attitudes towards schooling**
  Different cultures have different views of education. Parents/guardians should be encouraged to be involved in the student's schooling. Developing attitudes and behaviours conducive to educational success will take time and may involve personnel outside the school. Examples of different cultural attitudes which may need to be considered include:
  - People from some cultures have a high regard for formal education but may not put a strong emphasis on comprehension or analytical and critical thinking. Over time, and with encouragement, students will normally come to realize and develop the skills expected.
  - Other cultures do not put a high value on formal education. A lack of progress may be a result of attitude toward schooling, poor attendance or lack of home support for school tasks.
- **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**
  If PTSD is suspected, a referral should be made to a mental health professional. Information and some strategies for dealing with PTSD can be found in Appendix 3.
- **Medical Issues**
  A medical history, as well as a vision and hearing check, may give insight and direction for improving the student's overall progress.

Students with Documentation of an Exceptionality

New students may register at a school and provide documentation indicating that they have been previously assessed. If this is the case, the assessment results will be reviewed by the Guidance Counsellor/ Educational Psychologist and the student may be referred to the Service Delivery Team upon school entry.

The Pre-referral Process

The pre-referral process for students from diverse cultures is similar, in many regards, to that of other students in the K-12 school system and should involve all teachers working with the student. If a student does not progress as expected or appears to be performing above grade level expectations in certain areas, the pre-referral process may be initiated by the classroom teacher. During the pre-referral process, teachers attempt to gain a better understanding of the student's strengths and needs by observing and documenting the student's response to specific teaching strategies. Supporting the learning needs of students is an ongoing problem-solving process best accomplished by groups of teachers sharing ideas, experiences and resources.

As outlined in the provincial document *Service Delivery Model for Students with Exceptionalities*, teachers will use the **Pre-Referral** form to note the strategies tried during pre-referral, the period of time they are in place, and progress. The Pre-referral form is kept in the student's cumulative file.

Specific pre-referral considerations for students from diverse cultures

Before deciding to initiate the pre-referral process, teachers should ensure that the student has been given adequate time to acquire language skills, address gaps in schooling and adapt to the new cultural environment and expectations. This means ensuring that classroom strategies and suggested interventions for students from diverse cultures have been implemented and evaluated, and that appropriate programming has been provided.

1. Ensuring parents/guardians understand the pre-referral process

Due to language and/or cultural differences special attention must be paid to ensuring that parents/guardians understand the teacher's concerns and the pre-referral process. With the parents/guardians' permission, an interpreter may aid in the sharing of information between home and school. It is important that the interpreter be reminded to respect the confidentiality of the meeting. In addition, special consideration may have to be given to the following:
- Problem solving around contacting parents/guardians, including:
  ° What is the best way to make initial contact?
  ° Who will contact the parents/guardians?
  ° Deciding on how to best convey the message in order to minimize possible misunderstandings due to language and/or cultural differences
  ° Allowing for the possibility that multiple contacts may be necessary
- Being flexible with the scheduling of parent-teacher meetings
- Providing the opportunity for a trusted third party, familiar with the language and customs, to partake in the meetings
- Making allowances for lack of familiarity with the Canadian educational system, including sensitivity to the concept of student support services

2. Documentation

For ESL students in K-9, the *ESL Learning Plan* should be reviewed as part of the pre-referral process, and a copy should be attached to the Pre-referral form. *The ESL Learning Plan* is kept in the student's cumulative file. For ESL students in high school and other students from diverse cultures, teachers should attach a short summary to the pre-referral form outlining the classroom strategies and interventions which have been implemented, comments as to their effectiveness and any other information which might aide in the pre-referral process. For further information see *Important Precursors to the Comprehensive Assessment Process* section above.

3. Additional pre-referral strategies

For additional pre-referral strategies, consult the *Pre-Referral Intervention Manual* by Stephen R. McCarney et al. supplied to all schools by the Department of Education in

2010. This manual includes strategies for students who are performing below grade level. For students who are performing above grade level in specific areas, please consult the provincial document, *Gifted and Talented Handbook,* available on the Department of Education website.

The Referral Process

When a teacher is considering a referral to the Service Delivery Team for a student from a diverse culture, the academic progress of the student should be evaluated in relation to his/her peers from a similar cultural, language and educational background. For students receiving ESL services or LEARN courses, consultation with these teachers will assist in making this evaluation. If an ESL teacher is not assigned to the school, the referring teacher may consult with school district personnel responsible for ESL services.

There are situations when it is appropriate to refer a newly arrived student to the Service Delivery Team. For example, in some instances there may be a history of academic difficulty and indicators of an exceptionality are noticed soon after arrival. In addition, in extreme cases, it may be immediately apparent that the student's difficulties stem from an exceptionality. Although there is no documentation available, a referral for assessment may be warranted.

If it is decided that a referral is appropriate, the form *Referral to the Service Delivery Team* is completed and submitted for review. All strategies, both pre-referral and those implemented prior to the pre-referral stage should be attached.

The referral package is reviewed by the Service Delivery Team and the referring teacher. Further information may need to be collected to determine whether or not the referral concerns can be primarily attributed to cultural and/or linguistic differences. Members of the Service Delivery Team may be assigned to collect background information and gather current data on language proficiencies of the student. Further referrals for assessment should be deferred until this information is collected and discussed by the Service Delivery Team. Depending upon the extent and nature of the information required, the team may decide to treat this as an initial step of the comprehensive assessment process for students from diverse cultures. Please refer to the *Comprehensive Assessment* section of this document for information regarding the collection of this data, as well as considerations pertaining to obtaining informed consent.

If further assessment is not appropriate at this time, the team, including the referring teacher(s), will decide on additional strategies to be implemented to address the referral concerns. If further assessment is required, the Service Delivery Team determines which professional(s) will assess the student, and completes the appropriate referral forms. Given the unique considerations involved in the assessment of students

from diverse cultures, these professionals should form an assessment team that works together throughout the assessment process.

The Comprehensive Assessment of Students from Diverse Cultures

For students from diverse cultures, it is particularly important that any decisions regarding assessments are made by a team of assessors, in consultation with the referring teacher and other teachers working with the student. The assessment team may also consult other professionals familiar with the assessment of students from diverse cultures. The team decides which assessment tools and subtests are appropriate, and discusses the interpretation of assessment results.

It will be necessary to allot more time than usual for completing the comprehensive assessment. Collecting background information, obtaining informed consent, triangulating data, drawing conclusions and explaining results to parents/guardians will require extra time, given the unique considerations of these students. However, the assessment must still be completed within the timeline set forth by the Department of Education.

Informed Consent

Assessors must pay particular attention to the challenge of obtaining informed consent. Due to possible language and/or cultural differences, careful attention must be given to ensuring that parents/guardians understand the assessment process and what their consent means. Adequate time should be allotted to ensure understanding. With the parent's consent, an interpreter aid in this process. For additional considerations regarding communication with parents/guardians, please refer to the pre-referral section of this document.

Information Gathering

The gathering of background information is a **critical** component in the comprehensive assessment process for students from diverse cultures. The information gathered will guide decisions regarding who should be involved in the administration of assessments, the choice of assessment tools, and will also aid in the interpretation of assessment results. The importance of involving the family members in this process should not be underestimated as they can provide valuable information about the student's background and functioning outside of the school setting. The family can help provide information about the student's social and emotional functioning as well as language use and development. Parents/guardians and other family members can help in constructing a language profile of the student, particularly in regard to languages used in the home and the community.

Assessors should be alert for possible misunderstandings due to cultural and/or linguistic differences. Cultural norms such as the types of information considered private, assumptions about power and authority, and the appropriateness of displaying emotions, making eye contact, or expressing personal views need to be considered. As well, past experiences may impact how families view educators and authority figures, as well as their perception of intelligence.

Background information should be gathered from multiple sources. The following factors must be given special consideration:
- Classroom strategies and interventions for students from diverse cultures
    - ° Documentation of these strategies and interventions should be attached to pre-referral package and will provide information that may help in determining whether or not the referral concerns can be primarily attributed to language acquisition, gaps in schooling, or cultural issues.
- Rate of progress as compared to peers with a similar background
    - ° Consultation with the classroom teacher(s), ESL teacher and parents/guardians is important in making this determination.
- Educational history (e.g., language of instruction, gaps in formal education, differences in school systems, attendance patterns and reasons, number of school changes before and after arrival)
- Family stressors (e.g., family separation and/or reunification issues, frequent moves, changes in socio-economic status, health concerns)
- Trauma (e.g., refugee experiences, exposure to war, natural disasters or terrorism)
- Developmental milestones
- Medical history
- Cultural background
- Behavioural observations across a variety of settings
    - ° The assessor should be aware that observed behaviours may reflect cultural expectations as well as individual characteristics.
- Language proficiencies

Language Proficiencies

Collaboration with the ESL teacher will assist the assessment team in understanding the student's language proficiencies. If an ESL teacher is not assigned to the school, the team may consult with school district personnel responsible for ESL services. Consultation with Speech Language Pathologists may also be helpful. Every effort should be made to determine the following:
- Language(s) spoken in the home
- Approximate level of language proficiency in languages other than English
- Approximate level of English language proficiency (listening, speaking, reading and writing)

There are two types of language proficiency that must be considered, basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1984). It is important that information about both types of language proficiencies be gathered. Observations of the student interacting with classmates and teachers in the classroom and other settings can provide information about the student's basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). Similarly, observing the student's language during instructional activities in the classroom can provide information on his or her cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP).

This information will aid in determining if the areas of concern may be the result of an exceptionality or simply a reflection of the normal process of second-language acquisition. With appropriate instruction and adequate time, a student's English proficiency should improve in a predictable way. If it does not, further investigation is warranted.

Language proficiency information can also help to determine the degree to which language proficiency may influence test performances on cognitive and achievement measures.

Measures of Language Proficiency

The Benchmarks for ESL Developmental Stages, which can be found in *Guidelines for Delivery of ESL Services in K-6* and *Guidelines for Delivery of ESL Services in the Intermediate School*, available on the Department of Education website, may aid in determining the student's stage of English language acquisition. In addition, the following measures may be helpful:

- Reading assessment results
- Writing samples in the student's first language or language of prior schooling
- Writing samples in English
- Other samples of student work
- Observations in a variety of settings
- Teacher rating scales/input. The SOLOM Teacher Observation Matrix is an example of a rating scale that can be used to obtain teacher input on a student's oral language proficiency (See Appendix 4).
- Story telling – used to evaluate the student's expressive abilities and provide information on the student's ability to organize the information so that it can be understood by the listener, draw conclusions and evaluate actions (Ortiz, 1997).
- Story-retelling – used to evaluate the student's receptive and expressive language skills (Ortiz, 1997).
- Information from parents/guardians – parents/guardians and other family members can provide information regarding language proficiencies, particularly regarding languages used in the home. Questions to answer during this process may include: What language is used by the student during family activities and play time? What is the language of the student's parents and/or primary

caregiver? What is the language of the music and television programs that the student prefers? Is the student's language use different from his or her siblings? How does the student interact with others in the home environment? Have the parents/guardians noticed that the student has any difficulties at home in following directions, understanding spoken language or expressing him/herself? (Colorado Department of Education, 1999)

Specific Assessment Considerations

In making decisions regarding which assessment tools and subtests are most appropriate for a student from a diverse culture, the assessment team must consider the referral concerns, the impact of pre-referral interventions (including classroom strategies and interventions for students from diverse cultures), factors related to the student's background and experiences, and information obtained regarding the student's language proficiency and level of acculturation.

The team must be alert for possible misunderstandings due to linguistic and cultural factors.

> "It is not simply that an individual speaks another language that is a problem; rather, it is the individual's lack of English language proficiency that presents the obstacle to valid measurement of ability, skill or knowledge. Likewise, it is not simply that an individual is from another culture that is the problem but that the individual's lack of cultural knowledge presents an obstacle to valid measurement."
>
> (Rhodes, Ochoa, Ortiz, 2005, p. 126)

It is important to note that, while standardized tests can provide valuable information, because of the nature and cultural specificity of these tests, they should be used as only one part of an assessment. They should be supplemented by informal assessment measures such as:

- curriculum-based assessments
- observations in a variety of settings, including both structured and unstructured settings
- interviews with teachers, parents/guardians, and student
- checklists and rating scales by parents/guardians, teachers and student

In addition, assessment procedures such as testing of limits may provide valuable information. Assessors should take careful notes of student responses to both standardized and non-standardized procedures.

When reviewing the assessment information, the team should look for corroboration among the results of the various types of assessment data.

<u>Language of Assessment</u>

While some specialists recommend that formal assessments of students from diverse cultures be administered in both their first language and English, meeting that criterion may be difficult due to the limited immigrant community in Newfoundland and Labrador and resources available. Given the variety of languages and dialects spoken by this relatively small student population in Newfoundland and Labrador, formal assessment tools in the languages required and/or individuals fluent in those languages who can aid in the assessment process are, for the most part, unavailable. Moreover, after a student has been immersed in the second language for several years and has not kept up first language academic skills, carrying out formal assessment in the first language may be invalid. Data obtained through language proficiency assessments and the collection of background information can help guide decisions regarding most appropriate assessment instruments.

<u>Cognitive Assessment</u>

In deciding on the most appropriate approach to assessing the cognitive abilities of students from diverse cultures, the assessment team must consider the student's current level of language proficiency.

The following tools were provided to districts to aid in the cognitive assessment of students from diverse cultures:
- Wechsler Nonverbal Scale of Ability: Canadian
- Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices
- Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices
- Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – 4th edition (WISC-IV)
- Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale – Third Edition (WAIS-III)

If the assessment team deems that the student is **not proficient in cognitive academic language proficiency** (CALP) in English, nonverbal cognitive assessments that employ no verbal directions, no timed bonus points, and measure a broad spectrum of reasoning ability, are recommended. However, it is still important to be cautious when using nonverbal assessments. Non-verbal tools do not necessarily eliminate cultural loading or linguistic bias. The use of items common to Western or urban cultures such as paper/pencil tasks, the choice of pictures, and timed testing may disadvantage students who have limited exposure to these things. In addition, the non-verbal communication between the student and the examiner may also be influenced by cultural factors and be open to misinterpretation. Furthermore, nonverbal assessment instruments tend to measure a narrower range of cognitive abilities. Therefore, the scores obtained on these assessments should only be used as a general indication of cognitive functioning and must be corroborated by other data.

Since nonverbal intelligence tests cannot predict how a student will perform in the classroom, where the ability to use language for both social and academic purposes is

required, it is important that they are supplemented with additional information, such as:

- observation of the student in a variety of educational contexts to help pinpoint how the student's behaviour differs from his or her peers
- observations of how the student reacts to instruction on various tasks that measure cognitive functioning

If the assessment team deems that the student is **proficient in cognitive academic language proficiency** (CALP) in English, it may be appropriate to use measures of cognitive ability which are more verbal and language-based such as the WISC-IV and WAIS-III. These assessments tools measure a broader range of cognitive abilities and thus may provide a more accurate estimate of cognitive functioning for these students than a non-verbal tool. It is important to note that subtests which comprise such standardized cognitive assessments vary in linguistic demand and cultural loading. In addition, timed tasks and tasks designed to measure working memory or processing speed may disadvantage students who are learning a new language given that processing information in a second language is a slower, more complex process. Therefore, if the decision is made to administer such assessments, the assessment team must ascertain whether the results obtained can be attributed primarily to linguistic or cultural factors, or if they are indeed a valid and reliable indication of the student's cognitive functioning. Tools such as the *Culture-Language Test Classifications* and the *Culture-Language Interpretative Matrix*, developed by Flanagan, Ortiz & Alfonso, can aid in making this determination. Further information on the use and interpretation of these tools can be found in "Essentials of Cross-Battery Assessment" (Flanagan, Ortiz & Alfonso, 2007).

Interpretation of Cognitive Assessments

Once informal and formal cognitive assessment information has been obtained, this information should be discussed among assessment team members; other assessment personnel may have valuable insights into the student's cognitive functioning. Test scores on standardized cognitive assessments should be used only as one indication of cognitive functioning and weighed in light of all other information collected before arriving at any conclusions. Information gleaned on the process of learning may be more valuable than the actual score obtained. Scores on standardized cognitive assessments of students from diverse cultures should not be used in isolation in an ability/discrepancy evaluation as a deciding factor in determining the presence of a learning disability.

Achievement Assessment

Assessing the achievement of students from diverse cultures is a complex process. According to Rhodes, Ochoa & Ortiz, 2005, the following issues related to language, culture and schooling must be considered:

- Academic achievement measures are intended to assess the skills and abilities students have acquired as a result of direct instruction or intervention. Therefore, it is important to consider educational and environmental experiences of these students and how these might impact performance on achievement measures.
- If a student is not proficient in English, assessments of achievement may be measuring English competence instead of accurately assessing academic growth and development.
- Students from diverse cultures may have life experiences and skills that are not closely matched to the normative samples represented in formal measures of academic achievement. These assessments assume that the student being assessed and individuals in the norming sample are from similar cultural backgrounds and have had comparable experiences and opportunities to learn the content, language and skills measured by the test.
- Assessors need to be sensitive to the influence of content and processing factors, such as speed, on the achievement assessment of diverse learners.

There are advantages and limitations to both the formal and informal assessment of academic achievement for students from diverse cultures. Utilizing both may provide complementary points of comparison and thereby may result in a more accurate assessment. Each student's individual culture, language, schooling, and other applicable experiences must be considered (Rhodes, Ochoa, Ortiz, 2005).

Informal achievement assessments may include:
- Data on the student's rate of progress compared to peers with a similar background
- Academic assessments by ESL and classroom teachers
- Analysis of work samples
- Observation in multiple settings
- Information obtained from parents/guardians and other adults working with the student and/or the family
- Curriculum-based measures such as informal reading inventories
- Performance-based assessments such as portfolios, projects, scientific experiments, oral presentations, essays and artistic representations
- Dynamic assessment methods such as test-teach-retest, providing feedback on problem solving tasks and having student explain how they arrived at an answer

Selected subtests of standardized achievement assessment tools may be used but these would form only one part of the assessment of the student's academic skills. Their use must be given careful thought and the results interpreted with caution, taking into consideration the cultural and/or linguistic weighting of items.

Some advantages of using standardized achievement assessments include:
- Provision of a baseline for measuring progress

- Minimization of subjective judgement
- Delineation of specific strengths and deficits
- Provision of a picture of present functioning compared to peers

                                (Sattler, 2001, as cited in Rhodes, Ochoa, Ortiz, 2005, p. 205)

Interpretation of Achievement Assessments

Results of formal and informal achievement assessments should be compared and, if necessary, further investigated. Information obtained from classroom teachers, ESL teachers, parents/guardians and other individuals familiar with the academic progress of the student should also be considered. In making determinations regarding the achievement level of the student, the assessment team should look for corroborating evidence and similar patterns of strengths and weaknesses from multiple sources. Achievement levels should be described in terms of grade level versus age level descriptors.

Other Assessment Tools

Other assessment tools which may be useful in the comprehensive assessment of students from diverse cultures include:
- Visual motor integration tests
- Adaptive behaviour scales
- Behaviour rating scales

For adaptive behaviour and behaviour rating scales, parental input is essential. Teacher input alone is insufficient in understanding home and community functioning of a student from a different cultural and/or linguistic background. Due to cultural and linguistic differences, parents/guardians may require assistance in understanding and completing these rating scales.

General Comments on the Interpretation of Assessment Results

Clinical judgement plays a very important role in the interpretation of assessment results for students from diverse cultures. How a student scores on a formal assessment may not necessarily be the most valuable information that is gathered. Assessment may help shed light on such things as:
- patterns of strengths and weaknesses
- learning styles
- problem solving strategies
- memory skills
- reaction to challenging tasks
- perceived failure

Scores on standardized assessment instruments should not be included in the assessment report if the norms are not appropriate for the student being assessed or if the assessment was administered in a nonstandard manner. Instead, information gleaned from the assessments can be described and used to support a diagnosis, particularly if it is supported by information obtained through informal assessment measures (Artiles, 2002).

Overall test results should be interpreted in a team setting. The assessment team must ensure that the data collected is questioned and corroborated. It is important to ensure that the team is not jumping to conclusions or overlooking important information. Multiple sources should point to the same conclusion. Discussing test results with family members and/or other persons familiar with the student's background may provide additional insights into the student's performance.

The assessment team should also consider the following points when interpreting and reporting results:
- Both formal and informal assessments must be interpreted with caution. The cultural and linguistic loadings of each subtest, of each measure must be considered.
- Flexibility and openness to interpreting data in light of different cultural perspectives is necessary:
  ° Ascertain whether errors are typical of other students with similar backgrounds
  ° Consider that a student from another culture may not reason in the same manner as the assessment might assume, based on Canadian norms
  ° Consider the impact of limited exposure to school related activities (as discussed previously under Factors Which Impact Learning)
- When writing assessment reports, include descriptions of any departures from standard testing procedures and what impact this may have had on the interpretation of the results.
- In discussing the results of a comprehensive assessment with parents/guardians, care must be taken to ensure that they understand the conclusions, how they were arrived at, and the implications for programming. With the parent's consent, an interpreter, relative, or community member may aid in this process.

If the results of the comprehensive assessment point to an exceptionality, then the results should be used to inform supports and programming to meet the student's needs. If the student is not found to have an exceptionality, the Service Delivery Team should work with the referring teacher to ensure that information gathered as a result of the assessment is used to inform classroom strategies and interventions that might address the referral concerns.

Appendix 1: Cultural Differences in Student Behaviour

Ministry of Education, B.C.

Perceived Behaviour	Possible Cultural Explanation
The student avoids eye contact.	Keeping eyes downcast may be a way of showing respect. In some cultures, direct eye contact with a teacher is considered disrespectful and a challenge to the teacher's authority.
The student tends to smile when disagreeing with what is being said or when being reprimanded.	A smile may be a gesture of respect that children are taught to employ to avoid giving offence in difficult situations.
The student shrinks from or responds poorly to apparently inoffensive forms of physical contact or proximity.	There may be taboos on certain types of physical contact. Buddhists, for instance, regard the head and shoulders as sacred and would consider it impolite to ruffle a child's hair or give a reassuring pat on the shoulder. There are also significant differences among cultures with respect to people's sense of what is considered an appropriate amount of personal space.
The student refuses to eat with peers.	Some students may be unaccustomed to eating with anyone but members of their own family.
The student does not participate actively in group work or collaborate readily with peers on cooperative assignments.	Cooperative group work is never used by teachers in some cultures. Students may thus view sharing as "giving away knowledge" and may see no distinction between legitimate collaboration and cheating.
The student displays uneasiness, expresses disapproval, or even misbehaves in informal learning situations or situations involving open-ended learning processes (e.g., exploration).	Schooling in some cultures involves a strict formality. For students who are used to this, an informal classroom atmosphere may seem chaotic and undemanding, while teachers with an informal approach may seem unprofessional. Such students may also be uncomfortable with process-oriented learning activities and prefer activities that yield more tangible and evident results.
The student refuses to participate in extra-curricular or in various physical education activities (e.g., swimming, skating, track & field).	Extra-curricular activities may not be considered a part of learning or may even, along with some physical education activities, be contrary to a student's religious or cultural outlook. Some students may also be required to use after-school hours to generate income.

The student seems inattentive and does not display active listening behaviours.	In some cultures, the learning process involves observing and doing or imitating rather than listening and absorbing (e.g., through note-taking).
Performance following instruction reveals that the student is not understanding the instruction, even though she or he exhibited active listening behaviours that suggested understanding and refrained from asking for help or further explanation.	In some cultures, expressing a lack of understanding or asking for help from the teacher is interpreted as a suggestion that the teacher has not been doing a good enough job of teaching and is considered impolite.
The student is unresponsive, uncooperative, or even disrespectful in dealing with teachers of the other gender.	Separate schooling for boys and girls is the norm in some cultures. Likewise, in some cultures the expectations for males and females are quite different. The idea that females and males should have the same opportunities for schooling and play comparable roles as educators will therefore run contrary to some students' cultural conditioning.
The student appears reluctant to engage in debate, speculation, argument, or other processes that involve directly challenging the views and ideas of others.	In some cultures, it is considered inappropriate to openly challenge another's point of view, especially the teacher's. In other cases, there may be a high value attached to being prepared, knowledgeable, and correct when one opens one's mouth.
The student exhibits discomfort or embarrassment at being singled out for special attention or praise.	To put oneself in the limelight for individual praise is not considered appropriate in some cultures, where the group is considered more important than the individual.
The student fails to observe the conventions of silent reading.	Some students may be culturally predisposed to see reading as essentially an oral activity and will therefore read aloud automatically. For others reading aloud is associated with memorization.

Appendix 2: Possible Explanations for Observed Behaviours

Observable Behaviour	Possible explanation in a language learning context	Possible explanation in a Special Education context
Adds or deletes words; uses known words to replace other words	May not yet know the word; may not have internalized the words or requires more rehearsal of words	Has memory/oral language processing difficulties
Is easily distracted	Doesn't understand; is overloaded with new information; requires more visual/concrete support	Has an auditory processing problem, ADHD, or ADD
Has trouble following directions	Doesn't know the vocabulary in the instructions	Has sequencing or memory problems
Can complete arithmetic calculations but not solve word problems	Doesn't know vocabulary of the word problem; isn't familiar with the currency; has no prior experience with the content	Has processing or abstract reasoning problems; a memory problem; sequencing issue; may not be able to generalize from previous examples
Avoids writing	Lacks confidence or is not comfortable with having multiple drafts of work before the final version	Has fine motor difficulties and limited expressive language
Can't retell a story in sequence or summarize a plot	Is unfamiliar with too much of the vocabulary of the story	Has organization or processing problems

(Hamayan, Marler, Sanchez-Lopez and Damico, 2007, p. 40)

Appendix 3: Posttraumatic Stress and Classroom Strategies

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

If PTSD is suspected, referral should be made to a mental health professional for assessment and diagnosis. As described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Text Revision (4th Edition)* the following criteria are considered in arriving at a diagnosis of PTSD:

1. Exposure to Stressor:
    A student may experience Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) if he has been exposed to a traumatic event in which he experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with a life threatening event or serious injury; **and** his response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror. In children this may be expressed by disorganized or agitated behaviour.

2. Event Re-experienced:
    A student with PTSD will persistently re-experience the traumatic event in one or more of the following ways:
    - Recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts or perceptions. In young children, repetitive play may occur in which themes or aspects of the trauma are expressed.
    - Recurrent distressing dreams of the event. In children there may be frightening dreams without recognizable content.
    - Acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were re-occurring . In young children trauma-specific re-enactment may occur.
    - Intense psychological distress at exposure to internal and external cues that symbolize or resemble the traumatic event.
    - Physiological reactivity on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.

3. Avoidance:
    Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness (not present before the trauma), as indicated by three (or more) of the following:
    - Efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings or conversations associated with the trauma
    - Efforts to avoid activities, places or people that cause recollections of the trauma.
    - Inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma.
    - Marked diminished interest or participation in significant activities.
    - Feeling of detachment or estrangement from others.
    - Restricted range of affect (e.g., unable to have loving feelings.)

- Sense of a foreshortened future (e.g., does not expect to have a career, marriage, children or a normal life span.)

4. Arousal:
   Persistent symptoms of increased arousal (not present before the trauma), as indicated by two (or more) of the following:
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep.
- Irritability or outbursts of anger.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Hypervigilance
- Exaggerated startle response.

5. Duration of the symptoms:
   Duration of symptoms in Criteria B, C, and D is more than 1 month.

6. Life Disrupted:
   The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

PTSD may be described as acute or chronic, and may have a delayed onset.

Classroom Strategies for Dealing with PTSD

Students make most of their social contacts in school where they spend a large part of their day. Schools are crucial to helping a student build confidence, feel safe, and experience success. Pryor (2001) emphasises that, for students suffering from PTSD, school can be a safe place to learn and prepare for responsible citizenship. Williams (2007) points out that for students diagnosed with PTSD schools play an important role in interventions and that support must be given to the child, as well as the family as a whole.

When a student has been diagnosed with PTSD, the program planning team will outline strategies to help the student cope in the school environment. Needs which may be identified and possible strategies include, but are not limited to:

Needs	Strategies
Reduce anxiety; feel safe and secure	° Provide assurance of safety ° Remind the student that school is a safe place. ° Reinforce that teachers can be called upon at any time for assistance. ° Talk to the student about how the danger is past ° Be particularly gentle, comforting and reassuring. ° Look for opportunities within the curriculum to reinforce ideas regarding safety and security ° Ensure student is knowledgeable of stress reduction techniques ° Provide quiet space, and/or counselling, if student is feeling overwhelmed or anxious ° Talk to parents/guardians about the security and safety of the school and community, and about the need to feel secure themselves.
Develop a sense of belonging.	° Provide opportunity for working in pairs or groups. ° Encourage involvement in school and extra-curricular activities. ° Encourage older students to be involved in humanitarian causes.
Feeling of control over the environment and his emotions.	° Provide choices for academic and fun activities. ° Respect the student's decisions. ° Gently give the message that it is okay to talk about traumatic events but don't pressure the student if he is not ready to talk.
Experience success.	° Reduce the academic expectation but without allowing the child to fall behind in core subject areas, if possible. Academic expectations may need to be adjusted somewhat. If possible, this should be done without allowing the student to fall behind in subjects that deal with cumulative material or that may impact graduation. ° Encourage and facilitate continued education.
Express emotions freely.	° Allow the student to write about the traumatic event. ° Provide opportunity for self-expression through art and drama. ° Allow the student to express feelings of anger, resentment, etc. in a manner which will not be harmful or embarrassing. ° Provide opportunity for the student to feel carefree, happy and safe.

Concentration	° Provide student with strategies to enhance ability to concentrate, such as chunking work into manageable portions, organization techniques, taking short breaks at regular intervals.
Interest in learning and play	° Provide opportunity for students to learn through play. If activities are not age appropriate, a setting outside of the classroom may be available.
To productively use up excess energy.	° Incorporate activity into the learning experience.
Manage hypersensitivity.	° Be alert to students' auditory, visual, and tactile needs. Students may be particularly sensitive to loud noises, flashing lights, darkness, certain textures, etc.

Appendix 4: SOLOM Teacher Observation Matrix

SOLOM Teacher Observation   Student Oral Language Observation Matrix

Student's Name _____   Grade _____
Class (subject and teacher)_____
Checklist completed by: _____   Date _____

Directions: Based on your observation of the student, put an 'x' across the category that best describes the student's abilities.

	1	2	3	4	5
A. Comprehension	Cannot understand even simple conversation.	Has great difficulty following what is said. Can comprehend only "social conversation" spoken slowly and with frequent repetitions.	Understands most of what is said at slower-than-normal speed with repetitions.	Understands nearly everything at normal speed, although occasional repetition may be necessary.	Understands everyday conversation and normal classroom discussions without difficulty.
B. Fluency	Speech is so halting and fragmentary as to make conversation virtually impossible.	Usually hesitant; often forced into silence by language limitations.	Speech in everyday conversation and classroom discussion frequently disrupted by the student's search for the correct manner of expression.	Speech in everyday conversation and classroom discussions generally fluent, with occasional lapses while the student searches for the correct manner of expression.	Speech in everyday conversation and classroom discussions fluent and effortless, approximating that of a native speaker.
C. Vocabulary	Vocabulary limitations so extreme as to make conversation virtually impossible.	Misuse of words and very limited vocabulary; comprehension quite difficult.	Student frequently uses the wrong words; conversation somewhat limited because of inadequate vocabulary.	Student occasionally uses inappropriate terms and/or must rephrase ideas because of lexical inadequacies.	Use of vocabulary and idioms approximate that of a native speaker.
D. Pronunciation	Pronunciation problems so severe as to make speech virtually unintelligible.	Very hard to understand because of pronunciation problems. Must frequently repeat in order to make himself or herself understood.	Pronunciation problems necessitate concentration on the part of the listener and occasionally lead to misunderstanding.	Always intelligible though one is conscious of a definite accent and occasional inappropriate intonation patterns.	Pronunciation and intonation approximate that of a native speaker.
E. Grammar	Errors in grammar and word order so severe as to make speech virtually unintelligible.	Grammar and word order errors make comprehension difficult. Must often rephrase and/or restrict himself or herself to basic patterns.	Make frequent errors of grammar and word order that occasionally obscure meaning.	Occasionally make grammatical and/ or word order errors which do not obscure meaning.	Grammatical usage and word order approximate that of a native speaker.

Source: SOLOM is not commercially published. It may be copied, modified or adapted to local needs.

References

Alvarado, Dr. C. G. A. (2006). Best Practices in the Special Education Assessment of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Students. Retrieved online June 2011 at http://www.fasp.org/PDF_Files/Cultural_&_Linguistic_Diversity/BestPracticesCLD.pdf.

American Psychiatric Association (2000). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Text Revision (*4th Edition). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

Artilles, A. J., Ed; Ortiz, A. A., Ed. (2002). *English Language Learners with Special Education Needs:* *Identification, Assessment, and Instruction.* United States of America: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems Co., Inc.

British Columbia Ministry of Education, Skills and Training (1998). *ESL Learners with Special Needs In British Columbia: Identification, Assessment, and Programmin*g.

British Columbia Teacher's Federation (2003). *Identification, Assessment, and Programming for ESL Learners with Special/Additional Needs*.

Burnette, J. (2000). Assessment of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students for Special Education Eligibility. Council of Exceptional Children, Dec 2000. ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education (ERIC EC)

Colorado Department of Education (1999). *Special Education for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Students: Meeting the Challenges, Realizing the Opportunities.*

Cummins, J. (1984*) Bilingualism and Special Education: Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy.* Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Department of Education, Newfoundland and Labrador (2010). *Meeting the Needs of Students from Diverse Cultures.*

Department of Education, Newfoundland and Labrador (2011). *Guidelines for the Delivery of ESL Services in the Intermediate School.*

Department of Education, Newfoundland and Labrador (2011). *Guidelines for the Delivery of ESL Services K-6.*

English Language Learners School–Based Considerations Prior to Referral for Psychological Assessment (2011). Prepared by ESL/ELD Resource Group of Ontario (ERGO). Retrieved online at http://216.187.93.167/downloadables/June2011ELLspecEdconsiderations.pdf

Figueroa, R. A. (2002) Toward a New Model of Assessment. In A.J. Artiles & A. A. Ortiz (Eds.), *English Language Learners with Special Needs (pp. 51-64)*. Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington.

Flanagan, D. P., Alfonso, V. C. (2011). *Essentials of Specific Learning Disability Identification.* Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Flanagan, D. P., Ortiz, S.O., Alfonso, V. C. (2007). *Essentials of Cross-Battery Assessment Second Edition.* New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Garcia, G. M. (2010). *Best Practices in the Assessment of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. Phoenix, Arizona: Arizona Association of School Psychologists

García, Shernaz B. and Tyler, Brenda-Jean (2010). Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners With Learning Disabilities in the General Curriculum. *Theory Into Practice*. 49: 2, 113-120.

Klotz, M. B. & Canter, A. (2006). *Culturally Competent Assessment and Consultation*. Retrieved online June 2011 at *http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/culturally%20competent%20assessment%20and%20consultation%20nassp.pdf*

Litt, S. Learning Disability or Language development Issue? Retrieved online, June 2011 at www.everythingesl.net/special_education.php.

McCarney, S. B. and Wunderlich, K.C. (2006). *Pre-Referral Intervention Manual: Third Edition.* Columbia, MO: Hawthorne Educational Services, Inc.

New Strategies to Help Diverse students Succeed (2011). Council for Exceptional Children.

Oregan Department of Education (2001). *Special Education Assessment Process for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*.

Ortiz, A. A. and Yates, J. R. (2002). Considerations in the Assessments of English language Learners Referred to Special Education. In A.J. Artiles & A. A. Ortiz (Eds.), *English Language Learners with Special Needs (pp. 65-86)*. Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington.

Ortiz, S. O. (2004). Comprehensive Assessment of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students: A Systematic, Practical Approach for Nondiscriminatory Assessment. Retrieved online July, 2011 at http://www.nasponline.org/resources/culturalcompetence/ortiz.pdf.

Pryor, C. B. (2001). New Immigrants and Refugees in American Schools: Multiple Voices. *Childhood Education.* 77/5, 275-83.

Rhodes, R. L., Ochoa, S. H. and Ortiz, S. O. (2005). *Assessing Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students: A Practical Guide.* New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Rowe, J. (2010). Dealing with Psychiatric Disabilities in Schools: A Description of Symptoms and Coping Strategies for Dealing with Them. *Preventing School Failure*. 54/3, 190-198.

Sattler, J. M. (2006). *Assessment of Children Behavioral, Social, and Clinical Foundations: Fifth Edition.* La Mesa, California: Jerome M. Sattler, Publisher. Inc.

Sattler, J. M. (2008). *Assessment of Children Cognitive Foundations: Fifth Edition.* La Mesa, California: Jerome M. Sattler, Publisher. Inc.

Toronto District School Board (2007). *Guidelines for Psychological Assessment of English Language Learners.*

West Virginia Board of Education (2007-2008). *The Identification and Evaluation of Exceptionalities in Students with Limited English Proficiency.*

Williams, R. (2007). The psychosocial consequences for children of mass violence, terrorism and disasters. *International Review of Psychiatry.*