



SUPPORTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

with Possible Special Education Needs

WHO ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS?

English language learners are students in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario’s schools, and who may require focussed educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English. These students may be Canadian born or recently arrived from other countries. They come from diverse backgrounds and school experiences, and have a wide variety of strengths and needs.

(Supporting English Language Learners in Grades 1-8)



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ELLs with Special Education Needs

School boards will develop a protocol for identifying English language learners who may also have special education needs.

Where Special Education needs have been identified, either in the initial assessment or through later assessments, students are eligible for ESL or ELD services and special education services simultaneously.

(English Language Learners/ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2007, 2.3.3 and 2.3.4 Support Material)

Some ELLs have Special Education needs. They are as likely as any other student to be intellectually gifted, to have a learning disability or a behavioural disorder, or even to have multiple exceptionalities.

Students should not be assessed as having learning disabilities on the basis of performance or behaviours that reflect a process of language acquisition or acculturation, or a lack of prior opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills being tested.

Many countries around the world have identification and support protocols in place that closely parallel those of Ontario. Others do not. As a result, not all students who have Special Education needs will come with documents similar to psychological assessment reports and/or IEPs, and even if they do, families may not understand when or how to share these with the school.

Ongoing consultation with parents and other school staff including, where available, the ESL or

ELD teacher, the Special Education teacher, and the Guidance counsellor, needs to be established as supports for learning are being considered.

The same behaviours in one student may have a different cause than for another. This is especially true in the case of ELLs. Strong similarities of surface behaviours may lead teachers to make incorrect assumptions about their learners. The first step is a careful observation, over time, of what the ELL can do in a variety of classroom activities and settings. Conclusions must be cautiously drawn to avoid inaccurate labelling of the causes of the behaviours observed in the classroom (see Observable Behaviour chart on page 3).

Traditional normed tests, including some psycho-educational assessments, should be used with discretion. They may not garner accurate results since other factors like the familiarity with the vocabulary of the test or culturally specific content could interfere with a student's ability to answer correctly. The valuable feedback from all staff who have worked with the student will assist the IPRC committee in its determination about the Special Education needs of the ELL.

The development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for an English language learner needs to take into consideration both the needs related to language learning and the needs related to the student's exceptionality. However, an IEP is a document to support the Special Education needs that exist for the student. It is not a document to describe strategies for the development of English language proficiency. A delicate interplay of Special Education and ESL or ELD supports will provide the structure and scaffolds necessary for the acquisition of English.

ELL= English Language Learner (student)

ESL= English as a Second Language (program)

ELD= English Literacy Development (program)



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

Chart Credit: *Else Hamayan, Barbara Marler, Cristina Sanchez-Lopez, and Jack Damico. Special Education Considerations for English Language Learners: Delivering a Continuum of Services. Caslon Publishing, 2007. p. 40.*

(Source: *Supporting English Language Learners in Grades 1-8, pp. 43-46*)

Flowchart: Overview of the ELL Review Process

STEP 1 GETTING TO KNOW YOUR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER

- Welcome and Orientation
- Conduct intake interview with parents/guardians to begin building a student progress file (see Appendix A) (provide a trained interpreter if possible)
- ESL/ELD teacher conducts an initial assessment of English proficiency and math (e.g., STEP)
- Determine appropriate programming (e.g., ESL class, ESL support, ELD support) (see p.37 in Supporting English Language Learners in Grades 1-8)
- Teacher identifies appropriate modifications and/or accommodations to support the language needs of the ELL in the mainstream classroom
- Record all modifications in Appendix B
- Teacher tracks academic progress and cultural adjustment of the student (e.g., STEP continua, portfolio, observations, conversations, etc.)

STOP AND MONITOR

STEP 2

TEACHER NOTICES THAT THE ELL IS STRUGGLING – GATHER ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Review student progress file (see Appendix A and B)
- Collaborate with the student's other teachers to consider the ELL's academic progress, cultural adjustment and learning skills
- Share evidence and observations with the school-based LRT/LRC (e.g., describe the specific learning needs)
- Consider the Observable Behaviour chart on page 3
- Conduct an informal conversation with parents/guardians to share observations and ask for more input about the child including first language development and any communication difficulties, developmental/medical history, past school achievement, and home routines and behaviour (see Appendix C)
- Teacher, working with the LRT/LRC, determines learning goal(s), and adjusts practice to accommodate the learning need(s) of the student
- Track progress and gather qualitative and quantitative evidence to determine if the learning goal(s) is/are being met (add to student progress file)

STOP AND MONITOR

If the ELL is progressing well, continue ongoing monitoring of learning;

If the ELL continues to struggle, continue to Step 3.

REFERRAL TO STUDENT SUCCESS TEAM

- Present student's name at an SST meeting
- Group reviews evidence collected during monitoring period (e.g., portfolio, observations, student progress file, parental feedback)
 - If the ELL's learning need is observed only in English language contexts then the need is most likely related to the process of language acquisition
 - If the ELL's learning need is observed in the home language, and in all settings, then possible special education causes may be considered
- Group reflects on evidence to determine a possible special education need
- Group determines new learning goal(s), develops an individualized support plan, suggests program modifications and/or accommodations, and continues data collection (see Appendix D)

STEP 3

STOP AND MONITOR

STEP 4

SST REVIEWS PROGRESS

- Review student progress file and data collected during monitoring period (e.g., student work samples, observations, conversations)
- Evaluate efficacy of modifications, accommodations and/or other individualized supports
- Determine a next step option for the ELL
- Communicate with parents/guardians

STOP AND MONITOR

STEP 5

REFERRAL TO OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUPPORT TEAM

- Conference with administration and parents/guardians regarding possible referral
- Forward student progress file, medical and physical considerations and school observations to Out-of-School Support Team
- Additional classroom-based strategies and supports may be suggested, tracked and monitored
- Formal psychological academic testing may be considered

If the ELL is progressing well, continue ongoing monitoring of learning and set NEW learning goal(s), or

If the ELL is not progressing well, adjust the individualized supports as necessary and monitor progress, or

If the ELL is not progressing well, continue to Step Five (ONLY AFTER SEVERAL REVIEW LOOPS).

Program Adaptations: Modifications and Accommodations

When curriculum expectations are modified in order to meet the language-learning needs of English language learners, assessment and evaluation will be based on the documented modified expectations. This will be noted on the Elementary Progress Report Cards and the elementary and secondary provincial report cards, and will be explained to parents. Teachers, in collaboration with their principals, will determine the most effective way to document the modification of curriculum expectations for English language learners (see *Appendix B for a sample tracking tool*).

Teachers will check the ESL/ELD box on the progress report cards and the provincial report cards to indicate that modifications have been made to curriculum expectations to address the language learning needs of English language learners.

The ESL/ELD box should NOT be checked to indicate:

- ➔ **that the student is participating in ESL or ELD programs or courses; or**
- ➔ **that accommodations have been provided to enable the student to demonstrate his or her learning (e.g., extra time to complete assignments, access to a bilingual dictionary, opportunities to work in the student's first language).**

If information from the student's home country, from initial assessment, or from early teacher observation indicates that the student may have special education needs, the student will be referred to the appropriate school team (*Growing Success, 2010 p. 76*).

A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

To ensure that assessment, evaluation, and reporting are valid and reliable, and that they lead to the improvement of learning for all students, teachers use practices and procedures that:

support all students, including those with special education needs, those who are learning the language of instruction (English or French), and those who are First Nation, Métis, or Inuit.

(*Growing Success, 2010, p. 6*)

Differentiating Instruction for ELLs

Teachers must adapt the instructional program in order to facilitate the success of English language learners in their classrooms.

APPROPRIATE ADAPTATIONS TO THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM INCLUDE:

- modification of some or all of the subject expectations so that they are challenging but attainable for the learner at his or her present level of English proficiency, given the necessary support from the teacher;
- use of a variety of instructional strategies (e.g., extensive use of visual cues, graphic organizers, scaffolding; previewing of textbooks, pre-teaching of key vocabulary; peer tutoring);
- strategic use of students' first languages;
- use of a variety of learning resources (e.g., visual material, simplified text, bilingual dictionaries, and materials that reflect cultural diversity);
- use of assessment accommodations (e.g., granting of extra time, oral interviews, demonstrations or visual representations, tasks requiring completion of graphic organizers or cloze sentences instead of essay questions and other assessment tasks that depend heavily on proficiency in English).

While the degree of program adaptation required will decrease over time, English language learners continue to need some level of program support in order to experience school success.

The teacher needs to adapt the program for ELLs as they acquire English proficiency. For English language learners, in the early stages of language acquisition, the teacher needs to modify the curriculum expectations, in some or all curriculum areas. Most ELLs require accommodations for an extended period, long after they have achieved proficiency in Everyday English.

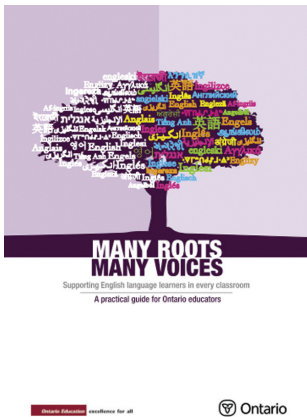
(*Supporting English Language Learners, 1-8, p.50*)

- * **English as a Second Language (ESL)** programs are for students born in Canada or newcomers whose first language is other than English or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools.
- * **English Literacy Development (ELD)** programs are for a newcomer whose first language is other than English or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools. Students in these programs are generally from countries in which their access to education has been limited, or where they may have had limited opportunities to develop language and literacy skills in any language. They arrive in Ontario schools with significant gaps in their education. Some Aboriginal students from remote communities may also have had limited opportunities for formal schooling, and they also may benefit from ELD instruction.
- * **Accommodations:** Strategies and provisions provided by the teacher to enable students to meet the curriculum expectations. When a student's program is accommodated, the provincial curriculum expectations are not altered.
- * **Modifications:** Changes to the curriculum expectations.
- * **Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS):** Face-to-face language skills used in everyday communication – listening, speaking, carrying on basic conversations, and getting one's basic needs met. Typically, English language learners acquire basic interpersonal communication skills before they develop proficiency in more complex, academic language.
- * **Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP):** Language proficiency associated with schooling and the abstract language abilities required for academic work. A more complex, conceptual, linguistic ability than conversational language, CALP includes facility in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. English language learners need at least five years to develop cognitive academic language proficiency in English.
- * **Comprehensible Input:** Language that is made comprehensible to the learner through the use of visual aids, familiar content, rephrasing, repetition, and other means.
- * **Culture Shock and the Adjustment Process:** Immigration is an experience that some psychologists compare to bereavement. Even for newcomers who arrive as part of a planned, voluntary process, immigration is a significant dislocation. For those who leave their countries as a result of war or another crisis, the experience can be highly traumatic.
- No matter what the circumstances, newcomers of all ages tend to go through a predictable sequence of stages in adjusting to their new circumstances. (*For more information about these stages, see Many Roots, Many Voices page 39*)
- * **Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC):** A committee that decides whether or not a child should be identified as exceptional, identifies the areas of a student's exceptionality according to the categories and definitions of exceptionalities provided by the ministry, decides an appropriate placement for a student, and reviews the identification and placement at least once in each school year.
- * **Individual Education Plan (IEP):** A written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, including a record of the particular accommodations needed to help the student achieve his or her learning expectations. An IEP must be developed for a student who has been identified as exceptional by an IPRC, and may also be developed for a student who has special education needs but has not been identified as exceptional. An IEP is a working document that identifies learning expectations that may be modified from or alternative to the expectations given in the curriculum policy document for the appropriate grade and subject or course. It outlines the specific knowledge and skills to be assessed and evaluated for the purpose of reporting student achievement.
- * **Inclusive Education:** Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and individuals are respected.
- * **Silent Period:** Many English language learners – especially young students – go through an initial silent period. They may say very little, and what they do say may consist of well-established, comfortable English phrases. This period may last for several weeks or months. Keep in mind that, during this period, ELLs are absorbing language at a rapid rate.
- * **STEP:** Steps To English Proficiency is a framework for assessing and monitoring the language acquisition and literacy development of English language learners across the Ontario curriculum. ESL/ELD and classroom teachers can use the STEP continua to assess and record evidence of students' progress gathered through day-to-day classroom learning experiences. Information from STEP, gathered over time and in various learning contexts, will be useful for administrators, teachers, students, and parents in supporting teaching and learning.

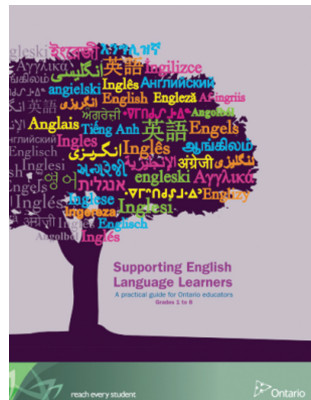
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- * *Supporting English Language Learners: A practical guide for Ontario educators, grades 1-8, 2008*
- * *Many Roots, Many Voices: Supporting English Language Learners in Every Classroom. A Practical Guide for Ontario Educators, 2005*
- * *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools, grades 1-12, 2010*

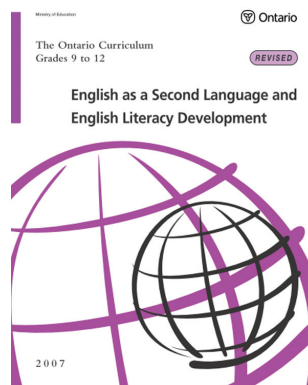
Resources



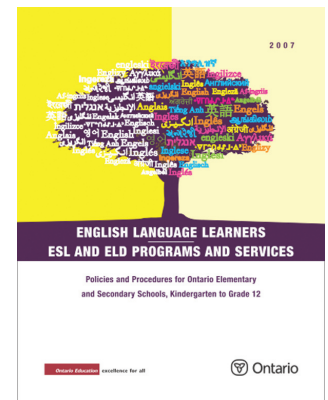
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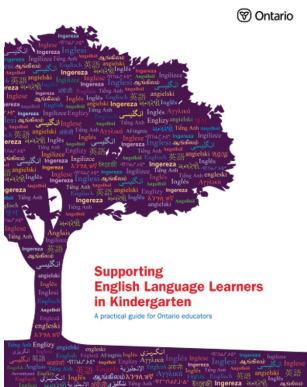
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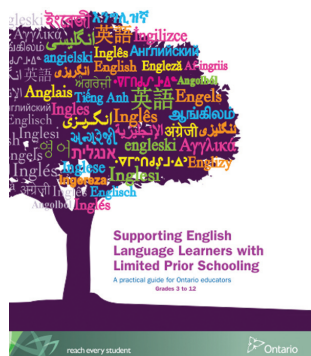
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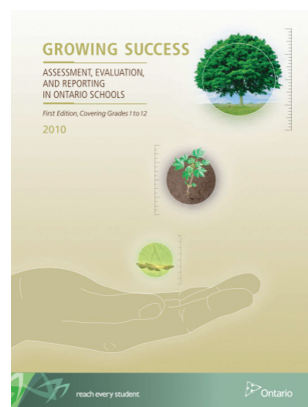
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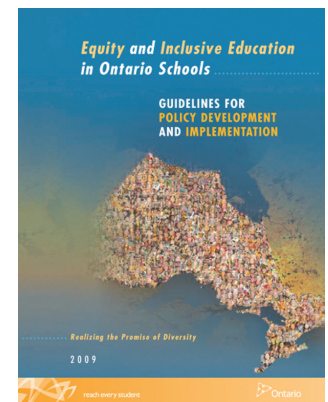
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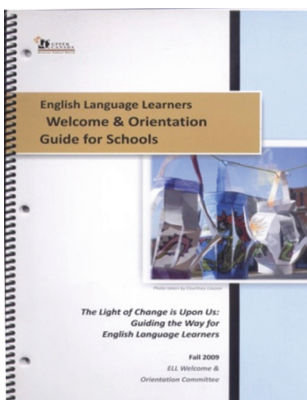
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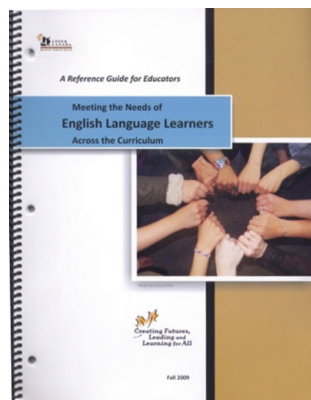
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