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Specific Learning Disability Assessment of English Language Learners: An Investigation of the Current Assessment Practices of Utah School Psychologists

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ABSTRACT

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The landscape of education and the students served in schools has changed over the last few decades and is becoming more diverse (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Methods of special education evaluation in schools are also changing to meet the needs of a dynamic population. Best practices for specific learning disability (SLD) identification recommend the use of effective evaluation methods that inform educational decisions. Many models of SLD identification have been proposed throughout the history of SLD classification. Though many school psychologists have relied on the discrepancy model of learning disability identification, many alternative evaluation methods are coming into popularity.

Best practices for SLD identification are changing to meet the needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse student population. Experts in administering culturally appropriate assessments for English language learners (ELLs) recommend that the areas of culture, language, and schooling be examined in order to ensure a valid and fair evaluation for this population (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). This study specifically examined current assessment practices of Utah school psychologists when assessing ELLs for learning disabilities by examining the most essential components of language proficiency, acculturation, academic skills, and intellectual functioning. This study additionally examined the barriers and recommendations of school psychologists when assessing ELLs.

A sample of 84 Utah school psychologists completed a survey about assessment practices as part of assessing an ELL for a suspected SLD. Findings from this study indicate school psychologists' responses align with the guiding principles that surround the assessment of ELLs. Participants indicated the importance of standardized measurements when assessing all areas except acculturation. Additionally, participants identified time, lack of resources, incomplete assessment instruments, and limited training and competency as major barriers for professionals working with ELLs. Results from this study can be used to inform and improve practice based on the respondents' recommendations, which included more resources allocated to acculturation assessment and more training from school districts and university training programs in the areas of ELL assessment.

Keywords: specific learning disability, assessment, school psychologist, English language learner

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I dedicate this work to my angel children Jaina, Grant, and Henry. Although I can't see them, I hope they see me and that I have made them proud.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The landscape of the American student body population has changed drastically in the last few decades and is consequentially more diverse than in years past (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Diversity in schools can come in many forms, including race, ethnicity, language, religion or ability. It is estimated that by the year 2030, 40% of the school population will speak English as a second language (U.S. Department of Education & the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2003) and that by the year 2044, minorities will represent more than 50% of the student population (NCES, 2014). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016a), in the 2014-2015 school year 9.4% of public school students participated in programs for English language learners (ELLs). This percentage has been increasing steadily over the past years (NCES, 2012). As a result, school psychologists in today's educational environment are required to juggle the demands of implementing best practices for service delivery while also meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

Understanding and meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students in a variety of educational settings (e.g., general education, special education) is a primary skill for school psychologists. In recent years, research has examined ELL-related issues in an attempt to help educators understand the issues facing this diverse population (Albers, Hoffman & Lundahl, 2009). Historically, school psychologists have been key professionals in determining eligibility for special education services (Merrell, Ervin, & Peacock, 2011; Reschly &Ysseldyke, 2002), and research has begun to examine psychological assessment practices for ELLs in an attempt to

improve assessment practices for culturally and linguistically diverse students and assist school psychologists in using best practice (Ochoa, Riccio, Jimenez, De Alba, & Sines, 2004).

Students with diverse backgrounds, such as ELLs, have frequently been over represented in special education settings (Ford, 2012), suggesting that our assessment methods could be improved to better identify those ELL students who have a specific learning disability (SLD). This research seeks to understand how school psychologists are currently identifying ELLs who are suspected of having an SLD, offers ideas for overcoming barriers to assessment, and suggests improvements for future assessment approaches.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Special education services in the United States educational system have a long and arduous history. Before the 1970s, students with disabilities were not educated in public schools but were instead educated in separate settings, such as private homes and institutions (Crockett, 1999). In 1975, as a result of legislation and case law, students with disabilities were allowed to be educated with their peers. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has remarked on the importance of this legislation by saying, "Since the 1960s, federal legislation has focused on educating children with disabilities, providing grants to improve education and services for the children and their families" (ED & the Institute of Education Sciences, 2010, p. 1). One piece of legislation, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), enacted in 1975, requires that schools accepting federal funds provide equal access to education, especially for those with physical and mental disabilities (Keogh, 2007). This major piece of legislation has been revised multiple times and has recently been renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Today IDEA constitutes the main body of special education law used by school psychologists and educators in the United States. When implemented, this act helps direct the practice of educational professionals when working with students with disabilities.

The following principles of IDEA provide guidance to schools when working with students with disabilities: (a) free and appropriate education, (b) least restrictive environment, and (c) individualized education program. Free and appropriate education (FAPE) is a key aspect of IDEA and refers to a student's right to be offered an education, free of charge, designed to meet the needs of the student (IDEA, 2004). Students with disabilities often have needs

beyond those of a regular education students and FAPE requires that additional resources be available to meet those needs. Least restrictive environment (LRE) is mandated as part of IDEA to prevent students with disabilities from being educated separately from typical peers. LRE is explained in the following way:

> To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions, or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (sec 1412(5)(B), 1975)

An individualized education program (IEP) is a road map of special education services to be offered to the student with a disability. The IEP is determined by a team of professionals, which includes the administrator, general education teacher, special education teacher, school psychologist, parent of the student, and often the student (IDEA, 2004). These main IDEA principles aid school psychologists in helping schools offer services to students to enable them to succeed academically, socially, behaviorally and emotionally (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010).

Special Education Services

Special education services seek to meet the individual needs of children with disabilities in educational settings and offer supports to students who have an educational disability, which impacts the students' access to the general education curriculum. A student who struggles in the classroom does not necessarily qualify for special education services. A student must be

identified as a student having a disability through methods of referral, assessment, and placement before services can be received. Students who are identified with a disability under IDEA are classified into one of thirteen categories and can be offered services through IDEA legislation. These categories are autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment, including blindness (IDEA, 2004).

Once identified, special education services are offered in a variety of environments and on a continuum of intensity. The ED has described these services as being "education in regular classes, education in regular classes with the use of related aids and services, or special education and related services in separate classrooms for all or portions of the school day" (ED & Office of Civil Rights, 2010, How Is An Appropriate Education Defined, para. 1). Services can be administered in various settings such as classrooms, homes, and private and/or public institutions. Related services, including speech therapy, occupational and physical therapy, psychological counseling, and medical services, may also be offered. School psychologists administer related services to students in special education and general education, and also work with other professionals to ensure that all students receive the services appropriate for their individual circumstances (NASP, 2010a).

Special Education Demographics

According to the ED (2016a, b), in the 2015-2016 school year, the number of school age children (3 to 21 years old) served under IDEA was 6.7 million, or 13.2% of the total student enrollment. In Utah, the number of students served under IDEA is approximately 80,000 or

12.4% of the total school enrollment (ED, 2016a, b). These numbers show there is a significant need for professionals to meet the needs of this growing population of special education students.

Students identified with an SLD represent the largest population requiring services under IDEA. In the 2014-2015 school year, approximately 35% of the students served under IDEA were classified under SLD, with approximately 2.3 million children being served nationwide (NCES, 2017). Because of the high number of students with an SLD in the educational environment, school psychologists need to understand SLD and its implications for identification and instruction. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has said, regarding the large proportion of students identified with SLD, "Identification of children with learning disabilities is a topic of paramount importance to school psychologists" (Lichtenstein, 2014, p. 331). It becomes important for school psychologists to know how to effectively offer services to this population.

Specific Learning Disability Definitions

Both government and private organizations have developed definitions for SLD. In 1975, the EHA provided for services for students with specific learning disabilities but gave an unclear definition of SLD. As a result, in 1977, ED introduced "Additional Procedures for Evaluating Children with Specific Learning Disabilities" and added the areas in which SLD could occur, including oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skill, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, or mathematic reasoning (Ahearn, 2008). Definitions have become clearer since the establishment of this educational law, but the formal definition has not changed much in the four decades since the institution of the original (Kavale, Spaulding & Beam, 2009).

Currently, the federal definition of an SLD, as outlined in IDEA, is as follows:

(i) The term means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes

involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest

itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do

mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain

injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

(ii) The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual,

hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of

environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (34 C.F.R. § 300.7, 2004)

The state of Utah uses a similar definition for SLD. Utah adds to the federal definition by saying that an SLD also affects a student's educational performance (Utah State Board of Education, 2016). In addition, an SLD "does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; of intellectual disability; of emotional disturbance; or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage" (Utah State Board of Education, 2016, p. 46).

A definition of SLD has also been developed by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), a committee of representatives from organizations committed to the education and welfare of individuals with learning disabilities. NJCLD defines learning disabilities as follows:

Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders

manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking,

reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the

individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur

across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social

interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a

learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other

handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious

emotional disturbance), or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences,

insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or

influences. (NJCLD, 2010, p. 1)

In summary, the defining characteristics of an SLD include an impairment to a specific

area of psychological processing that affects a student's academic performance. Additionally, a

learning disability cannot be the result of extrinsic influences, such as inappropriate instruction

or limited English proficiency (Utah State Board of Education, 2016). These definitions provide

a beginning for understanding what constitutes learning disabilities, but identifying students with

learning disabilities remains a significant challenge.

Specific Learning Disability Assessment

Many models of SLD identification have been proposed throughout the history of SLD

classification. Today the most common model for identification has been the discrepancy model,

but models such as low-achievement, intra-individual differences, and the Response to

Intervention model (RTI) are also used for learning disability identification (Fletcher, Francis,

Morris, & Lyon, 2005). *Best Practices in School Psychology*, a NASP publication outlining the

recommended practices of school psychologists, states that multiple approaches can be elicited

from the federal definition of SLD, including ability-achievement discrepancy, intra-individual

differences, clinical judgment and RTI (Lichtenstein, 2014). According to the 2006 IDEA

regulations, state regulations "must not require the use of a severe discrepancy between

intellectual ability and achievement for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, [and] . . . must permit the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention; and . . . may permit the use of other alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability" (Ahearn, 2008, p. 10). Utah Special Education Rules dictate that determining eligibility for SLD can be achieved through discrepancy, RTI, or a combination of the two, and the use of other alternative research-based procedures (Utah State Board of Education, 2016).

   Discrepancy model. Prior to 2004, IDEA regulations for identifying SLD required a "severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability" (United States Office of Education, 1977, p. G1082). The discrepancy model considers the difference between a student's intellectual ability and academic achievement, typically through the use of standardized measures (Kavale, 2001). Statistical regressions and/or discrepancies are conducted in order to determine if the difference between ability and achievement is statistically significant. Students who show a significant discrepancy between these scores are said to have a learning disability. This model follows the philosophy that eligibility criteria are needed as a means of rationing limited resources (Lichtenstein, 2014). Researchers make arguments both for and against the discrepancy approach (Kavale, 2001; Moores-Abdool, Unzueta, Donet, & Bijlsma, 2008), often stating that this model can lead to overidentification of students from diverse backgrounds (Hale et al., 2010). The model has been criticized as being a wait-to-fail model where educators wait to see whether learning difficulties meet the criterion rather than implement preventive and remedial strategies. NASP has said, "Because IDEA 2004 no longer requires an ability-achievement discrepancy as a criterion for learning disabilities eligibility, attention has shifted to alternative methods" (Lichtenstein, 2014, p. 352).

Response to Intervention. Recently, many states have abandoned the discrepancy model and assess their students with learning difficulties through RTI. RTI involves offering quality instruction to students and collecting data to determine if they respond to research-based interventions. If they do not, then more intense interventions are used to help the student progress until it is determined that the level of intensity needed by the student matches the services offered by special education (Kavale, Kauffman, Bachmeier, & LeFever, 2008). This model follows the philosophy that system resources can be used effectively for all students (Lichtenstein, 2014). Researchers argue that the RTI approach is not sensitive enough to determine that the reason for not responding to interventions is indeed because of an SLD (Hale et al., 2010).

Intra-individual. Provisions for other methods of assessment were introduced in the 2006 IDEA regulations. Though specifics about these alternative approaches are not given, this option has been interpreted to mean an evaluation of a pattern of strengths and weaknesses within the individual. Proponents of a pattern of strengths and weaknesses model state that it most closely meets the requirements of determining whether a student has a deficit in the basic psychological processes (Hale et al., 2010), which is part of the definition of an SLD. NASP's Best Practices in Identification of Learning Disabilities calls these models the intra-individual approach, which "follows from the premise that certain patterns of strengths and weaknesses in a child's cognitive functioning are indicative of a 'disorder in basic psychological processes,' as per the definition of learning disabilities in federal law" (Lichtenstein, 2014, p. 340). This model follows the medical model and a philosophy that a diagnosis of a measurable intrinsic condition within the individual is needed (Lichtenstein, 2014). Researchers have proposed links between cognitive processing and academic skills, but data to support the use of these models is weak and

its exclusive use is discouraged (Lichtenstein, 2014). Three such models of intra-individual differences include concordance-discordance method (Hale, Wycoff, & Fiorello, 2011), discrepancy/consistency method (Naglieri, 2011) and CHC-based operational definition of specific learning disabilities (Flanagan, Alfonso, & Mascolo, 2011). All rely on the use of standardized measures of intellectual functioning and academic achievement and require "identification of specific academic and cognitive deficits, as well as average (or better) general ability or intelligence" (Flanagan, Fiorello, & Ortiz, 2010, p.742).

Discrepancy/Consistency method. First developed by Naglieri in 1999, the Discrepancy/Consistency method focuses on "evaluation of whether within-child variability is greater than expected, above and beyond the unreliability of the scores" (Flanagan et al., 2010, p. 741). The goal is to identify cognitive processing weaknesses in the individual that are consistent with his or her academic weaknesses, using the Planning, Attention, Simultaneous, and Successive (PASS) theory to explain intelligence.

Concordance/Discordance method. Introduced in 2004 by Hale and Fiorello, the Concordance/Discordance method, based in Cognitive Hypothesis Testing (CHT) theory, uses data from multiple sources (i.e., measures of intellectual and academic functioning) to determine the correlation between a student's cognitive and academic strengths and deficits (Flanagan et al, 2010). In this model, a learning disability is "marked by a nonsignificant difference between an achievement deficit and related cognitive deficit, as well as significant differences between those deficit areas and a cognitive strength" (Miciak et al., 2016, p. 899).

Cross-battery assessment. Cross-battery method, developed by Flanagan and colleagues in 2002 and based in Cattel-Horn-Carrol (CHC) theory, seeks to systematically identify strengths and weaknesses in cognitive and academic abilities and processes and to understand the

relationship between them. A learning disability in this method is "marked by specific academic and cognitive deficits in an otherwise normal cognitive profile" (Miciak et al., 2016, p. 899). Because of the use of standardized assessments in these intra-individual methods, cross battery approach was developed to ensure that gaps in intelligence batteries are identified and a broad range of cognitive processes are examined.

In summary, these methods rely on the use of standardized assessments of intelligence and academic skills to determine if the student's academic and cognitive deficits are related, by looking at intelligence as specific cognitive functions instead of intelligence as a whole. There is a variety of conflicting evidence available to confirm their usefulness in identifying students as having an SLD (McGill, Styck, Palomares, & Hass, 2016).

Individualized assessment. Regardless of the model of evaluation used, NASP recommends the following: "As per IDEA requirements, educational evaluations are designed on an individualized basis. There is no standard battery for determining the presence of an SLD" (Lichtenstein, 2014, p. 346). Tailoring an evaluation to the individual student is one of the hallmarks of school psychology evaluations. Valid and fair assessments should always be used when conducting evaluations. A valid and fair assessment is one in which the test measures what it intends to measure and is administered to those it was designed for. The American Psychological Association (APA) states that psychologists should use assessment instruments that have established validity and reliability for the individual being assessed (APA, 2010). Best practices for school psychological service delivery stipulate that assessment batteries be individualized to best meet the specific needs of each student, thus ensuring the use of effective assessments (Lichtenstein, 2014).

NASP recommends that, regardless of the model being used, school psychologists should conduct comprehensive evaluations (Lichtenstein, 2014). A comprehensive evaluation, in addition to determining if a student has a disability, examines the specific educational needs of that student. Thus, a comprehensive evaluation strives to gather information to not only identify a student with a disability but to make educational decisions to help the student access the general education curriculum.

Steps to an evaluation. There are many important steps to a comprehensive evaluation. An evaluation team is formed to make decisions and oversee the evaluation. In Utah, this team includes the student's regular education teacher or a teacher qualified to teach a student that is the same age as the referred student, the student's parent, the student (if applicable), and a person qualified to conduct examinations, such as the school psychologist or speech language pathologist (Utah State Board of Education, 2016). IDEA (2004) requires that an evaluation begin with a review of the existing data, parental consent, observations and information from parents and teachers. The evaluation team determines what additional data are needed to determine whether the child needs special education services. Additional data may be generated using intellectual, academic, behavioral, or social/emotional assessments. After data is collected, the evaluation team collaborates to determine special education eligibility. There are many factors that relate to a student's educational performance, and school psychologists must also rely on their professional judgment when making eligibility decisions. These steps provide a framework for school psychologists to reference when identifying students with an SLD.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

In 1996, the NCES found that about 16 million youths were of racial or ethnic groups other than white. Today, approximately 26 million students are of racial or ethnic groups other

than white (NCES, 2016b). The number of diverse students in the educational setting has increased in the past decades and this trend is continuing. It is predicted that by the year 2044, minorities will represent more than 50% of the total United States population (Colby & Ortman, 2014), and more than 50% of the student population (NCES, 2014). These statistics show that diverse students are becoming a greater proportion of the total student population. Assessment practices that have been used for white students in the past may not be effective for this new demographic of students, suggesting the need for improved practices for a more diverse student population.

Examining the demographics of the student population will help professionals better understand the need for updated practices. In 2016, the total student enrollment in the United States was 53.8 million, with approximately 52% White, 14% Black, 25% Hispanic, 5% Asian, <1% Pacific Islander, 1% American Indian/Alaska Native, with 4% two or more races (NCES, 2017). NCES projects that by 2024 the total enrollment of students will be 45.6% White, 14.9% Black, 29.2% Hispanic, 5.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.9% American Indian/Alaska Native, with 3.6% two or more races (NCES, 2016b). In the United States, the proportion of students of Black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander backgrounds are increasing in the student population.

Utah schools are experiencing increased diversity similar to the rest of the country. In the 2004-2005 school year, the total school enrollment in Utah schools was 495,682 students, with approximately 82.6% White, 1.2% Black, 11.5% Hispanic, 2.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.5% American Indian, and 0.3% Unknown race (Utah State Office of Education, 2005). In the 2014-2015 school year, the total school enrollment in Utah schools was 633,896 students, with approximately 75.5% White, 1.4% Black, 16.5% Hispanic, 3.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and

1.1% American Indian, and 2.4% reported more than one race (Utah State Office of Education, 2016). These statistics show that Black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander students are also increasing in the Utah student population.

As illustrated, racial and ethnic minority groups are projected to become a greater proportion of the student population than White students. Minority groups will become a significant proportion of the student body and educational professionals will need to understand how to support them in educational settings. School psychologists will be required to administer fair and valid assessments for this population, as well as be involved in pre-referral interventions, referral, and placement decisions. There are many complex issues that affect the referral and placement rates of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education, such as poverty, underachievement, disproportionate identification for disabilities, and linguistic and cultural differences (Echevarria, Powers, & Elliott, 2004). It becomes important to implement culturally responsive practices for this group of students (Chu & Flores, 2011). This study looks at the interplay between linguistic and cultural differences combined with learning disabilities, specifically with ELL students.

English Language Learners

ELLs have been defined as "individuals in an English-speaking environment whose native language is not English" (Halle, Hair, Wandner, McNamara, & Chien, 2012, p. 1). The federal definition of an ELL comes from the Improving America's School Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-382) and states that an ELL:

> has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing or understanding the English language
> and whose difficulties may deny such individual with opportunity to learn successfully in
> classrooms where the language of instruction is in English or to participate fully in our

society due to one or more of the following reasons:

was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other

than English and comes from an environment where a language other than

English is dominant;

is a Native American or Alaska Native or who is a native resident of the

Outlying Areas and comes from an environment where a language other than

English has had significant impact on such individual's level of English

language proficiency; or

is migratory and whose native language is a language other than English and

comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant.

(sec. 7501)

This group of linguistically diverse students has been referred to by terms including ELL,

Limited English Proficient (LEP), and English as a Second Language (ESL; Albers et al., 2009;

Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). This group of students is known by many names but all terms

denote that these students are not yet proficient in English. They may be immigrants who have

just arrived in the United States or native citizens who have not yet gained English language

proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and/or writing. In addition to language skills, ELLs

can also differ from their native peers in other areas. Blatchley and Lau (2010) said of ELLs,

"They often lag behind native English speakers in academic skills and may display differences in

behavior or social skills" (Blatchley & Lau, 2010, p. 1).

ELL students are the fastest growing group of students in the United States (Carjuzaa &

Ruff, 2016). The ELL student population has grown since the 1990-1991 school year by

approximately 105%, while the general school population has grown only 12% (Office of

English Language Acquisition, 2002; Roseberry-McKibbin & O'Hanlon, 2005). Consequently, the number of ELL students in the educational setting has dramatically increased, creating a great need for culturally responsive practices. Between 1980 and 2009, the number of students in the United States who spoke a language other than English at home rose from 10% to 21% (Aud et al., 2011). In Utah, 14.3% of citizens speak a language other than English at home. It is reported that ELLs in schools speak over 400 different languages (ED, 2008). The majority of ELL students speak Spanish as their primary language (Planty et al., 2009). In the United States, about 4.6 million, or 9.4% of, students today are considered ELLs (NCES, 2016b). Of the students in Utah, 6.3% are considered ELL (NCES, 2016b).

The growing number of ELL students in the United States has led to increased demand for teachers and educators who can effectively address the needs of these culturally and linguistically diverse students. School psychologists are also called upon to use effective assessment and placement processes in the identification of children with disabilities to address the needs of ELLs. Effective assessment practices help to ensure that students who would benefit from special education services and meet eligibility requirements are offered services. Many assessment and referral practices have not been effective for the ELL population and have lent themselves to the improper and disproportionate identification of ELLs with disabilities (Chu & Flores, 2011).

Disproportionate Identification of Minority Students

The disproportionate identification of minority students with disabilities has been a persistent problem in schools, especially among certain racial and/or ethnic groups (Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002; Echevarria et al., 2004; Ford, 2012; Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999). Disproportionality refers to "the extent to which membership in a given . . . group affects

the probability of being placed in a specific disability category" (Oswald et al., 1999, p. 198).

The issue of disproportionate representation among culturally and linguistically diverse students was first noted in 1968 (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Dunn, 1968). Researchers have suggested that disproportionality can be attributed to subjective definitions of SLD and inaccurate methods of referral, assessment, and classification (Shifrer, Muller, & Callahan, 2011). The EHA first established criteria to help combat disproportionate representation by introducing the concept of nondiscriminatory assessments. Nondiscriminatory assessment procedures seek to reduce or eliminate racial or cultural bias so as not to discriminate against racially and culturally diverse students (IDEA, 2004).

Of those ELLs served in schools, about 13.8% receive special education services in the United States, while ELLs comprise only 9.4% of the total student population (NCES, 2016b). The percentage of ELLs receiving special education services is higher than the percentage of ELLs in the total school population, thus representing a disproportionate percentage. Because of the growing number of minority students among the student population, the risk of disproportionate identification of learning disabilities is greater than ever. Ochoa, Pacheco, and Omark (1988) found that ELL students are disproportionately placed in classes for students with learning disabilities. Sullivan (2011) also found that ELLs are overrepresented in special education, especially in the categories of SLD and speech-language impairments (SLI). The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has found that American Indian or Alaska Native students were 1.8 times more likely and Hispanic students 1.1 times more likely to receive special education services for learning disabilities (OSEP, 2007).

Disproportionate identification becomes a problem when children and youths who would benefit from services are not offered those services or when those who do not require services

are identified with a disability. Students who are incorrectly identified or unidentified do not

have educational services that meet their learning needs (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). In order to

prevent disproportionate identification, IDEA has mandated that identification of learning

disabilities not be a result of cultural factors, environmental or economic disadvantage or limited

English proficiency (IDEA, 2004, 34 CFR 300.173). ED has also required states "to establish

policies to prevent inappropriate overidentification by race and ethnicity of children with

disabilities and to collect and examine data to determine whether significant disproportionality

on the basis of race and ethnicity exists in the state and districts" (ED, Institute of Education

Sciences, & NCES, 2010, p. 2). As IDEA (2004) states, "[SLD] does not include learning

problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental

retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage,

or limited English proficiency" (34 CFR 300.7, 2004). Thus, before an ELL can be considered

to have a learning disability, cultural and linguistic factors must be ruled out as the primary

reason for the disability. In addition, ELLs should not be determined eligible if cultural factors

are the determinant factor (Chu & Flores, 2011). As a result, appropriate evaluation procedures

for culturally and linguistically diverse students are needed to prevent disproportionate

representation of ELLs with SLD.

Challenges Associated with English Language Learners

Many factors contribute to the level of disproportionate identification among ELLs, and

many of those challenges relate to the process of identifying ELLs for SLD. The main challenge

of identifying an ELL for an SLD is determining if the student's academic difficulties are the

result of a language difference or a learning disability, or other educational disability.

Researchers have stated that determining whether an academic difficulty is a result of language

difference or learning disability can be a difficult task as many of the characteristics of language difference and disability overlap. The two groups share many of the same characteristics, such as problems with pronunciation and syntax or trouble understanding metaphors and similes (Case & Taylor, 2005). Abedi (2006) found that ELL students with lower English proficiency are likely to be misidentified as students with disabilities. The challenges in assessing ELLs may contribute to the disproportionate representation of ELLs in SLD (Chu & Flores, 2011).

Many of the assessments often used by school psychologists when identifying learning disabilities are language based and required a proficiency in the English language. ELLs, with or without an SLD, struggle with English language proficiency, bringing to question the validity of these measures. Researchers have concluded that with "overlapping symptoms and manifestations as well as inconsistent criteria, cultural, linguistic, and/or gender differences may be misinterpreted as symptoms of a learning disability" (Shifrer et al., 2011, p. 247).

Second language acquisition process, poor educational instruction, processing disorders, or attention problems also constitute barriers to the identification process (Klingner & Harry, 2006). Other barriers to identifying ELLs include the shortage of bilingual practitioners, English-only legislation, and the availability of language supports in schools (Sullivan, 2011). The lack of appropriate assessments for learning disability identification for ELL students contributes to the problem of disproportionate representation (Chu & Flores, 2011). These factors create barriers for school psychologists in administering fair and valid assessments for ELLs. Appropriate evaluation procedures are difficult to determine when assessing ELLs for learning disabilities; culturally appropriate practices and nondiscriminatory assessments are needed to parse apart the cultural differences from disability characteristics.

Nondiscriminatory assessment. In order to promote equity and justice in the assessment process, NASP's Best Practices in Nondiscriminatory Assessment provides a framework for assessment of cultural, racial, linguistic or other kinds of diverse students. It states that "the development of applied methods in assessment has not progressed adequately and has left school psychologists at a loss regarding the best way to approach evaluations of individuals from diverse backgrounds" (Ortiz, 2006, p. 661). Thus, a process was developed that seeks to evaluate students for disabilities in the least discriminatory manner possible. Ortiz states that "nondiscriminatory assessment is much more than considering which standardized tools should be used and which should not. There is no simple answer or prescription, and standardized tests represent only one element of concern with bias" (Ortiz, 2006, p. 662). Instead nondiscriminatory assessment should seek to ensure that exclusionary factors, such as low motivation, physical illness, anxiety, cultural or linguistic differences, are ruled out as the primary cause of learning problems. As noted, this becomes increasingly important for diverse students who exhibit cultural or linguistic characteristics that mirror symptoms of a learning disability. NASP states that a nondiscriminatory assessment framework should include the following: assess for the purpose of intervention, assess initially with authentic and alternative procedures, assess and evaluate the learning ecology, assess and evaluate language proficiency, assess and evaluate opportunity for learning, assess and evaluate educationally relevant cultural and linguistic factors, evaluate, revise, and retest hypotheses, determine the need for and language(s) of formal assessment, reduce bias in traditional testing procedures, and support conclusions via data convergence and multiple indicators (Ortiz, 2006).

Guiding Principles

The changing demographics and increasing number of ELLs in our country requires school psychologists to apply guiding principles when conducting assessments with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Bainter & Tollefson, 2003). Roseberry-McKibbin and O'Hanlon (2005) have found that administering nonbiased assessments for ELLs is a significant concern for all those working with these students. The responsibility of administering nondiscriminatory assessments in schools often falls to school psychologists. Guiding principles have been established by governments and organizations to help address the bias often found in the assessment process and help school psychologists offer effective services.

Best practices publications. NASP has established ethics and guiding principles for the profession of school psychology for many years. Today, those guidelines for offering services are found in *Best Practices in School Psychology,* which also includes best practice information for assessing students for learning disabilities (Lichtenstein, 2014). This publication offers evidence-based information to help school psychologists offer effective in-school services. NASP has also established guidelines for administering valid and fair assessments, found in Standard II.3.5 of the *Principles of Professional Ethics,* and states: "School psychologists conduct valid and fair assessments. They actively pursue knowledge of the student's disabilities and developmental, cultural, linguistic, and experiential background and then select, administer, and interpret assessment instruments and procedures in light of those characteristics" (NASP, 2010b, p. 7). Therefore, school psychologists have a responsibility to use valid and fair assessments when working with ELLs suspected of SLD.

Assessment practices. Guidelines and recommendations for practice have been established to encourage professionals to administer culturally appropriate assessments. As

discussed, to receive special education services students must be assessed and determined

eligible for services. When assessing ELL students for SLD eligibility, many areas must be

considered, including cultural factors, family and developmental history, and educational history.

ED has identified several factors that are especially relevant to ensure accuracy in assessments

and assist in the administration of valid and fair assessment for ELLs (ED, 2000). These factors,

which should be addressed in the assessment of ELLs, include language proficiency, cultural

issues, and schooling issues.

Language proficiency. Guiding principles for nondiscriminatory assessment states that

one of the first steps in the assessment process of ELLs should be evaluating language

proficiency (American Educational Research Association [AERA], APA, & National Council on

Measurement in Education, 2014). State guidelines for learning disability identification dictate

that the disparity in achievement and ability "are not primarily the result of . . . limited English

proficiency" (Utah State Board of Education, 2016, p. 48). This means that a student with

limited English proficiency can be considered to have a disability if the language issues are not

the primary reason for the disability. Therefore, English proficiency should be assessed before

the student is considered for SLD eligibility. Language proficiency should be assessed in both

the native language of the student and English to address this issue of proficiency (Chu & Flores,

2011). Rhodes, Ochoa, and Ortiz (2005) recommend that both formal and informal measures be

used when conducting language proficiency assessments. Formal measures, such as the Basic

Inventory of Natural Language (BINL) and the Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey (WMLS),

though helpful, may not provide a complete picture of the student's language proficiency.

Informal measures should also be used, including observations, questionnaires, rating scales,

storytelling, cloze techniques, and language samples (Rhodes et al., 2005).

Cultural issues. Culture has been described as a significant factor that affects an individual's behavior and performance; such is true with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Unfortunately, cultural differences can be misinterpreted as deficits (Rhodes et al., 2005). Acculturation is a type of culture change that occurs when an individual adapts to a new culture (Collier, 1998). Acculturation could also be described as an individual's process of becoming acculturated to the U.S. mainstream and goes beyond culture, race, and/or ethnicity (Rhodes et al., 2005). Acculturation is a multi-dimensional and dynamic process and has been of interest to many researchers (Berry, 2003; Conchas, Oseguera, & Vigil, 2012). The effects of acculturation can be misjudged as the presence of a disability. Some of these effects are withdrawal, distractibility, and code-switching (Collier, 1998). An important part of the assessment process for ELLs is assessing their level of acculturation (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2007).

It is recommended that acculturation be assessed through interviews, observations and formal acculturation assessment instruments and questionnaires. Questionnaires and scales are more efficient in measuring acculturation, but interviews and observations are also valuable. Acculturation instruments assess items such as language use/preference, social affiliation, cultural traditions, cultural identity/pride, and generational status (Rhodes et al., 2005). No scale exists to measure all of these domains, but examples of measures include Acculturation Attitudes Scale-Revised, Acculturative Stress Inventory for Children, Bidimensional Acculturation Scale for Hispanics, and Brief Acculturation Scale (Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2011; Wallace, Pomery, Latimer, Martinez, & Salovey, 2010). Research has suggested that bilingual school psychologists are more likely than monolingual school psychologists to assess acculturation (O'Bryon & Rogers, 2010). It is important for school psychologists or someone on the

assessment team to assess the cultural experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students to ensure that cultural differences are not being misinterpreted as an SLD.

Schooling issues. SLD assessment, for ELLs or non-ELLs, must addresses school issues during the assessment process. Low academic achievement is often the reason for a suspected learning disability, thus school issues are often the most obvious factor to investigate. Standardized intellectual assessments, such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-V; Wechsler, 2014), Woodcock Johnson Test of Cognitive Abilities (WJ-COG III; Schrank, McGrew, & Mather, 2014a), and Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (Roid, 2003), and academic assessments, such as the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT-III; Wechsler, 2009), Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement (WJ-ACH; Schrank et al. 2014b), and Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement (KTEA-3; Kaufman & Kaufman, 2014) are widely used in the field of psychoeducational evaluations. In addition, interviews, observations, and educational, developmental and medical histories are also recommended as part of a nondiscriminatory evaluation (Blatchley & Lau, 2010). It is also important to determine if the student has had adequate opportunity for appropriate instruction (IDEA, 2004) and to examine consistency of school attendance. Examining the areas of culture, language, and schooling help to ensure that a valid and fair evaluation is being done for ELLs and that the evaluation is in line with recommended practice (ED, 2000).

School Psychologist's Role

Working with culturally and linguistically diverse populations should be of major concern to school psychologists because of the many issues involved in working with this population. School psychologists today are required to evaluate ELLs for possible disabilities, including SLD. Therefore, they should have knowledge of best practices in assessing ELLs and

understand the strengths and limitations of formal and informal assessment measures. Depending on the training and experience of school psychologists, they can play a variety of roles, but the ultimate role of the school psychologist in the assessment of ELLs for SLD is to choose assessment practices that are most appropriate for the individual student.

Bilingual school psychologists. Research has found that the most acceptable method for evaluating ELLs is using bilingual school psychologists (Bainter & Tollefson, 2003). Bilingual school psychologists are able to administer assessments in the native language of the ELL student. Bilingual school psychologists usually also have knowledge of important issues for culturally and linguistically diverse students, including acculturation and language acquisition, above that of monolingual school psychologists (O'Bryon & Rogers, 2010). Bilingual school psychologists comprise about 14% of all school psychologists in the United States (Walcott, Charvat, McNamara, & Hyson, 2016).

It is often a challenge to consistently utilize bilingual school psychologists. The number of languages that students speak, access to foreign language instruments, and availability of bilingual practitioners each present barriers to best practice (Chu & Flores, 2011). In the United States, students speak more than 400 languages (ED, 2008). In Utah, students speak many languages, presenting a barrier to finding an appropriate bilingual school psychologist. Because of the scarcity of bilingual school psychologists, other professionals are often used, including interpreters and monolingual school psychologists (Gopaul-McNicol, 1997).

Interpreters. The use of interpreters when assessing ELLs has been a common practice because of the limited number of bilingual school psychologists (Fradd & Wilen, 1990; Rhodes et al., 2005). Interpreters convey information from one language to another (Rhodes et al., 2005). NASP states in Standard II.3.6 of the *Principles of Professional Ethics,* "interpreters

should be appropriately trained" (2010b, p. 7). School psychologists should use trained interpreters. When selecting an interpreter, a thorough process should be used. Researchers have suggested professionals should look for interpreters that are proficient in the language of the student, familiar with the culture, have knowledge of special education, interpersonal skills, and a willingness to remain unbiased and trustworthy (Plata, 1993). Researchers have found that using a trained interpreter can maximize the validity and reliability of assessment results (Leung, 1996). Though the use of interpreters is a recommended practice, it should be used with knowledge of the limitations and challenges of its use.

It is also important that school psychologists receive training in the use of interpreters. Ochoa and colleagues (2004) found that of those school psychologists who use interpreters, only 52% had received training about how to best work with interpreters. Training should include skills in establishing rapport with interpreters, understanding non-verbal communication cues, and recognizing the importance of accurate translation (Gopaul-McNicol, 1997).

Monolingual school psychologists. One of the challenges of assessing the culturally and linguistically diverse students is the lack of bilingual professionals. It becomes an opportunity for monolingual school psychologists to address the needs of the increasing number of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Researchers have recommended that monolingual school psychologists develop cultural competency in working with these students (Gopaul-McNicol, 1997). Gopaul-McNicol suggests that it is important that monolingual school psychologists be aware of their biases and values, and understand inter-racial issues and different cultural groups when seeking to work with ELLs.

Monolingual English-speaking school psychologists have been trained in administering formal assessment measures and, in some circumstances, those measures can be used in

assessing ELLs. Many formal instruments are not normed for ELL populations, so the results of these assessments should be interpreted with caution (Noland, 2009). Bainter and Tollefson (2003) suggest other possible practices when assessing language minority students, including the use of nonverbal tests and testing in English. Nonverbal assessments are designed to reduce the English language and cultural bias found in verbal assessments, but they do not eliminate it completely. Nonverbal tests are preferable when assessing linguistically diverse students (Rhodes et al., 2005). School psychologists may choose to use this method when the student has not developed language proficiency in either the native language or English. Assessments in English may be administered if the ELL has some proficiency in English. The results can be informative but are often under representative of the student's true abilities (Rhodes et al., 2005).

In summary, school psychologists have many factors to consider when assessing ELLs for SLD. They have the responsibility to choose and administer assessment practices that consider a student's developmental, cultural, linguistic, educational, and experiential background (NASP, 2010a) as well as their own level of training and expertise (NASP, 2010b).

Statement of Purpose

Given the increasing proportion of ELL students in American schools, school psychologists are increasingly required to assess learning disabilities among this population. Unfortunately, there are still questions about what the guiding principles are when serving these students. Nondiscriminatory assessment practices are necessary, as required by educational law, and crucial to best practice. Nevertheless, the challenge remains for school psychologists to discover and implement guiding principles in their work with ELLs. Though nondiscriminatory practices have been implemented, disproportionate representation in special education is still seen among ELLs. This study will examine the current practices of Utah school psychologists

when assessing ELLs for learning disabilities. The need for appropriate assessment practices for

ELLs is a growing concern for educators and families of ELLs. An investigation of the current

practices will help school psychologists understand where we are, so we can determine where we

need to be and how to get there.

Research Questions

1. What do Utah school psychologists indicate are the most essential components of

   assessing ELL students who are suspected of having an SLD?

2. What are the barriers to using best practices when assessing ELL students?

3. What are the recommendations to improve ELL assessment for students suspected

   of having SLD?

CHAPTER 3

Method

This study examined the current assessment practices of school psychologists in Utah when assessing ELLs for suspected learning disabilities. The assessment of ELLs for learning disabilities is a complex process, as described in the literature review and reflected in the survey questions. An examination of the current assessment practices of school psychologists will provide information about the alignment of current practices with best practices and also identify what supports are needed to ensure school psychologists provide culturally appropriate evaluations.

Participants

Credentialed and practicing school psychologists in Utah were recruited to participate in this study. The potential participants were identified from a list of Utah school psychologists obtained from the Utah State Office of Education (USOE). Their publicly available email addresses were obtained and used to invite potential participants to complete the survey. Surveys were emailed to 287 school psychologists in Utah. They were assured that their identity and responses would be kept confidential.

Of the 287 school psychologists sampled, 84 responded to the survey for a response rate of 29.2%. Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of the 84 respondents. The demographic characteristics of the sample appear to be similar to the estimated demographic characteristics of the field as identified by NASP (Walcott et al., 2016), which found 83% of the field to be female and 87% identified their ethnicity as White, and relatively similar representation among other ethnic groups.

Table 1

Demographics of Study's Participants (*N* = 84)

Descriptor	*n*	Percent of total sample
Male	32	38
Female	52	62
Native American/Alaskan Native	1	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	4	5
Black/African American	0	0
Hispanic American/Latino	6	7
White/Caucasian	73	87

Respondents from this survey were asked whether they spoke a language other than English: 35% reported that they did, while 65% reported they spoke only English. Of those who spoke a language other than English, 62% spoke Spanish, 17% spoke French, and 7% spoke Portuguese, with the remaining languages being less than 4% each. The respondents spoke 12 languages other than English, including Spanish, French, Thai, Portuguese, German, Romanian, Tagalog, Cantonese, Japanese, Dutch, Russian, and American Sign Language (ASL).

Respondents were asked in which setting(s) they worked, whether early intervention/preschool, elementary, middle school/junior high, and/or high school. The percentage sum is greater than 100%. Respondents could report working in more than one setting because many school psychologists work in more than one school. Of those settings, 87% worked in an elementary school setting, 46% in a middle school/junior high setting, 37% in

a high school setting, and 30% in an early intervention/preschool setting. On average, the

participants worked as school psychologists for 10 years (*SD* = 8), ranging from 1 to 38 years.

Materials

Materials for participation included an email recruiting script (Appendix A), consent

form describing instructions and confidentiality information (Appendix B), survey with

demographic section and questionnaire section (Appendix C), and information about a prize

drawing (Appendix D). The survey was composed of 29 questions. Seven of the questions were

demographic questions, three were Likert-scale questions, four were multiple choice, and 15

were open-ended questions. The survey was distributed through the Qualtrics survey platform.

The demographic questions asked about the participants' gender, race/ethnicity,

languages spoken and fluency, years as a school psychologist, and age groups served. The

Likert-scale questions addressed areas such as rating the use of assessments when assessing

ELLs, the comfort level of using approaches to SLD assessment, and rating the quality of

training in ELL assessment. The multiple-choice questions asked respondents to indicate who

was responsible for conducting language proficiency, acculturation, intellectual, and academic

skills assessments for ELL students. The open-ended questions asked participants about their

experience with four areas of the assessment of ELLs for a suspected SLD, namely language

proficiency, acculturation, intellectual, and academic skills. The survey asked what respondents

perceive as the most essential components of assessment, the obstacles to assessment, and the

recommendations to addressing obstacles to assessment.

Procedures

Because no existing measure was available to research the assessment practices of school

psychologists, a survey was created to address the research questions. A pilot survey was

developed to gather initial feedback. The pilot survey was administered to graduate students in

the BYU school psychology program, and faculty advisors provided guidance regarding the

survey development. The questions were adjusted as needed before releasing the survey to the

identified sample.

The University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the study methods and

procedures. A Qualtrics survey was distributed via email to school psychologists to determine

the practices that they use to assess ELLs for learning disabilities. A reminder email was sent

and the survey was sent a second time to those participants who had not returned the survey.

From the responding participants, two were selected at random to receive a $50 VISA gift card.

Once respondents completed the survey, results were downloaded from the Qualtrics

website, and Excel spreadsheets were used to organize the data. Open-ended responses were

examined and then separated into individual ideas (Astuti, n.d.).

Data Analysis

To answer the research questions, content analysis was used to analyze the responses to

the open-ended questions and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data from the other

questions. Content analysis aims to analyze text data and gain direct information from study

participants. Text data might be obtained from narrative responses, open-ended survey

questions, interviews, focus groups, observations or print media. The goal of content analysis is

"to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Hsieh & Shannon,

2005, p. 1278). The content analysis process started with downloading the responses from

Qualtrics to password protected spreadsheets. The responses were read, and the open-ended

responses that contained multiple ideas were separated so that each idea in the response would be

included in the data analysis. The primary author and her advisor then read the open-ended

responses and created categories for each open-ended question. Categories were driven by the data, and as a result categories differed between questions. Minor categories were then linked into major categories. The major categories were then defined, and inclusionary and exclusionary criteria were identified. Research assistants were trained to accurately code the responses and reliability checks were completed. Initially, the reliability checks did not exceed the 80% reliability standard; the primary author and her advisor revised and refined the categories and the inclusionary/exclusionary criteria. The responses were coded again and an 80% inter-rater reliability standard was met. Table 2 summarizes the inter-rater reliability that was met with each survey question. Once coded, descriptive statistics were calculated and reported as percentages, means, and/or standard deviations.

Table 2

Inter-rater Reliability for Qualitative Survey Questions

Survey Question	Inter-rater reliability %
8. In your experience, what are the 3-5 most essential components for accurately assessing ELL students for a suspected Specific Learning Disability?	88
14. What are the most essential components of assessing ELL students' language proficiency?	100
15. What are the most essential components of assessing ELL students' acculturation?	93
16. What are the most essential components of assessing ELL students' intellectual functioning?	91
17. What are the most essential components of assessing ELL students' academic skills?	93
18. What obstacles do you encounter in assessing language proficiency?	88
19. What obstacles do you encounter in assessing acculturation?	87
20. What obstacles do you encounter in assessing intellectual functioning?	92
21. What obstacles do you encounter in assessing academic skills?	80
22. What recommendations do you have to address the obstacles identified when assessing language proficiency?	83
23. What recommendations do you have to address the obstacles identified when assessing acculturation?	100
24. What recommendations do you have to address the obstacles identified when assessing intellectual functioning?	100
25. What recommendations do you have to address the obstacles identified when assessing academic skills?	87
27. What obstacles do you encounter in using the above-mentioned assessment approaches to Specific Learning Disability Assessment?	83
29. What are your suggestions for improving the assessment of ELLS in your school/district?	89

CHAPTER 4

Results

Guiding principles for administering culturally appropriate assessments for ELLs suggest that culture, language and schooling issues be examined in order to ensure a valid and fair evaluation for this population (ED, 2000). This research study seeks to address the following research questions: (a) What do Utah school psychologists indicate are the most essential components of assessing ELL students who are suspected of having an SLD? (b) What are the barriers to using best practices when assessing ELL students? and (c) What are the recommendations of school psychologists to improve ELL assessment for students suspected of having SLD? Each survey question asked respondents to share their experience in the areas of culture, language and schooling issues by examining language proficiency, academic skills, intellectual functioning and acculturation assessment practices.

Advancing the Practice of Assessing English Language Learners

Questions were asked to obtain important and pertinent information to advance the practice of school psychologists when assessing ELLs. The researchers believed it was important to understand who was responsible for conducting assessments, how often the assessment components were used, how comfortable they were with using various approaches to SLD identification and how they would rate their training in ELL assessment. In addition to asking about the essential components, participants' responses also explored the barriers to completing ELL assessments and recommendations for addressing these barriers.

Who is responsible for administering assessments? Using a multiple-choice format, respondents were asked who is responsible for administering assessments in their school settings. Participants were able to select more than one response so the percentage sum is greater than

100%. Table 3 summarizes the responsibilities of conducting the selected assessment areas.

According to the respondents, ELL specialists were primarily responsible for administering

language proficiency and acculturation measures. Additionally, special education teachers were

most often responsible for administering academic skills measures, and school psychologists

were most responsible for administering intellectual functioning measures.

Table 3

Participant Responses to Multiple Choice Items Related to Responsibility of Conducting Assessments

Assessment Area	Response Percentage and Frequency (N = 84)				
	SP	BSP	ST	ELL	Other
Language proficiency	27%	40%	25%	68%	27%
	(23)	(34)	(21)	(57)	(23)
Acculturation	45%	29%	12%	52%	19%
	(38)	(24)	(10)	(44)	(16)
Intellectual	90%	31%	8%	5%	6%
	(76)	(26)	(7)	(4)	(5)
Academic skills	26%	31%	88%	17%	15%
	(22)	(26)	(74)	(14)	13

Note. SP= school psychologist, BSP= bilingual school psychologist, ST = special education teacher, ELL =ELL specialist, and Other.

How often do you use the following assessments? Respondents were asked how often

they used the assessments of language proficiency, intellectual functioning, academic skills and

acculturation. Respondents rated these measures on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being never and 5

being always. Table 4 summarizes the frequency with which school psychologists use the

selected assessment areas. The most widely used assessment in assessing an ELL for a suspected

SLD, according to the respondents, were intellectual assessments and the least used were

acculturation measures.

Table 4

Participant Responses to Likert Items Related to Frequency of Use of Assessment

	Response Percentage and Frequency (N = 84)					
Assessment Area	N	R	S	O	A	Mean (SD)
Language proficiency	12% (10)	1% (1)	2% (2)	19% (16)	65% (55)	4.25 (1.33)
Acculturation	24% (20)	20% (17)	13% (11)	18% (15)	25% (21)	3 (1.54)
Intellectual	1% (1)	0% (0)	1% (1)	15% (13)	82% (69)	4.77 (0.59)
Academic skills	6% (5)	4% (3)	4% (3)	10% (8)	77% (65)	4.49 (1.12)

Note. N=Never, R=Rarely, S=Sometimes, O=Often, A=Always.

How comfortable are you with your knowledge of the following approaches of SLD assessment? While researching the current assessment practices of SLD evaluation, the researchers believed that it was important to examine various methods of SLD evaluation, as well as the components needed for an ELL assessment. Table 5 summarizes the perceptions of how comfortable respondents were in using various approaches of assessment. Respondents were notably more comfortable using the discrepancy model when conducting SLD assessments, than either the RTI or cross-battery approaches.

Table 5

Participant Responses to Likert Items Related to Comfort Level of Using Assessment Approaches

	Response Percentage and Frequency (N = 84)					
Assessment Approach	U	SU	N	SC	C	Mean (SD)
Discrepancy	1% (1)	0% (0)	2% (2)	6% (5)	90% (76)	4.85 (0.57)
Cross-Battery	8% (7)	19% (16)	15% (13)	30% (25)	39% (33)	3.85 (1.26)
Response to Intervention	1% (1)	5% (4)	7% (6)	37% (31)	50% (42)	4.3 (0.89)

Note. U=Uncomfortable, SU=Slightly Uncomfortable, N=Neutral, SC=Slightly Comfortable, C=Comfortable.

Rate your quality of training in ELL assessment. Respondents rated their training on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor quality and 5 being high quality. Table 6 summarizes the perceptions of the quality of their training in ELL assessment. Respondents believed that their overall ELL assessment skills training was of medium quality. School psychologists believed their training in working with interpreters was the least quality training.

Table 6

Participant Responses to Likert Items Related to Quality of Training in ELL Assessment

Ell Training Opportunities	Response Percentage and Frequency (N = 84)					
	PQ	SPQ	MQ	SHQ	HQ	Mean (SD)
Overall ELL assessment skills	7% (6)	11% (9)	35% (29)	25% (21)	23% (19)	3.45 (1.17)
Graduate training in working with ELLs	13% (11)	14% (12)	35% (29)	23% (19)	16% (13)	3.13 (1.23)
Post-graduate training in working with ELLs	13% (11)	17% (14)	37% (31)	12% (10)	21% (18)	3.12 (1.29)
Training in working with interpreters	17% (14)	17% (14)	31% (26)	23% (19)	13% (11)	2.99 (1.27)

Note. PQ=Poor Quality, SPQ=Somewhat Poor Quality, MQ=Medium Quality, SHQ=Somewhat High Quality, HQ=High Quality.

Research Question 1: Essential Components

The first research question in this study was stated in the following way: *What do Utah school psychologists indicate are the most essential components of assessing ELL students who are suspected of having an SLD?* The following information was gleaned from this study's data and provides the information to address the first research question.

Responses to this open-ended question identified the current assessment practices used by school psychologists. Further questions were asked to determine the most essential components when assessing language proficiency, academic skills, intellectual function, and acculturation. Respondents' responses were grouped into the following themes: language proficiency assessment, educational history, academic skills assessment, student and family background, non-academic assessment, assessment process variables, and current instructional practices. Table 7 summarizes the findings. Respondents indicated that language proficiency assessment was the most essential component of psychoeducational assessment for ELLs. Respondents also

indicated that assessment process variables, such as factors that influence the decisions of the practitioner about what test to use, how to administer the test, how to interpret data, or best practices in the administration of an evaluation with an ELL student, are an essential component in the assessment of ELLs.

Table 7

Participant Responses to Essential Components of Overall ELL Assessments

Essential Components	Operational Definitions	Response Percentage and Frequency (n = 333)
Language proficiency	Formal or informal measures to determine how proficient a student is with language, including native and/or English language	28% (94)
Academic skills assessment	Classroom, school, and district data to determine a student's current academic functioning and using formal and standardized measures to determine normed academic functioning	11% (37)
Non-academic assessment	Standardized measure that measure things other than academics, such as cognitive ability, adaptive ability, behavioral level of functioning, adaptive level of functioning, etc.	8% (28)
Education history	Obtaining information about the student's experience with schooling, formal education and instruction, including information obtained from past and current schools	8% (28)
Student and family background	Obtaining information about the student's personal and family background, including personal information such as developmental history or medical conditions and family information such as relationships, living situations or family history	17% (57)
Current instructional practices	Things that teachers do with the student at the present time or techniques that would be implemented in the classroom for the ELL student's benefit	4% (13)
Assessment process variables	Factors that would influence the decisions of the practitioner about what test to use, how to administer the test, how to interpret data, background knowledge that is needed to interpret the data or best practices in the administration of an evaluation with an ELL student	23% (75)

Note. n equals the number of responses to the question.

Language proficiency assessment practices. When asked what the most essential

components of language proficiency assessment were, more than 54% of the responses stated

that using formal and informal measures of language proficiency was essential to the assessment

process. Language proficiency means using formal or informal measures to determine how

proficient a student is with language, including native language and/or English language, and

what experience the student has with language. Examples of responses include determining

Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language

Proficiency (CALP) in the second language, or using Utah Academic Language Proficiency

Assessment (UALPA) scores which assess proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and

writing, and administering the Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey (WMLS III, Woodcock,

Alvarado, Ruef, & Schrank, 2010).

Approximately 24% of the responses referred to variables that could influence the

assessment process. Assessment process variables means factors that would influence the

decisions of the practitioner about what test to use, how to administer the test, how to interpret

data or best practices in the administration of an evaluation with an ELL student. Examples of

variables mentioned in the responses included "understanding dialects and speech patterns" or

"using native speakers to administer the assessment in the student's native language."

Acculturation assessment practices. When participants were asked the most essential

components of acculturation assessment, approximately 26% of the responses indicated that the

essential components included student and family background, which included obtaining

information about the student's developmental history, medical concerns, and family background

to identify current living situations, etc. Examples of responses from participants included

"structured developmental history," "family background," and "number of years in the United States."

Approximately 16% of the responses related to community and cultural factors. Community and cultural factors means factors that relate to a student or their family's exposure, access or involvement in the community in which they currently live or have previously lived, as well as their beliefs and attitudes about their culture and the culture in which they live, work, or go to school. Examples of responses included "exposure to academic culture," "looking at family involvement in community/school culture and participation in traditional native holidays, etc.," "acculturation of parents and siblings in the home," and "cultural beliefs of family members."

Another 14% of the responses related to language usage. Language usage means how, where, when, or with whom the student uses their native language and English language. Examples include "do the parents speak English to each other? to the children?" "language spoken at home," and "language used to watch TV, listen to music, etc. by student." Another 14% of the responses were things such as "I don't know," "I don't know what is meant by acculturation assessment," "I don't know that we do this in my district," or "We do not have or use a specific test to determine acculturation."

Intellectual functioning assessment practices. When asked about the most essential components of intellectual assessment, approximately 51% of the responses had to do with administering a standardized intellectual functioning measure. A standardized intellectual functioning measure means a standardized test of cognitive ability, which can include verbal assessments, both in the native language or English language, or nonverbal assessments, or any combination of the two. Of those responses, most referred to using a nonverbal measure of

intellectual functioning, such as the Test of Nonverbal Intelligence, Fourth Edition (TONI-4; Brown, Sherbenou, & Johnsen, 2010), Comprehensive Test of Nonverbal Intelligence, Second Edition (CTONI-2; Hammill, Pearson, & Wiederholt, 2009), Wechsler Nonverbal Scale of Ability (WNV; Wechsler & Naglieri, 2006), or the Universal Nonverbal Intelligence Test, Second Edition (UNIT2; Bracken & McCallum, 2016).

Approximately 39% of the responses referred to the importance of assessment process variables. Assessment process variables means factors that would influence the decisions of the practitioner about what test to use, how to administer the test, how to interpret data, or best practices in the administration of an evaluation with an ELL student. Examples include "using a test that minimizes language bias," "using a test that is psychometrically sound for this population," and "making sure the IQ measure isn't a reflection of language level." Of those responses, approximately 48% of the assessment process responses had to do with selecting an appropriate test to meet the needs of ELLs. Examples included "using a test to minimize language bias," "choosing a measure that will have the least language and cultural loading," and "knowing their language proficiency when choosing the test."

Academic skills assessment practices. When participants were asked the most essential components of academic assessment, approximately 45% of the responses referred to the importance of administering academic assessments appropriately. Examples of responses include "test them in the language they are learning in," "a comparison between English and other language testing," "rapport between the person giving the tests and the student taking them," and "comparison with same aged peers and siblings who are in similar circumstances." Additionally, 23% of the responses recommended that curriculum-based measurements be used; responses included "classroom data," "work samples," "Response to Intervention data," and

"curriculum based measures." Curriculum-based measurements are assessments grounded in the curriculum that measure a student's academic achievement or progress.

Also, 16% of the responses stated the importance of educational history, for example "academic progress throughout the year," "amount of formal schooling in English and native language," and "background history on the student's exposure to academics." Educational history means obtaining information about the student's experience with schooling, formal education and instruction, including information obtained from past and current schools.

Table 8 summarizes the results of the four survey questions that addressed the most essential components of ELL assessment. Those four questions are identified in the assessment area column (e.g., what are the most essential elements of language proficiency). The content analysis categories are identified as the columns under Response Percentage and Frequency. Because not all survey questions had the same content analysis categories an X in the table indicates that the category was not used to code responses for that specific question. For example, when reading the table, 54% of responses indicated that the most essential component of language proficiency, was a direct measure of language proficiency.

Table 8

Participant Responses to the Most Essential Components of ELL Assessment

	Response Percentage and Frequency								
Assessment Area	LP	ASA	IQ	SBF	EH	SFB	IM	APV	N
Language proficiency	54% (100)	6% (11)	X	X	4% (7)	4% (7)	6% (11)	24% (45)	n=185
Acculturation	X	X	X	5% (9)	6% (11)	26% (46)	14% (26)	4% (8)	n=180
Intellectual	X	X	52% (85)	1% (2)	X	X	6% (10)	40% (65)	n=164
Academic skills	X	35% (58)	X	X	16% (26)	X	2% (4)	45% (74)	n=164

Note. LP = language proficiency, ASA = academic skills assessment, IQ = standardized IQ tests, SBF = social behavioral functioning, EH = educational history, SFB = student & family background, IM = informal measures, APV = assessment process variables, N = # of responses for the survey question.

Research Question 2: Barriers

The second research question in this study was stated in the following way: *What are the barriers to using best practices when assessing ELL students?* The following information was gleaned from this study's data and provides the information to address the second research question. Participants identified meaningful obstacles to implementing best practices for ELL assessments. Some respondents identified difficulties inherent in the assessment process, or difficulties with insufficient resources, the competency of the school psychologist, or other educational professionals, the assessments themselves, or difficulties with collaborating with other professionals.

Language proficiency assessment practices. When respondents were asked what barriers they encounter when using best practices for assessing language proficiency, 19% of responses referred to challenges with the assessment process. For this question, assessment

process means obstacles that affect or interfere with the process of evaluating the students, such as the process being lengthy or not being comprehensive. Responses included "time," "waiting for someone who speaks the language to complete CALP testing," and "language barrier between student and tester."

Additionally, 16% of the responses referred to collaboration. Collaboration means an obstacle that affects or interferes with working together with other people—such as parents, teacher, and/or school or district personnel—to complete the assessment for the students. Examples of responses included "most frustrating when the SLP says they couldn't get anything on expressive language," "those that do administer only report the scores and don't have any commentary or summary on the testing," "sometimes parents insist on testing in English," "results come late," and "parent may say their child does not speak a second language but they do." Interestingly, 25% of responses were respondents saying they did not know what barriers exist, or they did not administer this type of assessment and thus did not provide an answer.

Acculturation assessment practices. When asked about the barriers to acculturation assessment, 22% of the response related to collaboration with others. Collaboration with others refers to working with parents, teacher, and other professionals in the assessment process. Responses included "inability to communicate with parents in native language," "difficulty getting in touch with parents," and "lack of full background information." An additional 19% of the responses related to competency of professionals, such as teachers, parents, ELL specialists, interpreters, and school psychologists involved in acculturation assessment. Competency means that the professional has limited knowledge, training or experience or does not feel competent in being involved in the acculturation assessment. Examples of responses included "interpreters don't always know correct terminology to accurately translate," "poorly trained ELL specialists

who block service for students because they attribute every difficulty to being an ELL student," "I feel I have a lack of training to do this," and "finding competent people to work with the student."

A total of 10% of the reported responses had to do with the acculturation assessments. For this question, assessment barrier means there is a defect or fault in the assessment instrument or testing instrument itself, such as being out of date, not being normed for the population, or not being comprehensive. Examples of responses included "information from parents needed that isn't on current parent survey," "a lot of information is based on anecdotal information," "don't have a good measure," and "there does not seem to be a standard way to assess this." In addition, 25% of the responses indicated the respondents did not know what barriers existed or they did not administer this type of assessment and thus did not provide an answer.

Intellectual functioning assessment practices. When respondents were asked what barriers they encountered when using best practice in intellectual assessment, 38% of the responses referred to problems with the assessments themselves. This category means that there is a defect or fault in the assessment instrument or testing instrument itself, such as being out of data, not being normed for the population or not being comprehensive. Examples of responses included "need more updated measures like the WNV," "nonverbal cognitive is always an incomplete look at intelligence," and "nonverbal assessments don't measure many psychological processes." A total of 19% of the responses related to struggles with resources (e.g., "the school district only has one nonverbal test that is widely distributed," "lack of bilingual school psychologists," and "finding space to use when testing"), and 17% of responses related to process variables (e.g., "choosing an appropriate measure" or "nonverbal IQ tests work best").

Academic skills assessment practices. When asked about the barriers to academic skills assessment, 16% of the responses related to competency of professionals. Competency barrier means that the professional has limited knowledge, training or experience or does not feel competent in administering an academic assessment. Competency of professionals included responses such as "knowing whether or not the academic deficits are expected," "needing competent people to administer tests," and "not knowing which test is appropriate." Another 16% referred to barriers with the assessments that are used in the assessment process. Examples of responses included "assessing validity of CBM data," "no way of testing languages other than Spanish," and "no comparable assessment in Spanish."

Another 16% of the responses referred to barriers inherent in assessing these students. These student factors included the student's experience, functioning, or characteristics that warrant consideration in the assessment process, such as level of instruction in native language and/or English, ability to function in the classroom or years in formalized schooling. Examples of responses included "lack of formalized instruction in either language," "limited language proficiency limits accuracy of academic assessment for limited English proficient students," and "doesn't make sense to test for LD in child that has been here for less than 2 years." Additionally, 21% of the responses included content about the respondents not knowing what barriers existed or their responses did not answer the question.

Table 9 summarizes the results of the four survey questions that addressed the barriers to effective ELL assessment. Those four questions are identified in the assessment area column. The content analysis categories are identified as the columns under Response Percentage and Frequency. Because not all survey questions shared content analysis categories an X in the table indicates that the category was not used to code responses for that specific question. For

example, when reviewing the table, 10% of responses indicated resources was a barrier to the effective assessment of language proficiency.

Table 9

Participant Responses to the Barriers to Effective ELL Assessment

Assessment Area	Response Percentage and Frequency								
	R	C	A	Co	SF	CBP	PV	NA	N
Language proficiency	10% (15)	14% (21)	14% (21)	16% (24)	X	X	19% (28)	25% (37)	n=146
Acculturation	14% (19)	19% (25)	10% (13)	23% (30)	5% (6)	5% (6)	X	26% (34)	n=133
Intellectual	19% (24)	7% (9)	38% (48)	1% (1)	X	X	17% (22)	17% (22)	n=126
Academic skills	16% (18)	17% (19)	17% (19)	3% (4)	16% (18)	10% (12)	X	21% (25)	n=115

Note. R= resources, C=competency, A=assessment, Co=collaboration, SF=student factors, CBP=continue best practices, PV=process variables, NA= not knowing what barriers existed or their responses did not answer the question, N=# of responses for the survey question.

Specific learning disability assessment approaches. Participants were asked about obstacles in using the discrepancy model, RTI, and patterns of strengths and weaknesses approaches to assessment, and the themes of their responses indicated problems with the assessment approaches themselves, as well as problems with resources, competency, assessments and guidelines.

When asked about obstacles they encounter in using SLD assessment approaches, 50% of the responses referred to problems with the approaches of discrepancy, RTI, and cross-battery/patterns of strengths and weaknesses. Of those responses, 54% reported problems with the RTI approach, while 32% reported problems with the discrepancy approach; 14%, problems with the cross-battery/patterns of strengths and weaknesses approach. Obstacles in using RTI

included the following: "biggest obstacles to the RTI approach is that teachers are not always willing to implement interventions with fidelity," "the RTI process needs to be clearly spelled out in terms of criteria if that is to be used," and "having enough classroom data to go with testing data." Obstacles in using discrepancy included the following: "Discrepancy leaves far too much out of the equation," "Discrepancy method offers more black and white approach which can be hard to get special education teachers to see past," and "lack of discrepancy for a student who is far behind (if the IQ is low)." Obstacles in using cross-battery/patterns of strengths and weaknesses included the following: "I'm not sure what a Cross-Battery evaluation for SLD would look like," "Cross-Battery is not used in my district," and "with Cross-Battery, the time it takes can be a challenge."

The other 50% of responses did not mention an obstacle with a specific approach, but to all approaches in general. Of those responses, 38% of the responses referred to competency or training. Examples included "Utah would benefit from more training in both cross-battery and Response to Intervention as well as how to implement those methods with an ELL student more specifically," "poor tier II implementation," "intervention fidelity by educators," and "school personnel unfamiliar or untrained in using these approaches." Another 10% related to unclear guidelines in administering ELL assessments. Examples of responses are "combination method is good but needs more guidelines set in place," "lack of direction and instruction from the state level," "lack of detailed interventions or fidelity in implementation," and "inconsistency between different schools in the district." An additional 6% of responses referred to obstacles with the assessments used. Examples included "lack of discrepancy data with Spanish Language tests" and "there aren't adequate CBM measures in some areas of achievement—namely writing and reading comprehension." Another 5% related to the time required in administering the steps of

an evaluation. Examples of responses included "time" and "providing justification can take time especially in earlier grades." Finally, 41% of the responses did not answer the question or were left blank.

Research Question 3: Recommendations

The third research question in this study was stated in the following way: *What are the recommendations to improve ELL assessment for students suspected of having SLD?* The following information was gleaned from this study's data and provides the information to address the third research question.

Participants identified a variety of strategies for ELL assessments; most recommendation responses related to continuing the use of appropriate practices in the process of ELL assessments (e.g., make sure to use a valid test or using more than one test), increasing available resources, such as bilingual school psychologists and interpreters, improving the skills of professionals involved in the evaluation process through increased professional development and increasing opportunities to easily collaborate with other professionals.

Language proficiency assessment practices. When asked what recommendations they had for language proficiency assessment, 16% of the responses related to continuing to use best practice in language proficiency assessment. Examples of responses included "don't compare ELL students to their US born peers," "use a translator," and "make sure you give a valid and reliable test." These responses relate something that the school psychologist believed was important to the assessment process but were not recommendations on how to improve the process. Additionally, 13% of the responses related to recommendations about competency and increased training for educational professionals in the area of language proficiency. Responses included "increased training within schools," "professional development for all school staff

regarding language development," and "educating teachers in the difference between ELL and SLD." Another 12% of the responses related to recommendations about personnel. Examples of responses included "hire more bilingual specialists," "increase the number of trained personnel assessing native languages," and "better access to translators with better training." A total of 30% of the responses did not provide a recommendation. Responses included "I don't know," "don't do this testing," and "none."

Acculturation assessment practices. Recommendations for acculturation assessment from 29% of the responses included improvements with resources. Responses about resources included "better access to interpreters," "have a bilingual practitioner," and "early intervention." Another 20% of the responses indicated recommendations in the area of collaboration. Responses included "provide a faculty mentor that is responsible to assist child and family in understanding school procedures and requirements," "improve school outreach efforts to ELL family populations," and "include parents as much as possible." A total of 11% of responses related to competency, for example, "receive training on how to assess this" and "additional training in cultural factors," and another 11% of responses included recommendations to assessments, for example "standard survey should be designed and disseminated to schools," "have a more standardized tool or interview format," and "need more assessment tools."

Also 16% of the responses stated the importance of educational history, such as "academic progress throughout the year," "amount of formal schooling in English and native language," and "background history on the student's exposure to academics." Another 20% of the responses included responses such as "I don't do this testing," "we don't look super close at this," and "I don't know."

Intellectual functioning assessment practices. When asked what recommendations they had to intellectual assessment for ELLs, approximately 37% of the responses referred to assessment process variables that addressed variables such as what instrument to use and how to administer the assessment. Examples included "always using a nonverbal test," "using more than one test," and "considering language or not focusing on scores in making decisions." Another 20% of the responses related to recommendations about resources, for example "buy more nonverbal IQ tests," "more test kits," and "more people available to step in to assess students in other languages." Another 11% related to recommendations for assessments, such as "update standardized assessments" and "development of better nonverbal or combination type IQ measures." An additional 27% of responses were responses such as "I have no idea," "fine the way it is," and "no recommendations."

Academic skills assessment practices. Recommendations for academic skills assessment included continuing to use best practices as 15% of the responses. Examples of responses included "administration by someone who the student is able to communicate with in their primary language," "use general education classroom interventions that are appropriate for a child who is ELL," and "make sure all ELL students are referred to the pre-referral intervention team." Additionally, recommendations for more personnel represented 9% of the responses, for example, "have more people who are able to assess," "more bilingual psychologists and teachers in schools," and "hire more tier II specialists and data trackers." Improvements in the use of academic interventions and data—"more emphasis on progress monitoring tools such as DIBELS, Aimsweb, and other CBM measures," "monitoring of academic interventions," and "intervention fidelity"—represented another 9% of the responses. An additional 43% of the

responses were responses such as "none," "N/A," "we have no problems with that," and "not important."

Table 10 summarizes the results of the four survey questions that addressed the recommendations for improvements to ELL assessment. Those four questions are identified in the assessment area, which is the first column. The content analysis categories are identified as the columns under Response Percentage and Frequency. Because not all survey questions shared content analysis categories an X in the table indicates that the category was not used in coding the responses for that specific question. For example, when reviewing the table, 16% of responses indicated resources as a recommendation for the assessment of language proficiency.

Table 10

Participant Responses to the Recommendations for Improvement of ELL Assessment

Assessment Area	Response Percentage and Frequency								
	R	C	A	Co	AD	G	CPB	NA	N
Language proficiency	16% (17)	13% (14)	11% (12)	11% (12)	X	1% (1)	16% (17)	30% (32)	n=105
Acculturation	29% (32)	11% (12)	11% (12)	20% (22)	X	X	X	20% (22)	n=110
Intellectual	20% (22)	5% (6)	11% (12)	X	X	X	X	27% (30)	n=111
Academic skills	12% (14)	7% (8)	7% (8)	6% (7)	10% (11)	X	15% (17)	43% (50)	n=115

Note. R = resources, C = competency, A = assessment, Co = collaboration, AD = academic data, G = clarify guidelines, CBP = continue best practices, NA = not having recommendations or their responses did not answer the question, N = # of responses for the survey question.

Improving the assessment of ELLs in your school and district. When participants were asked how they would improve the overall assessment of ELLs both in their schools and school districts, 35% of the responses related to improving the competency of educational

professionals. Participants recommended training for school psychologists, parents, school staff, and district, state and higher education personnel. Suggestions for improved competency included responses such as "improving techniques for educating parents about special education services and procedures," "more training and education to staff," "training on the developmental of language and how it may display itself in the learning process," "training through UASP," and "BYU come and do a professional development day on this."

A total of 17% of responses related to recommendations for more personnel. Examples included "hiring bilingual school psychologists," "committing more resources for the assessment of ELL children," and "having access to a trained native speaker who can help assess." Also, 12% of responses referred to continuing to use best practices, for example "academic, social and emotional needs of the child need to be evaluated when making eligibility decisions," "consider that no one approach or battery fits all," and "always include good family info and history." Another 10% of responses related to collaboration. Examples included "collaborate with fellow school psychologists," "better team communication of all the pieces of the assessments," and "collaboration with other professions in other districts/states." An additional 14% of responses included content such as "none," "no suggestions," and "see previous comments."

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The primary aim of this research was to identify and describe the current assessment practices of school psychologists in Utah when assessing ELLs for a suspected SLD. This research can help school psychologists, district and state leaders, and school psychology trainers understand what are perceived to be the most essential components of an ELL evaluation and what obstacles to completing these evaluations are present. This research also seeks to improve practice by asking for recommendations for addressing obstacles from those who are currently working in the field. This study sought to answer the following research questions: (a) What do Utah school psychologists indicate are the most essential components of assessing ELL students who are suspected of having an SLD? (b) What are the barriers to using best practices when assessing ELL students? and (c) What are the recommendations of school psychologists to improve ELL assessment for students suspected of having SLD?

Comparison of Survey Responses to Best Practices

The most notable finding from this study was the alignment and similarity of best practices identified in the research literature (Lichtenstein, 2014) and the essential components of comprehensive evaluations reported by the participants. Leaders in the field have identified the essential components of the assessment of ELLs includes language proficiency, cultural issues, and schooling issues (ED, 2000). Examining language proficiency is a priority because Utah state guidelines for learning disability identification outline that SLD "are not primarily the result of . . . limited English proficiency" (Utah State Board of Education, 2016, p. 48). It is also important to examine cultural issues in the assessment of these culturally and linguistically diverse students because the effects of acculturation, such as withdrawal, distractibility, and

code-switching, can be misjudged as the presence of a disability (Collier, 1998). Difficulties in

schooling, namely a student's academic achievement, are often the reason for a suspected

learning disability and should be carefully examined to determine if the student has an

impairment that is affecting the student's academic performance (Utah State Board of Education,

2016) or if there are other root cases contributed to the academic problems. The survey asked

respondents to share their experience in assessing language proficiency, academic skills,

intellectual functioning and acculturation assessment practices for ELLs with learning

challenges.

When participants were asked what were the essential components of an ELL evaluation,

their responses aligned quite well with the best practices identified in the school psychology

literature (ED, 2000) and included the following assessment components: language proficiency

assessment, review of educational history, academic skills assessment, review of student and

family background, non-academic assessment (e.g., intelligence tests, speech and articulation

tests, and behavior and adaptive assessments), and a review of current classroom instructional

practices. These responses closely mirror the recommended guiding principles of ELL

assessment. Measures of language proficiency were well represented in the responses as

approximately 28% of survey responses indicated that language proficiency was an essential

component. Assessing cultural issues were represented with implicit responses, such as "student

and family background," in 17% of the survey responses. Measures of school issues were also

well represented as illustrated by the themes of educational history, academic skills assessments,

non-academic assessments (e.g., intelligence tests, speech and articulation tests, and behavior

and adaptive assessments), and current instructional practices, representing 31% of the

responses. This finding suggests that language and schooling assessment issues are included as

essential components of ELL assessment, but cultural issues are perhaps less often identified as essential aspects of a comprehensive evaluation.

When asked about language proficiency, intellectual and academic skills assessments, many respondents indicated that using standardized measurements was an essential component of SLD assessment. School psychologists have been extensively trained in the use of standardized measurements in determining eligibility (Merrell et al., 2011), which may explain their reliance on standardized measurements. Standardized measurements were not indicated as an essential component of acculturation assessment, although experts in the field (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2007) indicate acculturation is a vital component of ELL assessments. Standardized measures of acculturation do exist, such as the Acculturation Attitudes Scale-Revised, Acculturative Stress Inventory for Children, Bidimensional Acculturation Scale for Hispanics and Brief Acculturation Scale (Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2011; Wallace et al., 2010), but were not noted as an essential component by the participants. Regarding the infrequent mention of standardized measures to understand a student's level of acculturation may be due to several factors such as lack of awareness about available measures, lack of easy availability of these measures, or limited understanding of how to assess acculturation.

Overall, assessment of acculturation does not appear to be a priority for participants in this study when completing an overall psychoeducational assessment for ELLs. Acculturation had the highest percentage (14%) of "I don't know" and similar answers. It appeared that many participants either did not know what the term meant, how to measure it, or had never administered a measure of acculturation. When asked how often school psychologists use the assessments of language proficiency, acculturation, intellectual function, and academic skills in assessing ELLs for a suspected SLD, participants noted acculturation was used the least. There

appears to be a lack of understanding of the importance of acculturation assessment in the evaluation process of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

ELL students are disproportionately placed in classes for students with learning disabilities (Sullivan, 2011); therefore, IDEA has mandated that identification of learning disabilities not be a result of cultural factors, environmental or economic disadvantage, or limited English proficiency (IDEA, 2004, 34 CFR 300.173). The reduced emphasis on these areas in the assessment of these students may be contributing to their disproportionate identification (NCES, 2016b). As mentioned, the responses in this survey indicate that school psychologists frequently rely on standardized measurements in the assessment process, so providing opportunities for school psychologists to be aware of well-studied measures of acculturation would be helpful and may help to reduce disproportionate representation.

Barriers to Effective Assessment

A useful finding from this study is the description of obstacles that are present in the field. One of the barriers identified in the responses was the difficulty "deciphering between a true learning disability and cultural factors or limited English proficiency." Researchers have stated that determining whether an academic difficulty is a result of language difference or learning disability is one of the main challenges of identifying an ELL for an SLD because many of the characteristics of language difference and disability overlap (Case & Taylor, 2005). The respondents did not specify how to address this barrier, but their responses indicated that they acknowledge the complexity of evaluating ELLs, and may reflect the lack of awareness about assessing acculturation; furthermore, respondents also reported that they often did not have enough time to devote to the assessment process. Cultural factors are often explored and identified through student and family interviews or observations (Rhodes et al., 2005), which

take time to schedule, complete, and then summarize, and which may contribute to the struggle to accurately identify and incorporate cultural factors that may be at play in the students' learning challenges.

When respondents reported specific barriers to ELL assessments, they suggested problems with time, assessment instruments, access to competent practitioners and even struggles with their own training and competence. When assessing language proficiency, respondents believed that the major barrier was the evaluation process and having to "wait for someone who speaks the language." When assessing acculturation, barriers existed with collaborating with others, including "inability to communicate with parents in native language" and "difficulty getting in touch with parents." When discussing intellectual assessments, respondents reported barriers with standardized assessments, saying things such as "nonverbal cognitive is always an incomplete look at intelligence" and "nonverbal assessments don't measure many psychological processes." When assessing academic skills, one reported barrier was the competency of professionals. Respondents stated they struggled with finding "competent people to administer tests," and "not knowing which test is appropriate." School psychologists in this sample described a wide variety of barriers in the assessment process. The barriers appear to be focused on having sufficient resources (e.g., interpreters, time) and having the expertise available to meet the needs of students and expertly administer and interpret assessment instruments.

Another survey question was asked to determine if school psychologists are the professional primarily responsible for administering these assessments, and for this sample, the responses indicated that school psychologist are not responsible for assessing language proficiency, acculturation, or academic skills. Given that school psychologists in Utah are giving

only a portion of the complete assessment (i.e., cognitive assessments), this lack of responsibility could contribute to a fragmented approach to assessment, or it could strengthen the assessment process if collaboration occurs to integrate multiple professionals and perspectives could be integrated to develop a comprehensive understanding of the student's challenges and then develop interventions that will be most helpful to the child. It would be helpful to understand the reasons why the assessment process is divided among various professionals and how this may or may not be useful to accurately identifying ELLs with a disability and to develop effective interventions based on assessment information.

About 25% of the responses to the question about barriers to assessing language proficiency, acculturation, and academic skills assessment showed respondents did not have barriers to report. If this notable portion of professionals working in the field do not have barriers to report, they may be content with the process as it currently is or they may not have the expertise in this area to be able to recognize the barriers. Respondents also may have struggled to identify barriers to assessment in these areas because they do not customarily administer these assessments.

School psychologists do primarily administer measures of intellectual functioning, so their perceived barriers in this area are important to examine. A total of 38% of the responses indicated that respondents had problems with the assessments themselves, stating "need more updated measures like the WNV," "nonverbal cognitive is always an incomplete look at intelligence," and "nonverbal assessments don't measure many psychological processes." These responses suggest that the practitioners recognize problems or defects with some of cognitive assessment instruments. Researchers have also identified the lack of appropriate assessments for learning disability identification for ELL students contributing to the problem of disproportionate

representation (Chu & Flores, 2011). Nonverbal cognitive measures are preferable when assessing linguistically diverse students (Rhodes et al., 2005) and several measures are available: Comprehensive Test of Nonverbal Intelligence, Second Edition (CTONI-2; Hammill et al., 2009), Wechsler Nonverbal Scale of Ability (WNV; Wechsler & Naglieri, 2006), or the Universal Nonverbal Intelligence Test, Second Edition (UNIT2; Bracken & McCallum, 2016). Respondents recommend their use with ELL students over traditional, language-based assessments, but respondents still reported obstacles with these measures, saying that nonverbal measures did not give a full picture of a student's intellectual functioning.

Recommendations for Improving ELL Assessment

One of the most relevant findings of this research was the suggested recommendations for improving ELL assessments. These recommendations come from professionals who are currently working in the profession and have first-hand experience trying to implement best practices. These recommendations could be incorporated into ongoing professional development for currently practicing school psychologists and into training programs for preservice school psychologists. Optimally, the barriers would be addressed by the broader educational community given that school psychologists are only one of many professionals involved in the assessment process. The majority of responses recommended that best practices for intellectual assessment, language proficiency assessment, and academic skills assessment should continue to be used. These recommendations included statements like "use an interpreter," "make sure you give a valid and reliable test," "using more than one test," and "administration by someone who the student is able to communicate with in their primary language." These recommendations from school psychologists do not suggest new practices, but align nicely with what has already been identified in the research literature (Rhodes et al., 2005; Lichtenstein, 2014). These

responses suggest that school psychologists are knowledgeable about using best practices in the assessment of ELLs.

In contrast, respondents recommended improvements in the availability of resources in the assessment of acculturation. A total of 29% of responses for the question about recommendations for acculturation assessment practices related to the need for more resources for assessing acculturation. Resources for acculturation assessment could include well-trained professionals such as bilingual school psychologists, interpreters, district level specialists, and other professionals familiar with the culture. Resources could also include assessment instruments, surveys and/or scales, as well as time to conduct interviews or home visits. Participants noted that having enough time to measure acculturation was problematic. This again suggests that acculturation is perceived to be the weakest component in the assessment of ELLs and that practitioners would like more resources to aid them in the assessment of this area.

When asked about suggestions for improvement in the overall assessment of ELLs in their schools and districts, respondents relayed that they would like to improve their competency in assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students. These diverse students are predicted to make up more than 50% of the student population by the year 2044 (NCES, 2014), so the need for expertise in this area is important, and school psychologists recognize that importance. Because of the scarcity of bilingual school psychologists, other professionals are often used in the assessment of ELLs (Gopaul-McNicol, 1997), so it is important for school psychologists to improve their competence in this area. Additionally, NASP says "…the training of school psychologists often fails to provide sufficient competency regarding what might make [assessment measures] biased or discriminatory and even less about how to use them in a less biased or discriminatory manner" (Ortiz, 2006, p. 663). Although data were not analyzed to

determine which areas school psychologists would most like to improve their competency, examples of desired training included working with interpreters, understanding language development and the needs specific to ELLs, how to administer and interpret assessments for ELLs and training with the overall process. When asked to rate the quality of their training in ELL assessment, both graduate and post-graduate training, the average responses indicated that school psychologists believed their training was of medium to somewhat high quality. Respondents reported training in working with interpreters; training for all staff regarding ELLs and effective interventions, instruction, and assessment for this population; and training about assessment practices for school psychologists is needed, as well as training for special education teachers, and general education teachers are needed.

In summary, the responses of the school psychologists in this sample did align with the guiding principles that surround the assessment of ELLs for SLD. Participants mentioned the importance of standardized assessment instruments in assessing language proficiency, intellectual functioning, and academic skills, but standardized measurements were not indicated as an essential component of acculturation assessment. Although participants were able to identify guiding principles, they reported problems with having sufficient time to implement best practices. They also named barriers such as cognitive assessment instruments that may provide incomplete pictures of students' cognitive skills, challenges when assessing acculturation, access to bilingual practitioners, and needing more training to expand their competence. They recommend more resources allocated to acculturation assessment and improving competency for professionals in assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Implications for Practice

This study sought to assist school psychologists, school districts, and training programs in the improvement of SLD assessment for ELLs. Findings from this study can be helpful in the implementation of professional development to provide more information on acculturation assessment and collaboration within the assessment process.

Practitioners need more information about assessing acculturation. Many participants either did not know what the term meant, how to measure it, or had never administered a measure of acculturation. It was found that school psychologists in this sample rely on standardized measurements when measuring language proficiency, intellectual functioning, and academic skills, so providing opportunities for school psychologists to be aware of strong measures of acculturation would be helpful. School psychologists would also benefit from understanding how components such as language use/preference, social affiliation, cultural traditions, cultural identity/pride, and generational status (Rhodes et al., 2005) are assessed and connected to other data produced in the evaluation process. Ortiz stated, "Research has demonstrated that both cultural (not race, but acculturation) and linguistic (proficiency) differences are significant factors that can influence an individual's performance on psychological, language and achievement tests" (Ortiz, 2006, p. 665).

In order to evaluate cultural and linguistic differences, Ortiz recommends collecting this data through observations across multiple settings, interview with parents, teachers and the individual, review of existing educational records and home visits. Factors that should be examined include languages spoken and language fluency of the home, parents and individual, the parents' and individual's level of acculturation, the individual's birth order, parents' level of literacy in the native language and English, parents' level of education, and parents'

socioeconomic status (Ortiz, 2006). Collier (1998) stated that side effects of acculturation could

include heightened anxiety, confusion in locus of control, code-switching, silence or withdrawal,

distractibility, response fatigue and other indications of stress response. These recommendations

provide guidance for areas that school psychologists should consider when assessing

acculturation and skills that school psychologists should be trained in to administer valid and fair

assessments for this population.

Training for school psychologists in administering valid and fair assessments for ELLs

and other culturally or linguistically diverse students is imperative. Ortiz recommends that

school psychologists should have cultural and linguistic competence when assessing culturally

and linguistically diverse students. He stated:

In general, the combination of cultural and linguistic competence may be defined as

possession of the following: (a) skill and competence in selecting and using culturally

appropriate methods, procedures, and tolls that are designed to reduce bias systematically

in assessment; (b) knowledge of, and familiarity with, cultural factors relevant to the

individual being assessed and the ability to evaluate data within the context of that

culture; (c) knowledge of language development, second language acquisition, models of

bilingual or English as a second language (ESL) education and their relationship to

achievement and school-based learning; and (d) the ability to communicate effectively

and competently in the native language of the individual being evaluated. (Ortiz 2006, p.

665)

School districts and state agencies can assist school psychologists in improving their competence

in ELL assessment by offering opportunities to be trained in using appropriate methods,

familiarity with cultural factors, language development, and second language acquisition, as well as effective communication.

Evidence-based professional development (PD) for all professionals involved in ELL assessment would be helpful. The PD could focus on collaboration and integration of assessment results. Our results indicate that a variety of professionals are involved in the assessment process, and it would be important for professionals to be sure the evaluation results in well-integrated data. Evidence-based PD focuses on providing training over time and school-based coaching to ensure that the new skills are refined over time (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Schools may need to prioritize resources for assessing ELL students. Respondents indicated that there often is not enough time or competent personnel available for complete assessments according to the best practices. Respondents recommended more bilingual school psychologists to assist in assessing ELL students. Because of the lack of bilingual school psychologists in the field, monolingual school psychologists need to collaborate with interpreters, teachers and administrators. Findings from this study also found that ELL specialists are the principle administrators of both language proficiency assessments and acculturation assessments. This finding suggests that school psychologists need to work closely with ELL specialists, whether in the school or within the district, when assessing ELLs. The ELL specialist is an important resource that school psychologists should rely on. ELL specialists are trained in "second language acquisition, bilingualism, the difference between social and academic language proficiency and the roles that language and culture play in learning" (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc., 2003, p. 1).

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Although there are important conclusions to be made from the findings of this study, there are some limitations to consider. For example, the sample participants may be representative of the population; because the survey was administered via email, the sample may over represent school psychologists that are savvy using technology and have easy access to email and time to complete survey research. It may also be that the content of the survey, culturally and linguistically diverse students, was of more interest or experience to some school psychologist, which lead them to respond to the survey. Another possibility is that some school psychologists may value research more than others. Linguistically diverse professionals seemed to be represented by the sample, in that participants reported that they spoke 12 languages other than English, but it was not asked whether the participants were native or non-native speakers of these languages. Further research in the area of assessing ELLs with sample participants who are native speakers of diverse languages would be valuable to determine if demographic characteristics of the school psychologist influences the results.

Additionally, the sample participants reported having limited experience and expertise in the area of ELL assessment. They seemed to be unfamiliar with acculturation assessment, had limited experience with cross-battery assessment, and may not be native speakers of a second language. They reported more problems with the discrepancy model, perhaps because Utah has relied heavily on this assessment method so they were familiar with problems with this model. Because the sample has limited experience with other models, specifically cross-battery assessment, the results may be unique to Utah school psychologists. Further research with samples of school psychologists in other areas of the country would be beneficial.

Another limitation of the study relates to the format of the questions. A survey was chosen for this study in order to reach school psychologists from across the state of Utah. The survey included open-ended questions and because of this, respondents were able to provide answers such as "I don't know," "N/A," or some response that did not pertain to the question. Although helpful information was gleaned from these responses, more specific responses from survey questions would have provided richer information, particularly about the barriers found in the assessment process and recommendations for improvement. A semi-structured interview format would have provided richer information, and an interviewer would have been able to ask the participants to expound upon answers such as "I don't know," or "I'm not sure."

A possible implication for future research would be to further evaluate how the various methods of SLD assessment help or hurt ELLs and other diverse students. The discrepancy model, RTI, and patterns of strengths and weaknesses vary and highlight different data in the assessment process. Although school psychologists may be familiar with one assessment model or be required to use one model in their district, it may not contribute to better understanding the student being evaluated to develop effective interventions and instructional practices. Further research about how each approach is used with diverse students would add valuable information to the body of research for this population of students. It is also important to conduct further research to consider how well the assessment processes contribute to developing evidence-based interventions. It is important to consider how the pre-referral process, assessment process, and post-referral process all influence culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Another avenue for future research is to replicate this study with other professionals involved in the assessment of ELLs. Professionals to be included are teachers, speech language pathologists, and/or administrators. Research that explored the experiences of students and

parents in the evaluation process could also be very helpful. Future research could also study school districts who successfully administer ELL assessments and examine what factors contribute to their effective use of best practices.

Summary

The primary goal of this research was to identify the current practices of Utah school psychologists when assessing ELLs for a suspected SLD. Additionally, this study sought to determine barriers to best practice and recommendations for improved practice in this area of assessment. The researchers believed that this particular area was important to examine because there is difficulty in distinguishing between English language deficits and an SLD. To assist in determining whether an ELL is experiencing the struggles found in learning English or shows characteristics of an SLD, school psychologists and school teams should be examining the language proficiency, cultural issues, and schooling issues of these students.

Findings from this study indicate that the responses of the school psychologists in this sample did align with the guiding principles that surround the assessment of ELLs for SLD. They mentioned the importance of standardized assessment instruments in assessing language proficiency, intellectual functioning, and academic skills, but standardized measurements were not indicated as an essential component of acculturation assessment. Although participants were able to identify guiding principles, they reported that they have problems with having sufficient time to implement best practices. They also named barriers such as cognitive assessment instruments that may provide incomplete pictures of students' cognitive skills, challenges when assessing acculturation, access to bilingual practitioners, and needing more training to expand their competence. They recommend more resources allocated to acculturation assessment and

improving competency for professionals in assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students.

ELL assessment is a difficult issue requiring further investigation that could include evaluating how the various methods of SLD assessment contribute to positive outcomes for ELLs or other diverse students, replicating this study with other professionals involved in the assessment of ELLs, studying school districts who successfully administer ELL assessments, and examining what factors contribute to their successful use of best practices. It is hoped that findings from this study can be helpful in the implementation of professional development to provide more information on acculturation assessment and collaboration within the assessment process. Findings from this study can also help school districts and state agencies provide more resources to ELL students.

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APPENDIX A: Email Recruiting Script

Dear School Psychologist:

My name is Jesika Forbush, and I am a graduate student at Brigham Young University. My research team and I are conducting a study on the assessment practices and obstacles of school psychologists when assessing English Language Learners (ELLs) for a suspected Specific Learning Disability (SLD). We hope that in completing this study, we can learn more about the ways in which school psychologists conduct learning disability assessments for ELLs. Participants who complete this study may choose to enter their e-mail address to be selected to receive a $50 Visa gift card.

In order to participate, you must (a) be over the age of 18 and (b) be currently credentialed as a school psychologist in the state of Utah. Study surveys will be mailed out to Utah school psychologists in the next few weeks. We hope that you will participate in this research.

Thank you very much for your time! If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at jesikaolsen@gmail.com or Ellie Young at ellie_young@byu.edu. This research has been approved by the Brigham Young University Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

Jesika Forbush

APPENDIX B: Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research:

Introduction
This research study is being conducted by Jesika Forbush, a school psychology graduate student at Brigham Young University, to determine the current assessment practices of school psychologists in Utah when working with English language learners (ELLs) and the obstacles they encounter. You are being invited to participate in this research study because you were chosen from a list of currently licensed school psychologists as recorded by the Utah State Office of Education. Jesika will be working under the supervision of associate professor, Dr. Ellie Young, PhD NCSP.

Procedures
Your participation in this study will require the completion of the attached survey. You will be asked to provide demographic information and answer survey questions. It will take you approximately 10-15 minutes to answer the questions that follow. Your answers will remain confidential.

Risks/Discomforts
There are minimal risks for participants in this study. Participation in this research will require some of your time and input. Because the questions that follow will ask you to reflect on your experiences with culturally and linguistically diverse students, you may experience some slight emotional discomfort. The risk is considered to be minimal; however, your reactions may vary depending on experiences. Your participation is voluntary. Should you feel uncomfortable with the questions, you may choose to stop at any time. Your consent to participate is implied by the completion of this questionnaire.

Benefits
The benefits of this study may not have direct relation to you as a participant. However, results of this study, through your participation, will lead to more information on the topic of obstacles to multicultural assessment practices in relation to school psychology. This could lead to more research and advancement on this topic.

Confidentiality
All information will remain confidential. The information will not identify certain individuals, but instead, will be categorized as group data. All questionnaires will only be accessible to those directly involved with the research. The information you provide will be stored and safeguarded in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Ellie Young's office at Brigham Young University.

Compensation
For participating in this study you can enter into a drawing to win one of 3 $50 Visa gift cards. Please complete the "contest form" and return it with the testing materials if you wish to be entered.

Participation

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or decline participation entirely without jeopardy or penalty.

Questions about the Research

If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact Jesika Forbush at jesikaolsen@gmail.com, or Ellie Young at (801) 422-1593/ ellie_young@byu.edu. You may also contact Ellie Young's office at 340 MCKB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602.

Questions about your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions you do not feel comfortable asking the researcher, you may contact The Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants. You may contact the BYU IRB Administrator at irb@byu.edu or 801-422-146.

Statement of Consent

The completion of this survey implies your consent to participate. If you choose to participate, please complete the survey and return.

Thank you for your help with this important research.

Jesika Forbush

APPENDIX C: Survey

This study is interested in which assessment practices you use most often in the evaluation of English Language Learners (ELLs) for a suspected learning disability. We are also interested in the obstacles you encounter in your assessment of ELLs.

Demographic Questions

Gender	Male	Female			
Ethnicity	Black/ African American	Native American/ Alaskan Native	Hispanic American/ Latino	Asian American/ Pacific Islander	White/ Caucasian
Language other than English?	YES	NO			
Indicate language(s):					
Foreign language proficiency level	Elementary	Limited working proficiency	Professional working proficiency	Full professional proficiency	Native proficiency
Settings in which you work	Early Intervention/ Preschool	Elementary	Middle School/ Junior High	High School	
Number of years as a school psychologist					

In your experience, what are the 3-5 most essential components for accurately assessing ELL students for a suspected Specific Learning Disability?

Please identify who is typically responsible for conducting the following assessments of ELLs in your schools:

	School Psychologist	Bilingual School Psychologist	Special Education Teacher	ELL Specialist	Other: Please specify
Language Proficiency	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐ Specify:_____ _____
Acculturation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐ Specify:_____ _____
Intellectual	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐ Specify:_____ _____
Academic Skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐ Specify:_____

Please indicate how often you use the following assessments when assessing ELLs for learning disabilities from 1 to 5, with 1 being never and 5 being always:				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Language Proficiency	1	2	3	4	5
Acculturation	1	2	3	4	5
Intellectual	1	2	3	4	5
Academic Skills	1	2	3	4	5

What are the most essential components of assessment when assessing ELLs in the following areas?	
Language Proficiency	
Acculturation	
Intellectual	
Academic Skills	

What obstacles do you encounter in the following aspects of ELL assessment?	
Language Proficiency	
Acculturation	
Intellectual	
Academic Skills	

What recommendations do you have to address the obstacles identified when assessing these areas?	
Language Proficiency	
Acculturation	
Intellectual	
Academic Skills	

Please rate your knowledge of the following approaches to Specific Learning Disability Assessment:

	Uncomfortable	Slightly Uncomfortable	Neutral	Slightly Comfortable	Comfortable
Discrepancy	1	2	3	4	5
Cross-Battery	1	2	3	4	5
Response to Intervention	1	2	3	4	5

What obstacles do you encounter in using the above mentioned assessment approaches to Specific Learning Disability Assessment:

Please rate the following areas of your training in ELL assessment from 1 to 5, with 1 being poor quality and 5 being high quality:

	Poor Quality	Somewhat Poor Quality	Medium Quality	Somewhat High Quality	High Quality
Overall ELL assessment skills	1	2	3	4	5
Graduate training in working with ELLs	1	2	3	4	5
Post-graduate training in working with ELLs	1	2	3	4	5
Training in working with interpreters	1	2	3	4	5

What are your suggestions for improving the assessment of ELLs in your school/district?

APPENDIX D: Prize Drawing

Please complete the following information to be entered to win a $50 Visa gift card.

Name: _____

Email address: _____