

Chapter 15

Interdisciplinary Training in Intensive Intervention for Students With Disabilities and Multi-Lingual Youth

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes an interdisciplinary training project funded by OSEP to support school psychology and dual credential teacher candidates to effectively work with and provide inclusive educational supports to students with disabilities, including multilingual youth, with intensive academic needs. The authors describe the need for the project and provide an overview of the conceptual framework and training components, such as didactic and experiential learning, as well as key elements of the project, including evidence-based assessment and instruction and culturally responsive and sustaining practices. Formative and summative measures used to measure candidate outcomes are described, and preliminary results are provided.

In the United States, 10.2% of public-school students are considered multi-lingual (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Of these, approximately 5 million multi-lingual learners (MLLs), or more than 76%, identify as Hispanic/Latinx, with Spanish as the most prevalent language spoken (U. S. Department of Education, 2020). Student with disabilities make up about 10% of students in U. S. public school, and approximately 10% of students who receive special education services are also designated as a MLL (National Council on Disabilities, 2018). This number varies widely by state. For example, in California, 23% of students were designated MLL in 2015-2016, with 31% identified as having a disability. In West Virginia, by comparison, only 7% of students who were designated MLL also received

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special education services. While Hispanic and Latinx students may qualify under any of the 13 disability categories in Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), data from the Office of Special Education Program (OSEP) show that of students who identify as Hispanic or Latinx with disabilities, 45% have the designation of Specific Learning Disability (OSEP, 2019).

Data from national assessments underscore that the instructional needs of students with disabilities and MLLs are not being met. The most recent results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2019) show that 12% of students with disabilities and 10% of MLLs in fourth grade performed at or above proficient in reading compared to 39% of both students without disabilities and non-MLLs in the same grade. In math, 17% of students with disabilities and 16% of MLLs in fourth grade performed at or above proficient in math compared to 45% of students without disabilities and 44% of non-MLLs. Furthermore, the gap in fourth grade reading and math performance between students with disabilities and those without disabilities has been consistent or increased since 2015. Similarly, the gap in fourth grade reading performance between MLLs and mono-lingual youth has remained the same since 2015 and has steadily increased in math since 2003.

Meeting the needs of MLLs who have intense academic needs and/or disabilities is complex. These students are simultaneously learning to speak, listen, read, and write in English. The assessments used to find areas of strength and need are rarely normed on MLL populations and do not consider variations in language and culture (Ortiz, 2019). These challenges coupled with a small research base on effective interventions for MLLs makes meeting the instructional needs of these students difficult. Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) is one potential way that states, districts, and schools can support MLLs with intense academic needs and/or with disabilities.

Current OSEP model demonstration projects focus on developing, implementing, and evaluating MTSS models for MLLs: Project Elite2 at University of Texas, Austin; Project Ellipses at American Institutes for Research; and Project Lee at Portland State University (Multitiered Systems of Supports for English Learners, 2020). These model demonstration projects highlight the need for MLLs to have instruction that is evidence-based and culturally responsive. Together the projects outline key features of instruction for MLLs at each tier of MTSS. For example, Tier 1 core instruction for MLLs should include high quality differentiated instruction in language and literacy; culturally responsive pedagogy; meaningful opportunities for students to practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing; and first language supports. Tier 1 also includes English as a second language instruction and supports, as well as having teachers who are knowledgeable about native and second language development (Multitiered System of Supports for English Learners, 2020). For Tier 2 supplemental supports and Tier 3 intensive supports, instruction for MLLs should include all elements of Tier 1 as well as a focus on oral language and academic language development, and regular use of data for instructional decision-making.

To effectively meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities and MLLs in inclusive education environments via an MTSS model, schools need highly trained teachers and student support specialists who can collect and interpret instructionally relevant data, and design and deliver intensive, evidence-based and culturally responsive instruction (Project Elite2, Project Ellipses, & Project Lee, 2018). Although special education teachers and school psychologists are uniquely positioned to identify and support struggling learners, their training has not traditionally focused on serving all learners, they have received little training and practice in interdisciplinary collaboration, and their roles in schools tend to be narrowly focused. In a recent survey of school psychology practitioners, for example, almost 90% of respondents reported spending a “great deal of time” engaged in special education related assessments whereas 22% reported spending “quite a bit” or a “great deal of time” providing academic intervention

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