

## The Impact of Placement Practices on English Language Learners

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Freeman and Freeman (2002) identified three distinct subgroups of ELLs: newly arrived with adequate formal schooling, newly arrived with limited formal schooling, and long term English learners. These subgroups require significantly differing approaches in instruction and vary extremely in terms of prior education, literacy, and English oral language proficiency. But what happens when these students are placed together in one classroom with one teacher attempting to use “differentiated instruction” to maximize each student’s learning rate and academic success? We contend that this effort is analogous to placing 20 students into one classroom who all need a credit in science, except that some need a credit in astronomy, others in biology, yet others in earth science. Meanwhile, the teacher assigned to the class is certified in elementary science education and provided with state science standards for physics and requested to provide differentiated instruction such that all students will maximize their learning in the areas in which they need help while making progress toward achieving high scores in the standardized state science test in physics.

We decided to take a look at these three groups in terms of their characteristics and instructional needs, and identify some of the causes for the failure of our secondary schools to provide the kind of help that allows them to be successful academically and economically. Our premise was simply that differentiated instruction cannot take place without differentiate placement when student characteristics are too varied to allow for successful implementation of such instructional strategies.

Table 1 summarizes some of the characteristics of these distinct ELL subgroups as identified by Fresno Unified School District, Office of Multilingual/Multicultural Education and Lenski, Ehlers-Zavala, Daniel and Sun-Irminger (2006). For discussion in this work, these three groups are classified as: Highly Literate New Immigrants (HLNI), Under Schooled New Immigrants (USNI), and Long Term Literacy English Proficient (LTLEP).

Table 1

	<b><i>Highly Literate New Immigrants</i></b>	<b><i>Under Schooled New Immigrants</i></b>	<b><i>Long Term Literacy English Proficient</i></b>
Length of time in US	In country less than five years	In country less than five years Recent arrivals to U.S.	More than five years in an English-speaking school
Prior schooling	Adequate schooling in native country	Disrupted or no schooling in native country	Some English as a second language classes or bilingual support
Literacy levels	Strong literacy foundation: Reading/writing at or above grade level [in L1]	Little or no English fluency; little or no literacy in native language	Orally fluent in English Frequently no literacy in home language; limited reading/writing levels in English
Performance on high stakes tests	Low performance on standardized tests when administered in English; difficulty passing district proficiency exams	Poor performance on proficiency exams and standardized tests; poor academic achievement; below grade level in Math; behind in credits	Perform poorly on achievement tasks
Parental characteristics	Have parents who are educated speakers of their native language	Parents who have low literacy levels	Parents struggle with literacy - may be immigrants or native born and may or may not have completed high school.
Language acquisition	Found it easy to acquire a second or third language Demonstrates potential to make fast progress in English	Could have difficulty learning English	Literacy skills are below grade level; require substantial and ongoing language and literacy support
Programmatic needs	Traditional EL program sequence meets needs	Progress through ELD levels is slow, may have to repeat levels	Traditional sequence of classes in either SEL or Bilingual Program does not apply

In part, the failure of programs to meet specific ELL needs is based on the fact that while the NCLB defines when a student is limited English Proficient (LEP) and requires states to evaluate oral, reading and writing skills of all LEP students, it does not suggest how to do so. Consequently, tests and the accompanying accommodations vary state by state. (Gitomer et al, 2005). Some of the English language proficiency and achievement tests used to identify and assess students are the Bilingual Syntax Measure (BSM), the Idea Proficiency Test (IPT), the Language Assessment Battery (LAB), the Language Assessment Scales (LAS), the Maculaitis Assessment Program (MAC), the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) and the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) (Abedi, 2002). Criticisms include the fact that almost all of these tests were normed on a native English speaking population, and standardized such that students being tested who fall below a 30-40<sup>th</sup> percentile range (the cutoff score can vary based on the test used and district guidelines) are labeled ELL. However, fully 30-40 percent of native English speakers also fall into this category (Russell, 2003). This means that the “below grade level” labeling of ELLs receiving services does not distinguish them from native English speakers.

Oral proficiency tests have been similarly criticized for their unreliability (Ramirez, Yuen & Ramey, 1986) since they cannot distinguish between a child who does not know the answer and one who does not speak English (Rossell & Baker, 1988). According to Perlman and Rice (1979), in one study, 50% of monolingual English speakers with above average reading fluency tested into ELL programs based on the outcomes of these placement tests.

Assessing students is a complex process, one that is further complicated by socio-cultural, psychological and economic considerations (Petterway, 2006). It is clear from the

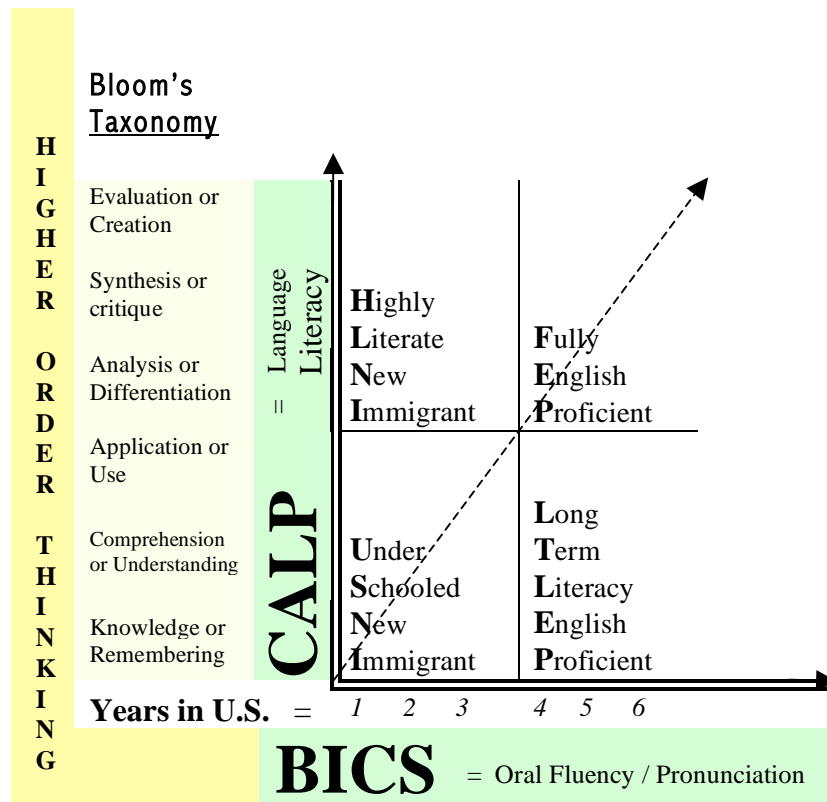
research that despite varied placement and assessment tools and practices, there is inadequate differentiation of student knowledge, skills and needs in making appropriate program placement determinations and evaluating program outcomes. In *“Beyond Bilingual Education,”* Gershberg, Danenberg and Sanchez (2004) rightfully conclude that the processes school systems use to gather information from new arrivals and assess them for placement needs improvement.

The goal of ELL programs is to provide students with appropriate, challenging instruction to motivate them without overwhelming them and to enable them to succeed in the pursuit of their academic and economic goals. Current theories about learning and second language acquisition have been heavily influenced by the works and ideas of Lev Vygotsky and Stephen Krashen. Vygotsky developed and promoted the notion that learning consists of the merged processes of thought and language, interdependent functions whose development is made possible when learners perform activities that lie in their particular “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978). This “zone” pertains to things the learner can accomplish with the assistance of others, tasks that lie just beyond the capacity of their own actual developmental level. Analogous to this, Krashen (1988) developed his well-known concept of “comprehensible input,” also known as ‘i +1’. This theory proposes that learners at stage ‘i’ achieve maximum growth in language acquisition when they receive input at the i+1 level. These concepts are critical to understanding why the placement of the three subgroups of ELLs (HLNI, LTLEP, and USNI) in one learning environment is untenable if learning is to occur for any of them.

The three subgroups of ELLs discussed and reviewed here have been identified as having differing backgrounds in terms of time in the U.S., literacy skills, and second language (L2) oral

fluency. In order to discuss their specific needs and issues, we have developed the following model:

### ELL SUBGROUP MATRIX



Note: The X axis of the ELL Subgroup Matrix correlates the level of oral language fluency developed over the course of years spent in the United States school systems while the Y axis denotes increasing levels of cognitive academic ability related to Bloom's taxonomy.

Jim Cummins is best known for distinguishing between oral proficiency (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills/BICS) and academic proficiency (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency/CALP) (Cummins, 1979). According to Cummins, conversational fluency can be attained within one to three years, whereas, academic proficiency in an L2 may take up to seven years. CALP is highly dependent on literacy levels and cognitive thinking skills. These

skills, among others, have been shown to transfer from a learner's L1 to their L2, indicating that a strong educational background in the L1 accelerates the student's ability to grasp cognitively demanding ideas, enhances reading (decoding) in the L2, and enables students to learn alternative grammars quickly.

While children learning their first language naturally transition from oral language proficiency (BICS) to more decontextualized uses of language in reading and cognitively demanding language uses (CALP) sequentially, once the conceptual framework is developed more fully (3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade), learners do not necessarily progress from BICS to CALP; they can develop both concurrently or even approach cognitively demanding tasks (reading scientific texts) without having acquired oral fluency. The understanding of these theories of learning and second language acquisition is important for developing tools and techniques to promote individual student success.

The ELL Subgroup Matrix aligns Cummins CALP with the cognitive taxonomy developed originally by a committee led by Benjamin Bloom, which identifies an order of development for intellectual or critical thinking skills (Bloom, 1956). This classification system has been widely used throughout the field of education and is unilaterally used as a planning tool by teachers for constructing increasingly demanding intellectual activities. Students can enter the secondary school system with a wide range of abilities, from very rigorous academic backgrounds to very limited schooling (Cobb, 2004).

The goal of students is to become fully English proficient (FEP) and transition into regular American classrooms and succeed academically and economically. As the matrix

indicates, the top right quadrant (FEP) is the direction of intended learning (arrow). Using this matrix and connecting it with an understanding of different abilities based on Cummins (1979) work, along with expectations of potential progress and levels of ability according to Bloom's taxonomy, we can look at each of the three subgroups and understand their linguistic and literacy needs and abilities. Armed with that understanding and the indications of Vygotsky's and Krashen's accepted theories of learning and second language acquisition, we can look at the available educational tools and techniques (best practices) suited to meet the needs of learners who fall into each category. Distinguishing subgroup-related educational issues is critical because each subgroup faces different challenges and requires a different approach (Gershberg, Dannenberg & Sanchez, 2004).

Lastly, we can decide if these practices can or cannot be utilized by one teacher with a classroom constituency consisting of students that come from all three subgroups. If we recognize such divergence in needs and applicable best practices as to preclude successful outcomes for students placed together in one classroom, that is to say, that differentiated instruction cannot occur without differentiated placement, then we are compelled to look at whether our current secondary school placement practices help or hinder us in differentiating students according to these subgroups when they begin their academic journey through our secondary educational systems.

HLNI students are particularly affected when they are placed in classes aimed at developing low-level reading and word identification skills (Allington, 1991). They tend to develop greater English proficiency (Linguanti, 1999) and do so more quickly than other subgroups. Among them are many "gifted" students, whose needs include differentiated curriculum, with a higher level of expectation with respect to content and process as well as a desire for advancement, depth and

complexity (Van Tassel-Baska, 2003). As new immigrants, these students tend to be highly motivated to learn (Ogbu, 1991) and present few disciplinary problems in the classroom. According to recommendations for serving the gifted immigrant population of students, they need to be identified and placed according to their educational background and potential (Harris, 1993). Thomas and Collier (1996) found that HLNI benefit most from an emphasis in part on higher order thinking skills and cooperative group work.

Additionally, these students fare better in immersion than bilingual programs (Krashen, 2005), because the development of oral fluency is best accomplished through extensive opportunities for conversation with native speakers while the advantages of the accelerated cognitive abilities of bilinguals “kicks in” as soon as a minimal level of proficiency has been reached in English. Not surprisingly, rather than negatively affecting school status, high concentrations of these new immigrants in schools results in higher overall standardized test scores (Gershberg et al., 2004).

Many LTLEP students are not fully literate in any language and have been held back in earlier grades. Bilingual programs at the secondary school level are not useful for them, not only because they do not have the extended time for such a program, but also because while they may speak Spanish, they are often less familiar with Spanish grammar and do not have literacy skills in Spanish in order to benefit from bilingual education. Teachers certified in TESOL, specialized in SLA, may not be the most knowledgeable in helping these students because the field of psycholinguistics does not address issues of comprehension development or teach about the process of how to make sense of decoded text.

Long Term LEPs have high BICS ability; they are orally as fluent as many native (born in the U.S.) Americans and are familiar with the American school system and culture. As the matrix indicates, these students have an uphill battle developing the academic and literacy skills required to succeed in high school and gain economically viable skills. LTLEPs have difficulties reading and



understanding context-reduced information; the kind of understanding that is required to ensure higher level academic success. Having limited formal schooling and/or unsuccessful experiences with schooling, these students do not enjoy coming to school, sometimes they have not developed appropriate school related behaviors to allow them to avoid punitive school measures that attempt to coerce their cooperation with the academic behavioral setting requirements. These students often need explicit instruction in learning how to organize information and take notes. They have not been exposed to a broad array of literature and have not developed an enjoyment of reading a variety of genres, many operate at a significant enough deficit to warrant express instruction in basic reading skills; they are unfamiliar with decoding and phonics and have reading fluency levels anywhere from second to 5<sup>th</sup> grade level (Archer, Gleason, & Vachon, 2003).

Unfortunately, USNI suffer from many of the issues of both LTLEPs and HLNIs. These students come predominantly from low socioeconomic backgrounds and have low or no native language literacy skills and limited formal education (Short, 1998). Like their immigrant counterparts, HLNI, they lack knowledge of the new culture and have suffered recent loss of relatives, familiar communities, and the security of living in surroundings they have been accustomed to. Further, they are unable to communicate in the new language, and their schooling is sometimes so limited that they do not even have knowledge of the most basic skills, such as how to hold and use a pencil or pen, print or write letters; they may need instruction in how to write on a lined sheet of paper (Enfield, 2005).

These students lack both BICS and CALP and have extensive literacy and linguistic needs. When their needs go unmet, they become the LTLEPs of tomorrow. Beyond lacking content knowledge or schemata and being unable to read, USNI may not have been exposed to the formal schooling environment and have little or no experience of appropriate and necessary “school” behaviors, such as sitting for lengths of time at a desk, working with other students in a group, and whether they can bring food to eat into the classroom,. Entering at the secondary

school level, these students have no time to waste in acquiring basic literacy and economic survival skills. To be successful in the limited time available, they need intensive tutoring, consistent emotional and academic support, and the best of available resources to help them. These students are very poor readers and “must have their phonological skills strengthened because the inability to identify speech sounds erodes spelling, word recognition, and vocabulary development” (Moats, 2002).

Teachers of ELLs are instructed to provide opportunities for cooperative learning as a solution to the incredibly diverse nature of their classroom constituencies (Cohen, E.G., 1994; Iddings, Jacobs, & McCafferty, 2006; Kagan, S., 1993). They are also given some tools, such as remedial reading programs, to help them address the needs of their students. However, the extreme differences that exist among these students negate the positive intended effects of collaborative learning and often result in hindering rather than helping students to succeed in acquiring necessary language skills. HLNIIs do not have ‘more capable peers’ to assist them in small groups to mediate in developing their cognitive skills, while LTLEPs do not have ‘more capable peers’ to help them improve their fossilized oral fluency. Instead, this fossilized interlanguage may be passed on to new immigrants. Teachers’ efforts then must be redoubled, not only to teach English, but additionally, to undo the harm caused by incorrect modeling.

When classes for ELLs implement remedial reading programs that are intended to develop literacy skills for LTLEPs, these programs fail to meet the educational needs of HLNIIs. HLNIIs may not be ready to read aloud because they are operating in Krashen’s initial ‘silent period’ (Krashen, 1988), and their inability to read is related to pronunciation rather than literacy issues. Further, HLNIIs may within a very brief time frame be ready to understand higher level academic texts based on their capacity to gain meaning through cognates and their analytic skills, while some remedial reading interventions focus on simpler words and the understanding of less cognitively demanding texts, along with exercises meant to develop basic critical thinking skills. Even when

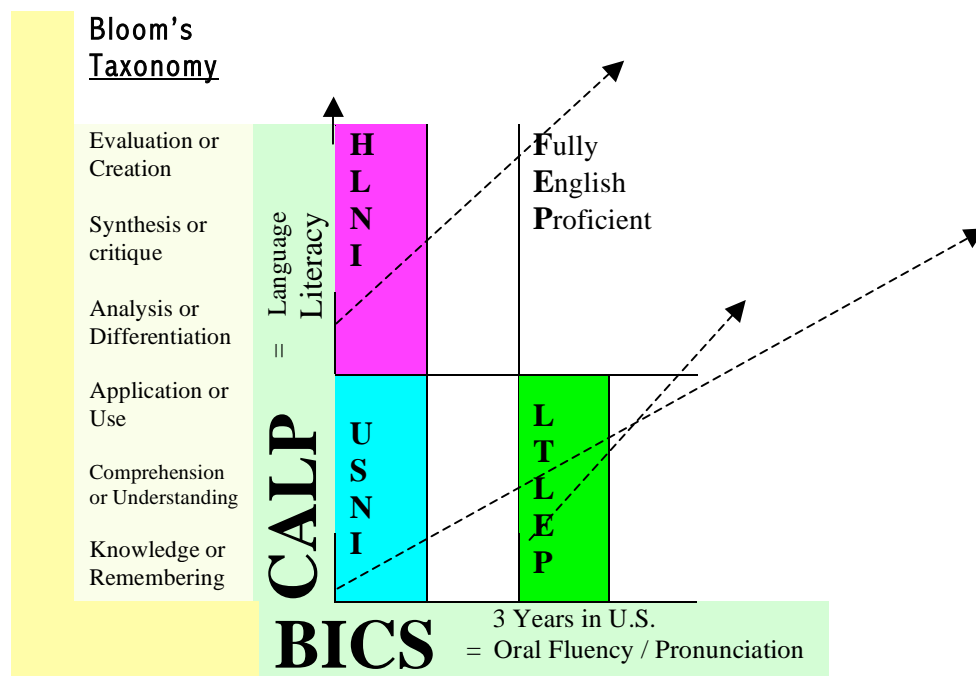
HLNIs participate in class work related to the needs of LTLEPs, they cannot assist LTLEPs with reading because they are not yet able to pronounce the advanced words they may recognize; they lack oral fluency. Translation is not an option when LTLEPs have little or no L1 fluency and new immigrants have limited or no L2 fluency. Of course, these issues are further exacerbated when the classroom contains a majority of students with a common L1 and only a few students who speak a different L1 such as Serbian, Turkish, or Afrikaans. These extremely ‘in the minority’ students not only fail to get the help they need, their efforts to learn English are compounded by hearing Spanish spoken by the majority of the students as well as by the cultural rejection that they experience in these classrooms.

LTLEPs are handicapped by the necessary focus on oral pronunciation exercises and efforts to initially explain and practice using simple nouns and verbs. The time spent on linguistic work of this kind for the sake of HLNIs and USNIs is a strong source of continued frustration and demotivation for LTLEPs, who vent their stress by attempting to gain attention in ways that result in their eventual expulsion from school. On the other hand, HLNIs often understand grammar lessons after one or two examples are given, while LTLEPs and USNIs struggle for weeks or much longer to understand the same grammatical structures. When teachers test students on these topics, they often face difficult decisions. The HLNIs understand the material and are both ready and want to continue learning new material, which they need to do in an accelerated fashion if they are not to be held back rather than helped to move forward in their learning process. However, LTLEPs and USNIs need extensive continued explanation and practice in class. Grammar is not easily made into a cooperative learning activity and the groups in the class cannot simply ‘explain’ the material to one another. Well-intentioned teachers do not make these decisions lightly and incur tremendous stress in their efforts to provide the differentiated instruction these students need.

Culturally responsive instruction recognizes diversity among students in terms of a variety of aspects of their culture, including family values, student interests, and attitudes toward educational

objectives. The failure to provide culturally responsive, meaningful instruction contributes to problematic student behavior that ELL teachers deal with in their classrooms. If we recognize the notion of a zone of proximal development related to cultural characteristics that are made visible in perceptions of motivation and classroom behaviors, we recognize that these aspects also vary greatly between the subgroups and that undifferentiated placement increases classroom management issues, which only compounds the difficult task of successful teaching and learning in ELL classrooms. The lack of commonality in literacy, oral fluency, social and motivational factors, and critical thinking skills are reflected in the following diagram:

ELL subgroup ZPD and i+1 areas



NOTE: Although the degree and rate of learning may vary, it is unlikely that the zone of proximal development or the level of i+1 are in common areas for the purposes of teacher scaffolding and instruction.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis suggests that when the input provided for second language acquisition is too far away from a student's level of current L2 proficiency, it fails to help them learn because it is not 'comprehensible input' (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Although the Interaction Hypothesis promotes social interaction as a means to negotiate meaning and improve second language acquisition (Long, 1981), it assumes that interaction is occurring between students of a range of L1s to force negotiated meaning through the use of the common L2. It applies less, if at all, to ELL classes with students predominantly speaking a common L1. It also does not consider the effects of fossilization in LTLEP speech that can transfer to the whole speech community (Stander, 1998).

Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) assumes the provision of scaffolding by a teacher or more capable peer. The teacher must determine what that zone is for each student, knowing that if instruction falls outside the ZPD, either above or below it, no growth will occur. The oral fluency of LTLEPs is outside the ZPD of HLNIs and USNIs, while the cognitive skills used by HLNIs is often beyond the range of the ZPD for both USNIs and LTLEPs. It is not adequate to place these students, so vastly differing in abilities and needs, in classrooms that provide them with cooperative activities and claim to have provided appropriate interventions to help ELLs catch up to achievement levels of their counterparts in regular classrooms. Reciprocal teaching and teacher scaffolding can be effective in classrooms where the range of student skills is such that they near each other's ZPD and the teacher can provide comprehensible input routinely at the  $i+1$  level for a majority of the students, but the range of linguistic and literacy needs and abilities in ELL classrooms precludes successful differentiated teaching.

While Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mandates quality instruction and demands accountability through assessment, it allows for local flexibility in choosing the means of serving the needs of ELLs. To test our hypothesis that students requiring distinct teaching strategies and programs are not adequately differentiated during the placement process, we conducted a nationwide survey of representative high schools. Two descriptive surveys were developed for this purpose.

The surveys targeted a representative sample of 50 schools, located in 6 different states, with a broad range of school programs and systems. While the bulk of our data (60%) came from districts identified as having the largest numbers of English Language Learners, some rural schools and those that have only recently gained a substantial population of ELLs were also surveyed. In total, we received 40 responses to questionnaires, providing an 80% response rate. The total number of English Language Learners represented through these surveys is ~ 5,500 students. Survey participation included 5 of the 6 states with the largest number of ELLs, and 4 of the top 10 districts enrolling the largest number of ELLs in the United States.

The first survey was completed by classroom teachers, who identified classroom issues arising from the mixed constituency of students, while the second survey, detailing processes at individual schools, was completed on-line by school ELL coordinators. In conjunction with feedback and research, a prototype instrument was developed to facilitate identification of different groups of ELLs based on language facility and literacy skills. The surveys are presented and discussed below.

## TEACHER SURVEY – HIGH SCHOOL ELL PLACEMENT PRACTICES

Research indicates that 3 distinct subgroups of English Language Learners may require differentiated instruction. A brief summary of these subgroups is provided:

<b>HLNI (High Literacy New Immigrant)</b>	<b>USNI (Under Schooled New Immigrant)</b>	<b>LTLEP (Long Term LEP)</b>
Recently arrived (less than 4 years)	Recently arrived (less than 4 years)	More than 5 years in American schools
Adequate prior formal schooling	Have experienced interrupted schooling	Perform poorly on standardized tests
Have strong literacy skills in their native language	Have limited native language literacy skills	Have difficulty reading and below grade level literacy skills
Demonstrate potential to learn English quickly	Have difficulty following what is taught	Have difficulty paying attention
Understand rules of grammar when taught	Appear lost and do not grasp language rules	Do not seem to grasp rules of grammar
Are motivated and behave well in class	Avoid participating and have difficulty doing assignments	Don't turn in assignments and seldom stay on task
Stay on task and try to do assignments		Need attention due to behavioral issues

Please answer the following questions:

**Are there students in your classroom that appear to belong to these 3 subgroups?** YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

*Percent YES 100% All teachers surveyed indicated they recognize students belonging to the described subgroup categories*

**Can you identify students from more than one of these subgroups in your class?** YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

*Percent YES 100% All teachers indicated they had more than one subgroup in their class*

**Do you recognize any differences in the instructional needs of these subgroups?** YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

*Percent YES 95% Almost all indicated that they recognize clearly different needs and characteristics for each group*

**Can you identify some of those differences?**

*Comments USNI need more basic skills help/phonics (5) – HLNI need more content and to accelerate learning (8) – are motivated/independent (2) LTLEP need: more real world training (1) – have discipline issues (3) – lower literacy (4) – lack motivation (3) – may never do well in school (1)*

**Do you see distinct classroom management issues stemming from unmet differentiated learning needs of the subgroups?** YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

*Percent YES 90% Teachers recognize classroom problems arising from placing subgroups together*

**Do you think some of your classroom management issues might diminish if these subgroups were not grouped together in one classroom (differentiated placement)?** YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

*Percent YES 80% Most teachers believe they would have less discipline problems with differentiated placement*

**Do you think some of your students need different curriculums-methodologies?** YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

*Percent YES 85% Most recognize subgroups need different teaching strategies and curriculum*

**Are the literacy needs of your long term LEPs being adequately met by their placement in a classroom with students who speak little or no English?** **YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_**  


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*Percent NO 85% Teachers indicate literacy needs of LTLEP are NOT met in undifferentiated classes (Exception: Newcomer Centers)*

**Do you think the heterogeneous grouping of students in your classroom might be negatively affecting the motivation of some of your students?** **YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_**  


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*Percent YES 70% Teachers recognize lack of differentiation in placement diminishes motivation (exception: Newcomer Centers)*

**Does the presence of long term LEPs hinder or help the development of oral fluency for your newer immigrant students?** **Hinder \_\_\_ Help \_\_\_**  


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*% choosing 65% A majority of teachers believe LTLEPs do NOT improve oral fluency for (Hinder) new immigrants*

**Would differentiated placement work better than your efforts to differentiate teaching through small groups and individual tutoring?** **YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_**  


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*Percent YES 75% Most teachers would like students placed separately (Exception: Newcomer Centers)*

**Does the undifferentiated placement of these subgroups make it more difficult to implement small group work or to give individual attention to students?** **YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_**  


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*Percent YES 80% Teachers have difficulties using cooperative learning techniques when these subgroups are all together (Exception: Newcomer Centers)*

**Would it help to place these students in groups according to their level of linguistic versus literacy needs?** **YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_**  


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*Percent YES 85% Most teachers think these students should be differentiated in placement based on linguistic/literacy needs*

**Please provide additional comments:**

*Comments USNI need better materials and curriculum – the worst thing is to put LTLEP together with HLNI and USNI – USNI can learn from HLNI and be placed together*

**CONCLUSIONS:**

The overwhelming majority of teachers indicated that these subgroups require differentiation in placement and that their needs are not being met through efforts to instruct them together in one classroom. Newcomer Centers only have USNI and HLNI, although even they commented that once students leave the centers and go into the school system proper, they face the above situation and “get lost” by being placed all together.



The second survey, the ELL Coordinator survey, can be viewed at the following web link:

<https://desktop.websurveyor.net/wswebtop.dll/WSPubReport?esid=104455&subaccountid=65835>.

Here we will summarize the findings. Responses confirmed that assessment tools are extremely varied and do not appropriately evaluate English Language Learner student abilities. There is great variation in who can administer tests, often those giving and scoring them are not TESOL professionals, nor are they certified in ESOL. Training is limited to administration and scoring processes and there exists a possibility of subjective interpretations, making the process more of an art than a science. Only half of the schools surveyed indicated efforts at determining literacy levels, despite the fact that LTLEPs can be tested for English literacy and are often the subgroup requiring the most help in this area.

Although most schools had career training programs, requirements related to grades and not failing classes often precluded ELLs from accessing these programs; almost no schools have the ability to test for career skills and interests, despite the fact that most ELL coordinators and district personnel commented on the urgent need for career skills development for English language learners.

Although schools have a thirty day window to test and evaluate students for placement, and most claim to complete the testing and placement process within 20 days, 95% placed students into classes upon arrival to school and prior to receiving results of test scores. Students are seldom moved from this original placement. Half the schools surveyed had a committee in place to determine placement, which required the participation of a parent. However, the majority indicated that these meetings took place during school hours, parents often had difficulty

attending meetings, and that meetings were often postponed due to scheduling problems.

When asked what kinds of changes they would like to see, 12% indicated they wanted less testing, 15% more career oriented training, 18% requested more staff training, and 56% mentioned a lack of appropriate textbooks, alternate learning models, ability to meet student learning needs, and student grouping. In total, 88% of the comments reflected ELL students were not receiving appropriate curriculum or were not placed according to their learning needs.

#### CONCLUSIONS:

Information collected indicates that placement practices do not differentiate between three distinct ELL subgroups requiring significantly differing approaches. The failure to differentiate subgroups is based in part on variability in testing, knowledge of testing personnel, and the lack of tools to differentiate students according to linguistic and literacy needs and abilities. The teacher survey strongly reinforced implications of the on-line ELL Coordinator survey, stating clearly that (a) students are not differentiated adequately during placement, and (b) this lack of differentiation poses problems and issues in the classroom that hinder effective differentiated instruction. Comments from district level personnel reiterated the need for better assessment and placement of English Language Learners.

Implications of our surveys include the following: School administrators and teachers recognize the lack of differentiation and its impact on efforts to improve educational outcomes for ELLs. The current system is unable, given its setup, to provide adequate differentiation during the placement process. There is a desire for change and a willingness to consider

alternatives on the part of teachers, school and district personnel.

One of these alternatives is the Differential Placement Quality Control Model (DPQCM), developed as a result of the study and pictured below. While it is not meant to replace other assessments, it can serve to identify and confirm characteristics of a given student in light of the three subgroups, provide schools and teachers with an overview of student needs and potential, and pave the way to discovering school and community resources to meet those needs. The instruction sheet, guidelines for scoring and placement rubric (not pictured here) can be requested from the author.

### Differentiated Placement Quality Control Model

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Last First

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Placement: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please review accompanying instruction sheet prior to completing or scoring. Based on available records and/or information gathered from student and/or parents**

#### CHECKOR WRITE IN APPROPRIATE ANSWERS

Information to be Reviewed	YES	NO	Not Sure or Unknown	Information Source
1. Student has been in U.S. schools for more than 4 years	_____	_____	_____	Date entered US Schools: _____
2. There is evidence of continuous, formal schooling	_____	_____	_____	Check(✓) source(s) of evidence: Interview: ___Student ___Parent Documentation: ___School records Other: _____
3. There is evidence of parental education beyond high school	_____	_____	_____	Check(✓) source(s) of evidence: Interview: ___Student ___Parent Other: _____
4. Student responds easily to simple questions in English	_____	_____	_____	<b>OBSERVATIONS:</b>
5. Student speaks English with little (or no) accent	_____	_____	_____	

6. Student demonstrates ability to form letters, words and/or phrases quickly and easily using print and/or cursive	_____	_____	_____
7. Student demonstrates the ability to use a dictionary without signs of confusion or difficulty (be sure he/she understands the task)	_____	_____	_____
8. Student performs numerical operations quickly and efficiently	_____	_____	_____
9. Student appears to transfer knowledge of cognates	_____	_____	_____
10. Student engages in conversational English without hesitation in speaking	_____	_____	_____

This prototype model, accompanying instruction sheet and placement guidelines are being further tested in the next phase of our ongoing research into English language learner placement practices. Working with school districts, we will provide training for teachers and administrators in a systems-oriented strategy of decision making that incorporates using the DPQCM, and quickly identifying available school and community resources for meeting individual ELL student needs. Our approach is based on the understanding that earlier identification of student needs, and more effective placement into available, appropriate programs can improve outcomes for both ELL students and schools.

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