

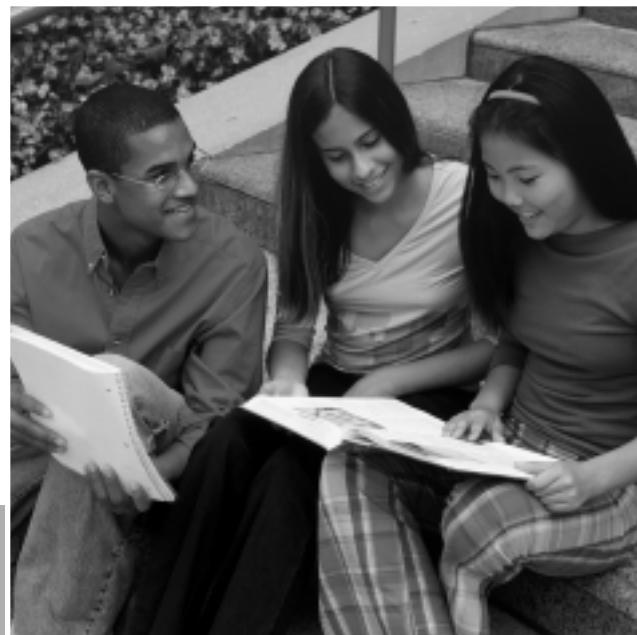
## CHAPTER 3

# Characteristics of Second Language Acquisition, Cultural Diversity, and Learning/Behavior Disabilities

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### Significance to Contemporary Educational Contexts

FUNDAMENTAL TO ACCURATELY DIFFERENTIATING LEARNING DIFFERENCES from academic or behavior disorders is a working knowledge of the major learning/behavior characteristics reflective of second language acquisition, diverse cultural values and norms, as well as learning disabilities and behavioral disorders. Diverse learners exhibit expected behaviors as they acquire a second language (e.g., English) and/or adapt to a new cultural environment (e.g., school or classroom). These selected behaviors may appear similar to those typically associated with intrinsic learning or behavior disorders. This is significant in today's schools in that the implementation of multi-tiered learning and response to intervention must assist educators to better clarify linguistic and culturally appropriate behaviors to avoid the continuation of misinterpreting these behaviors as disability characteristics. Only by understanding all three areas (linguistic differences, cultural diversity, and disabilities) can educators make informed decisions concerning the needs of diverse learners.



## Overview

The typical and expected behaviors and characteristics associated with acquiring English as a second language and those associated with various cultural norms are discussed. We then present learning and behavior characteristics associated with learning and behavior disorders. The chapter concludes by comparing and contrasting cultural and linguistic behaviors with those of disabilities to best reduce misinterpreting learning differences as disabilities.

## Key Topics

- ▶ second language acquisition
- ▶ interlanguage
- ▶ code switching
- ▶ cultural diversity
- ▶ learning disabilities
- ▶ behavior disorders

## Learner Outcomes

Upon completion of this chapter, the reader will be able to:

1. Articulate the process of acquiring English as a second language.
2. Identify learning behaviors typically exhibited within the main stages of second language acquisition.
3. Describe cultural diversity in today's classrooms including behaviors, values, and norms.
4. Describe behaviors and characteristics typically associated with learning disabilities and behavior disorders.
5. Compare and contrast cultural/linguistic behaviors with those associated with learning and behavior disabilities.

## INTRODUCTION

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The basic premise of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001) is that student achievement in public schools must improve for all including diverse learners and students with disabilities. However, there are significant challenges confronting diverse learners in the high-stakes assessment era because these students continue to be misdiagnosed as having a disability. The fact that these students continue to be misidentified for special education is evidence that there needs to be a clearer understanding of the differences between a disability

and cultural/linguistic diversity prior to referral and/or placement into special education. The literature on this topic indicates that despite the continued growth in the number of diverse learners, most schools are inadequately prepared to address their needs. As discussed in Chapter 1, a most significant challenge in addressing learning or behavior disabilities is distinguishing between second language acquisition and cultural diversity and disabilities. To best make these distinctions, an understanding and comparison of second language development, diverse cultural values, as well as disability characteristics is necessary.



## Characteristics of Second Language Acquisition, Cultural Diversity, and Disabilities

The complexity of deciphering between the inherent characteristics associated with cultural and linguistic needs and a learning or behavior disability can become quite challenging when the question of whether a diverse learner has a disability arises. We begin by providing an overview of second language acquisition with specific emphasis placed on the behaviors typically expected as a learner is progressing through various stages of language acquisition. This is followed by a discussion of cultural diversity and various behaviors reflecting different values and norms. Specific behaviors often associated with learning disabilities and behavior disorders are then presented.

### Second Language Acquisition

Second language acquisition is a process that is influenced by several cognitive and environmental factors (Cummins, 2000; Hamayan & Damico, 1991). These include:

- *Age.* Children who begin the process of learning English as a second language during their early childhood years generally achieve higher levels of proficiency (Krashen, Long, & Scarcella, 1979).
- *Acculturation.* Patterns of second language use will take learners longer to internalize over the more outward aspects of a new culture (e.g., clothing styles, music) (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003).
- *Attitude and Motivation.* A positive attitude along with high levels of motivation are important aspects necessary to achieve proficiency in a second language (Hamayan & Damico, 1991).
- *Learning Style.* A learner's culturally influenced preferred styles of learning may differ from the teacher's preferred styles of teaching, resulting in an inadequate learning progress (Grossman, 1995), including progress toward learning a second language.

- *Native Language Proficiency.* Proficiency in the student's first language provides the foundation for successfully acquiring a second language (Coyne, Kame'enui, & Carnine, 2007; Cummins, 1989).
- *Community/Family.* Cultural and linguistic values and abilities are essential to successful second language acquisition (Baca & Cervantes, 2004).

These and related ecological factors are not all-inclusive and others apply. However, at a minimum, these need to be considered in the overall process of second language acquisition. It is beyond the scope of this book nor its purpose to provide detailed discussion about the development of a second language and the reader is referred to Cummins (2000), Ovando, Collier, and Combs (2003), and Hamayan and Damico (1991) for comprehensive coverage of this topic. Rather, we are attempting to identify expected behaviors often associated with the development of a second language (and misinterpreted as a disability), acknowledging that various cognitive and environmental factors influence this development.

Therefore, of significant concern to educators is the need to recognize that behaviors, which appear to be related to a disorder, are in fact expected and typical based on the learner's stage or level of second language acquisition. The following discussion addresses some of these primary learning behaviors associated with defined stages of second language acquisition (Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Cummins, 2000; Grossman, 1995; Hoover et al., 2008; Ovando, Collier & Combs, 2003).

- *Stage 1: Silent.* This is an active listening stage during which little English may be spoken and the learner relies on simple yes/no-type responses and on nonverbal communication. The learner, during the silent stage, may experience confusion with locus of control, poor attention, and exhibit shy or withdrawn behaviors.
- *Stage 2: Production.* During the second stage of development, the student "produces" language on a regular basis. Students in this stage generally begin with 1,000 or so words that they use and understand and further develop up to 3,000 words. Verbal expression contains short phrases or simple sentences. Initially, students may experience frustration and make grammatical errors.
- *Stage 3: Intermediate.* At this stage of second language development, a learner understands and uses approximately 6,000 words. The student begins to approach age-appropriate language use and is capable of generating complex sentences and providing opinions. Written language becomes more efficient; however, the learner in this stage may continue to make periodic errors in speech, reading, and/or writing (e.g., syntax, grammar, vocabulary, punctuation).

- *Stage 4: Advanced.* During the advanced stage, the learner is further developing and refining second language skills and abilities generally commensurate with age. Language uses, fluency, and written language skills are similar to age-level peers. Expressive and receptive language comprehension is also at an advanced level with few errors being made in using the second language.

In addition to these behaviors and learning characteristics, two specific patterns of second language usage must be understood and recognized to best differentiate learning difference from disability. These are *interlanguage* and *code switching*.

- *Interlanguage.* As students acquire a second language, they access their internal language system, which includes features such as English language rules, native language rules, and various universal language aspects common to many languages (Hamayan & Damico, 1991; Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003). These authors wrote further that these interlanguage characteristics may initially result in the use of English not reflective of native English speakers. This may include deviations from the standard word order in English, improper grammar usage, or other evidences of confusion with more complex sentence and grammar structures. Two important ideas must be understood to best serve learners acquiring a second language and to avoid misdiagnosis of a disability: The development of interlanguage follows a natural and systematic process and is not mastered easily or quickly, and as learners progress through the stages of acquisition their errors and confusion with various aspects of the second language are reduced, resulting in mastery of the second language over time (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003). As a result, behaviors associated with normal interlanguage development must not be misinterpreted as cognitive deficits or evidence of emotional disorders.
- *Code Switching.* Another set of behaviors that reflect the complex systems associated with acquiring and using a second language is the practice of code switching. Code switching occurs as speakers shift across different grammatical structures, such as beginning a sentence using words in English while ending that same sentence with words from another language (e.g., French, Spanish, Hmong) (Hamayan & Damico, 1991). According to Ovando, Collier, and Combs (2003), code switching is both predictable and useful in the overall communication where second language acquisition is involved. Code switching is often misinterpreted as a deficit in language development or usage, rather than as the useful and higher-level language skill it is in communication.

The learners' experiences, what they are exposed to, and the opportunities for learning and development play a critical role in acquiring a second language.

Knowledge of behaviors associated with the various stages of second language development along with interlanguage and code-switching abilities provide a solid foundation for problem-solving teams to avoid misrepresenting typical, normal, and expected language errors or problems commonly found within the second language development process, as language disorders.

## **Cultural Diversity**

Interrelated with second language acquisition needs, behaviors, and characteristics are the many values, norms, customs, and behaviors associated with cultural diversity. Challenges face learners as they attempt to adjust to a new culture, creating situations in which misinterpretation of culturally valued behaviors are seen by educators as learning or behavior disorders. In addition to language, many factors reflect diverse cultural experiences of learners such as learning styles; previous educational experiences; or family/community views toward education, respect, time, belongings, and individual achievement (Grossman, 1995; Hoover & Collier, 1985). Differentiating behavior differences from disorders requires educators to understand the learners' cultures and how those cultures teach and view different behaviors. It is not possible, nor productive, to identify all diverse behaviors that are frequently misdiagnosed as disorders; rather, some typical examples are presented in Baca and Cervantes (2004), Grossman (1995), Hoover et al. (2008), Hoover and Collier (1985), and Winzer and Mazurek (1998). These examples are not all-inclusive and are presented to emphasize the critical importance of knowing the cultures within which you teach prior to making judgments concerning a possible disability.

**COOPERATIVE VERSUS COMPETITIVE LEARNING** ■ “Cultures differ in the degree to which they stress cooperation, competition, and individualism” (Grossman, 1995, p. 324). In some cultures, cooperatively sharing information is encouraged and supported. In schools, this may be misinterpreted as copying or cheating (Smith, 1991). Conversely, some cultures teach children to be self-reliant, when completing work and solving problems (Grossman, 1995). This should not be misinterpreted as an inability to work with others or as conflict-generating behaviors. Within many cultures, however, cooperative learning is preferred over competitive learning which, for many students, presents significant problems should the classroom instruction be independent and competitive based. Knowing a diverse learner's cultural views toward cooperative versus competitive learning is essential to avoid misinterpreting such behaviors as indifferent, avoidance, or lazy (Winzer & Mazurek, 1998).

**ACTIVE AND PASSIVE LEARNING** ■ In addition to issues of cooperative and competitive learning, cultures vary on how they prefer to emphasize active and passive learning (Grossman, 1995). Students who prefer passive learning are taught to sit quietly, be attentive, and respond verbally only when asked or

called upon in the classroom. Educators who prefer a more active posture in learning may misinterpret these behaviors as shyness, laziness, or emotionally based insecurity to an extreme. Although “active participatory learning has proven to be more effective than passive learning for most students” (Grossman, 1995, p. 312), not all students come to school ready for active learning and must be taught this way of education. These preferences for learning also include cultural values pertaining to the extent that learning should be teacher or student directed. A learner’s inability to assume active learning in school should not automatically be considered a problem, and must be considered relative to the cultural values of that student.

**MOTIVATION** ■ The extent to which a student is motivated to learn also has underpinnings in cultural values and norms. For example, how the home supports learning is one of the key elements to motivation (Winzer & Mazurek, 1998). If a culture teaches that certain fields of study or careers are more male or female specific, then motivation to succeed with different subjects may be culturally based. The cultural backgrounds of students provide a foundation for shaping how students view various aspects of education, and the importance of these must be known prior to considering lack of motivation as a characteristic of a disability rather than cultural preference.

**AGGRESSION** ■ Behaviors typically associated with aggression (e.g., defending oneself, strong verbal expression of views) may be encouraged and taught in different cultures (Nazarro, 1981). Tolerance of aggressive behaviors may vary across cultures, and educators must be familiar with cultural expectations concerning aggression prior to labeling it as a behavior disorder. In addition, students new to U.S. school settings may be unfamiliar with acceptable behaviors, which in some instances are more restrictive to the student than in previous settings or cultural preferences (Hoover & Collier, 1985). It is important to note that aggressive behavior that is hurtful or harmful to others is not to be tolerated; rather, culturally based aggression often becomes an issue for educators, not when it is hurtful, but when it becomes more assertive than typically preferred by the teacher. However, this more assertive behavior is not to be misinterpreted as a disorder if the student is behaving in a culturally taught manner.

**LOCUS OF CONTROL** ■ Locus of control refers to the extent to which learners perceive whether they are controlled by internal or external forces (Hallahan et al., 2005). Student perceptions of locus of control vary significantly across cultures (Grossman, 1995). In some cultures, students believe that certain events (e.g., success, control over one’s own future, responsibility for certain things) are out of one’s control. This *external* locus of control perception drives how and to what extent various life tasks are undertaken. In other cultures a more *internal* locus of control (i.e., in charge of one’s own efforts, future) prevails, which in turn drives task completion and views toward achievement of

goals (Hoover & Collier, 2004). Although many educators strive to assist learners to achieve internal locus of control, for many diverse learners external locus of control is a cultural value and/or a temporary expected result as students adjust to new cultural environments (i.e., acculturation), and should not be viewed as a disorder.

**ACCULTURATION** ■ In addition to acculturation affecting the process of second language acquisition, it has specific implications when considering a diverse learner for a suspected behavior disorder. Diverse learners who are acculturating to a new educational environment may find this experience highly stressful and difficult to manage (Hoover & Collier, 2004). The stress and confusion often associated with acculturation may be evident in several behaviors considered disruptive in school, including withdrawal, aggressive acting out, distractibility, or confusion with locus of control. Educators must consider potential behavior problems relative to the acculturation levels diverse learners are experiencing. As learners become more acculturated to the school and learning environment, the side-effect behaviors of acculturation will diminish, clearly indicating the lack of a behavior disorder.

**TEACHING/LEARNING STYLE COMPATIBILITY** ■ A student's consistent preferences and patterns used to complete learning tasks reflect learning styles (Winzer & Mazurek, 1998). Diverse learners often experience difficulty with instruction "because their learning and behavior styles do not match their teachers' instructional styles" (Grossman, 1995, p. 139). All too often, we see learners considered for special education due to their inability to learn or behave, presumably because of some deficit; in reality, the suspected problem is a result of incompatibility between teaching style and learning style. Prior to moving ahead with any formal consideration of suspected academic or behavior problems as disabilities, the teaching and learning style compatibility should be identified. Determination of a learning difference or a disability must be grounded in the knowledge that compatible teaching-learning styles prevail, providing the student with culturally responsive education and sufficient opportunities based on cultural values and linguistic needs. The following section describes five cognitive learning styles frequently discussed in the literature for diverse learners (Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Hoover & Collier, 2003; Winzer & Mazurek, 1998). Comparison of teacher instructional styles and students' preferred styles of learning is facilitated in several guides included in this section.

**COGNITIVE LEARNING STYLES** ■ The manner in which a student organizes and processes information reflects one's cognitive learning style (Winzer & Mazurek, 1998). Consideration of cognitive styles is particularly relevant to diverse learners as research suggests that "there is a link between cultural back-



ground and approaches to learning” (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003, p. 215). A variety of cognitive learning styles exist and it is beyond the scope of this book to provide detailed coverage of each style. For our purposes, we need to understand that cultural background influences preferred cognitive styles and that these preferences must be accommodated to provide culturally responsive education and compatible teaching instruction. Five cognitive learning styles exhibited by diverse learners follow, which may be reflective of cultural norms; styles that may be evident in the classroom that should not be misinterpreted as disorders if they differ from preferred instructional styles. These include:

1. *Field Dependent-Independent Styles.* Field-dependent learners prefer to view a pattern in its entirety rather than constituent parts. They have difficulty focusing on individual aspects or parts of a pattern or task. Field-independent learners have the ability to separate parts from the whole and attend to individual details (Winzer & Mazurek, 1998).
2. *Tempo-Reflective/Impulsive Styles.* Learners who spend time thinking through and analyzing an issue or topic prior to generating a response are demonstrating a reflective tempo or style. Those who are more spontaneous and immediate in their response to tasks or issues demonstrate an impulsive cognitive learning style (Grossman, 1995).
3. *High-Low Tolerance Styles.* A learner who prefers situations to be highly structured and consistent with little change in routine reflects a low tolerant cognitive style. Those who are highly flexible, prefer variation, and who may experience problems with rigid structure demonstrate a preference toward a highly tolerant cognitive style (McLaughlin, 1985).
4. *Broad-Narrow Categorization Styles.* Learners who emphasize inclusion of most ideas, topics, or issues in completion of tasks are considered broad categorizers. These students tend to group or cluster both primary and secondary items minimizing the possibility of omitting something important or significant. In contrast, a narrow categorizer is much more selective in what to include or exclude in a task or assignment. Students who prefer a narrow categorization style are highly detailed and exclusive in how they approach tasks, and tend to only identify the most important purpose of the assignment (Hoover & Collier, 2003; McLaughlin, 1985).
5. *High-Low Persistence Styles.* Highly persistent learners are very focused and determined to complete a task or solve a problem. These learners do not give up until they have resolved whatever it is they are working on or attempting to complete. A low persistent style is characterized by giving up easily, frequent distractions, and have difficulty remaining on-task. These learners rely heavily on skimming and scanning abilities, avoiding significant attention to detail, and desiring frequent changes (Hoover & Collier, 2003).

As one can see, learners approach tasks and problem-solving situations along a continuum relative to each cognitive learning style. Educators should be aware of these different preferred cognitive learning styles and consider them relative to teacher instructional styles. Particular cognitive learning styles may differ from typically accepted or preferred classroom practices. However, for diverse learners these may reflect cultural norms, acculturation, or second language acquisition needs and should not be misinterpreted as disorders. Low persistence or a highly reflective style may more accurately indicate a learner's stage of second language acquisition or acculturation level rather than any indication of a learning or behavioral disability. Forms 3.1 through 3.11, developed from content found in the sources previously cited for each learning style as well as Good and Brophy (1995) and Woolfolk (2006), provide opportunities for educators to record their perceptions concerning preferred instructional styles, as well as how they perceive the learner's preferred styles. These guides are designed so that educators can better understand the classroom and instructional preferences for struggling learners. They should be used along with other formal and informal assessment devices and practices. For additional information about instructional and cognitive styles, the reader is referred to Grossman (1995), Hoover and Collier (2003), Ovando, Collier, and Combs (2003), Winzer and Mazurek (1998), and Woolfolk (2006).

**NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION** ■ Much of our communication involves nonverbal elements such as gestures, body language, eye contact, facial expressions, or use of personal space (Winzer & Mazurek, 1998). Nonverbal communication is culturally based and, according to Nieto (1996), educators often fail to recognize nonverbal cues associated with different cultures. Nonverbal communication exhibited in the classroom by students may deviate from expected nonverbal communication behaviors. This is often reflective of cultural norms and values and should not be viewed as a learning disorder.

**TIME AND SPACE CONCEPTS** ■ The concepts of time and space vary across cultures (Hoover & Collier, 2004). *Time* for some cultures is highly structured with a reality of its own. For others, time is less structured, less linear, and more reflective of life events and needs, and less on a clock (Winzer & Mazurek, 1998). In regard to personal space, different cultures emphasize the use of space in various ways (e.g., more or less space; close proximity; greater social distances) (Shade & New, 1993).

If learners come from a different cultural or linguistic background these behaviors and characteristics are often either misunderstood and/or viewed as a deficit in the context of American schooling rather than as values reflecting diversity. It creates behavioral, cultural, and linguistic dissonance that appears similar to characteristics of a learning or behavior disorder. Learners may show

poor motivation, engagement, or time management that reflect their cultural values toward these constructs. These learners may also have difficulty in changing activities and experience confusion with time and space movement (e.g., moving from one class period to another) due to the lack of familiarity with the educational expectations. Current research evidence cited earlier indicates that these types of cultural, linguistic, and environment factors are often misunderstood and account for misdiagnosing learning or behavior disorders.

## Disabilities

As suggested, for some educators the cultural and linguistic behaviors and characteristics previously discussed are often misinterpreted as one and the same as learning or behavior disorders, due to lack of understanding of diverse cultural values and norms. To assist in determining the difference between a disorder and a difference, characteristics of learning and behavior disabilities are discussed followed by a comparison of all three behaviors (i.e., second language, cultural, disability) to best differentiate difference from disability.

**LEARNING DISABILITIES (LD)** ■ Historically, a number of inherent factors have contributed to classifying learning disabilities, including the concept that LD involves intrinsic, biologically based, learning difficulties (i.e., as opposed to learning failures associated with culture, language, and socioeconomic variables), as well as specific cognitive deficits or set of deficits (i.e., as opposed to generalized learning difficulties due to differences across cultures and languages).

Various definitions of a learning disability exist with each having its strengths and weaknesses. An accepted operational definition of learning disabilities best serves our interests related to discussions in this book and is as follows: *Students with learning disabilities exhibit learning and cognitive disorders that are intrinsic to the learner* (Bradley, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002), and are reflected in academic achievement deficits. Characteristics often associated with learning disabilities include one or more of the following along with the academic deficit (Hallahan et al., 2005):

*Attention deficits.* Problems maintaining attention to and remaining on tasks

*Impulsivity.* Tendency to respond quickly, leading to frequent errors

*Hyperactivity.* Persistent pattern of and inappropriate degrees of excessive movement (Cohen, Spenciner, & Twitchell, 2003)

*Information-Processing Deficits* (e.g., memory, perception, thinking).

Problems with long- or short-term memory, perceiving and processing information, using problem-solving abilities, and regulating and adjusting one's performance as needed

While not all characteristics are found in all students with learning disabilities, these are presented so that problem-solving teams can understand potential similarities in behaviors often associated with learning disabilities and those reflective of educational needs of learners resulting from cultural and linguistic diversity.

In summary, a learner is identified as having a learning disability when he or she exhibits significant cognitive (i.e., information-processing) needs along with academic needs (e.g., lack of response to interventions) that are due to factors within (or intrinsic to) the learner and not a result of cultural/linguistic diversity or other established disabilities (e.g., emotional/behavioral disorders, physical or sensory disabilities).

**BEHAVIOR DISORDERS** ■ As discussed in the previous section, many student behaviors consistent with diverse cultural norms, teachings, and expectations are misunderstood or misinterpreted by educators, resulting in a misdiagnosis of a behavior problem or disorder. Similar to learning disabilities, various definitions of behavior disorders exist and each has its critics. Also, similar to the LD definition, professional organizations have generated operational definitions of behavior disorders to best serve educators and their students. An operational definition of this type best serves our discussions. The Mental Health Special Education Coalition, formed in 1987, generated the following: Students with behavior disorders exhibit “behavioral and emotional responses in school programs so different from appropriate age, cultural or ethnic norms that the responses adversely affect educational performance, including academic, social, vocational or personal skills” (Fiedler, 2003). This operational definition further emphasizes that if the exhibited problems are temporary or expected responses to stressful events in the environment are manageable with routine interventions, they are not considered behavior disorders.

Specific characteristics often associated with behavior disorders are:

1. Problems are exhibited over an extended period of time
2. Behavior is consistently seen in at least two different settings, one of which is in school
3. Learner is unresponsive to direct interventions

In summary, to be identified with a behavior disorder the learner must exhibit significant and pervasive behaviors that adversely affect various aspects of the student’s life, demonstrating more serious emotional needs that vary significantly from age-related peers. Form 3.12, developed from content in the sources cited in this chapter, is a guide to document efforts to ensure that learning and social-emotional behaviors are considered within a cultural/linguistic context.



## Interpreting Second Language, Culture Diversity, and Disability Behaviors

As indicated in the title of this book, the primary learner outcome is to be able to more effectively and efficiently differentiate learning differences from learning or behavior disorders. For educators of diverse learners this has become a tremendous challenge over the years due to the fact that many normal and typical behaviors associated with various facets of cultural and linguistic diversity are similar to behaviors typically exhibited by those who truly have a learning disability or behavior disorder. In the previous sections of this chapter, we have discussed behaviors often associated with:

1. acquisition of a second language (i.e., English)
2. culturally diverse values, norms, teachings, and expectations
3. learning and behavioral disabilities

The similarity among behaviors reflecting these three aspects was initially presented in Table 1.2. We conclude this chapter by reiterating the reality that similarities among these behaviors can lead to misinterpretations between difference and disabilities.

Diverse learners who exhibit behaviors or characteristics similar to that of a disability do so for reasons that reflect external situations; that is, the process of acquiring a second language or the need to adjust to a new cultural environment. However, most diverse learners who exhibit these behaviors do not exhibit them because of intrinsic conditions or disorders that interfere with their learning. These learners may require supplemental support to address the behaviors exhibited and may need extra time to adjust to new learning situations. However, this is in contrast to education for a learner with a disability, which emphasizes helping the student remediate or compensate for internal deficits, learning or emotional.

Therefore, if the learner's behaviors can be associated with his or her cultural values/norms or with stages of second language acquisition, and not with an internal problem or deficit then a learning or behavior disability is not evident. Only if the particular learning or behavior need can be linked to an intrinsic disorder can a disability be appropriately considered. Problem-solving teams must make certain that diverse learners' behaviors are a result of intrinsic needs and not a result of only bilingual or culturally diverse needs to appropriately place those learners in special education as learning disabled or behaviorally disordered. Careful consideration of the behaviors exhibited by diverse learners relative to culture diversity and second language acquisition will facilitate the reduction of misdiagnosing a learning difference as a disability.

In addition, in order for appropriate diagnosis of a disability to occur, problem-solving teams must provide evidence of the identification of an intrinsic disorder reflecting cognitive and learning needs as discussed in this chapter. When considering all factors involved, educators will find that although behaviors and characteristics are similar, most diverse learners at-risk show evidence of needs related directly to cultural diversity and/or second language acquisition with no evidence of any intrinsic disorder. Chapter 4 will consider the assessment process used to identify whether the learning and behavior needs are most associated with diversity issues and/or disorders within the student.

## SUMMARY

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A variety of behaviors and learning characteristics reflecting cultural diversity and stages of second language acquisition were presented in this chapter. Also discussed were examples of practical definitions of learning disabilities and behavior disorders, including various behavioral characteristics often associated with these disabilities. Comparisons between diverse behaviors and disability behaviors were made along with discussions about the need to identify intrinsic disorders to appropriately identify a student as having a disability. The idea that most diverse learners exhibit behaviors in schools that reflect their cultural values and/or stages of second language acquisition, rather than intrinsic disorders, was also emphasized, highlighting the differentiation between learning differences and learning disorders.

### **Additional Activities to Support Learner Outcomes**

1. Present to colleagues the behaviors typically associated with diverse cultural norms and values and compare these with expected school behaviors.
2. Develop a schoolwide plan and process to ensure that the diverse behaviors discussed in this chapter are not mistaken for behaviors indicating a disability.
3. Generate professional development suggestions to share with colleagues so that they acquire more expertise in differentiating learning differences from learning and behavior disorders.
4. Provide examples from your educational setting that support the reduction of misidentifying learning differences from disabilities.





















**FORM 3.10 Student Evaluation Instructional Style Guide: Persistence**

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Classroom Environment \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher Completing Form \_\_\_\_\_

*Instructions:* Using the scale, respond to each item as it relates to how you observe the student learning in your classroom environment. Any additional comments about the learner's tendencies toward the style of Persistence may also be documented below.

1          2          3          4          5  
 Never                  Sometimes                  Always

*To what extent does the student:*

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Avoid making changes unless absolutely necessary   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Consider himself or herself highly structured in the way classroom situations are approached         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Rely heavily on scanning and skimming abilities  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Prefer to use several short blocks of time rather than one longer segment of time to complete a task | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Avoid tasks that are highly structured   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Take extended periods of time to carefully review new material or implement activities               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Welcome the chance to undertake tasks that require extended periods of time to complete              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Work on tasks until they are completed no matter how long it takes                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Experience difficulty working on tasks or activities for extended periods of time                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Tend to be unstructured in completing classroom activities or lessons                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

*Scoring:* Place the number marked for each item on the lines below and find the sum. Items marked with an asterisk (\*) must be reversed scored (i.e., 1 = 5; 2 = 4; 4 = 2; 5 = 1).

*Items:* 1\_\_\_\_ 2\_\_\_\_ 3\*\_\_\_\_ 4\*\_\_\_\_ 5\*\_\_\_\_ 6\_\_\_\_ 7\_\_\_\_ 8\_\_\_\_ 9\*\_\_\_\_ 10\*\_\_\_\_

*Persistence Score:* \_\_\_\_\_ divided by 10 = \_\_\_\_\_  
 Sum                                  Score

*Place an X on the continuum that corresponds with your score:*

\_\_\_\_\_

1                                  2                                  3                                  4                                  5  
 Low    Balanced    High

*Summary Comments:*



**FORM 3.11** Summary Profile of Teacher and Student Instructional Style Preferences

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Instructions:* Information obtained from completion of the Teacher Self-Evaluation Guides and Student Evaluation Guides is summarized on this form. Place an X along the continuum reflecting the obtained score from completion of the associated guides.

**► Field**

<b>Teacher</b>	1	2	3	4	5
	Dependent		Balanced		Independent

<b>Student</b>	1	2	3	4	5
	Dependent		Balanced		Independent

**► Tempo**

<b>Teacher</b>	1	2	3	4	5
	Impulsive		Balanced		Reflective

<b>Student</b>	1	2	3	4	5
	Impulsive		Balanced		Reflective

**► Tolerance**

<b>Teacher</b>	1	2	3	4	5
	Low		Balanced		High

<b>Student</b>	1	2	3	4	5
	Low		Balanced		High

**► Categorization**

<b>Teacher</b>	1	2	3	4	5
	Narrow		Balanced		Broad

<b>Student</b>	1	2	3	4	5
	Narrow		Balanced		Broad

**► Persistence**

<b>Teacher</b>	1	2	3	4	5
	Low		Balanced		High

<b>Student</b>	1	2	3	4	5
	Low		Balanced		High

**FORM 3.12** Consideration of Cultural/Linguistic Influences on Instructional Needs

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Area of Need or Suspected Problem \_\_\_\_\_

*Instructions:* Rate each item relative to its instructional consideration by the problem-solving team to clarify the learner's educational needs within a cultural and linguistic framework. Provide clarifying comments as a summary of the ratings.

- 1 = No Consideration                      3 = Considered to Some Extent  
2 = Very Little Consideration            4 = Extensively Considered

*The extent to which the following are considered in the decision-making process:*

**Second Language Acquisition**

Learner's attitude/motivation	1	2	3	4
Native language proficiency	1	2	3	4
Role of family/community	1	2	3	4
Compatibility between teaching and learning styles	1	2	3	4
Learner's stage of second language acquisition	1	2	3	4
Interlanguage (utilization of internal language system)	1	2	3	4
Code-switching abilities and usage	1	2	3	4
Linguistic features relative to comprehension	1	2	3	4

**Cultural Diversity**

Acculturation process and associated stress levels	1	2	3	4
Preference toward cooperative vs. competitive learning	1	2	3	4
Presence of active rather than passive learning	1	2	3	4
Assertive or aggressive behaviors as cultural values	1	2	3	4
Locus of control	1	2	3	4
Instructional styles of learner (Persistence, Tolerance, etc.)	1	2	3	4
Significance of nonverbal communications in learning	1	2	3	4
Varied perceptions of concepts of time and space	1	2	3	4

**Disability Characteristics**

Attention deficits	1	2	3	4
Impulsivity	1	2	3	4
Hyperactivity	1	2	3	4
Information-processing deficits	1	2	3	4
Extreme emotional response to learning	1	2	3	4
Responsiveness to interventions	1	2	3	4

*Summary of discussions about cultural and linguistic influences on learner's suspected area of educational need:*