Foreign Language Exemptions for Students Classified as LD: Beliefs, Myths, Evidence, and Best Practices

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Outline of Presentation

• I. Setting the stage for considering FL learning problems
• II. Some history about FL learning problems
• III. Is there a “disability” for FL learning?
  The problem with LD/Discrepancy definitions
• IV. Problems with “FLLD” concept (2006, 2009)
• V. Myths of FL learning and LDs
• VI. FL Reading “Disability”: The Simple View
• VII. Best Practices—Dos and Don’ts
Themes of my presentation based on the Evidence

• Language learning runs along a continuum from superior to average to poor oral and written language skills

• To have a LD in L1, you must have substantial impairments in oral and written L1 skills

• To have problems with FL learning, you must have substantial impairments in oral/written L1 skills (not math skills)
Themes of my presentation based on the Evidence

• If you do not exhibit substantial impairments in L1 skills, you will likely pass FL courses (assuming appropriate effort)

• There is no empirical evidence for the idea of a “disability” for FL learning

• Likewise, there is no diagnostic procedure to identify who will exhibit inordinate problems with FL learning prior to enrolling in FL classes (unless there are substantial impairments in L1)
Themes of my presentation based on the Evidence

• Empirical evidence has shown that all L1 learners, unless already bilingual, are likely to exhibit severe comprehension and vocabulary deficits in FL when compared to native speakers of the language.

• Almost all FL learners will have a reading “disability” in the FL (hyperlexia—good word decoding, poor comprehension).

• There is no empirical basis on which an individual classified as LD can be provided with a FL waiver/substitution but a low-achieving (non-LD) FL learner can be denied a FL waiver/substitution.
Themes of my presentation: Diagnosis of LD

- Substantial Impairments
- DSM-IV: Criterion A and B (Criterion B usually ignored)
- Criterion A used discrepancy, Criterion B used “significantly interferes with academic achievement”
- DSM-5 eliminated discrepancy criterion, uses “substantially and quantifiably below CA…”
- Defined “substantially below” as 1.5 $SD$ below mean age... $SS \leq 78$, which are “…needed for greatest diagnostic certainty” (allows 1.0 $SD$ in some circumstances) (p. 69)
I. Setting the Stage for Consideration of FL Learning Problems
Setting the stage

• Questions our studies have investigated over 30 years
• Why do students exhibit FL learning problems?
• Are there language (L1) differences between LD/low achieving students enrolled in FL courses?
• What are best predictors of FL learning?
• How do we define/diagnose a disability in L1?
• Can we define and diagnose a disability for FL learning?
• Are there different FL outcomes between LD and non-LD FL learners?
• Are there other factors (anxiety) in FL problems?
Setting the stage

- Differences between US and Canada with regard to LDs?
- “Average person standard” used?
- Viewpoints about discrepancies between IQ-achievement and achievement-achievement?
- Use of standardized tests for diagnosis and comparison of individuals?
- Differences in social contexts create differences in thinking about FL learning? (next slide)
Setting the Stage

- **Social Context for FL learning in U.S.**
- FL courses not taken until high school many years after mastering L1 (one period per day, 180 days per year, 2 school years in most cases, max 360 hours instruction)
- FL taken as a subject (similar to math, science)
- FLs taken as requirement for college, not to become literate or fluent in FL—FLs not required for all students
- U.S. is largely a monolingual society—little opportunity to practice the FL
- No expectation of FL mastery, socially or educationally, even for high-achieving students
II. Some History about Research with FL Learning Problems (that you may or may not know)
Some History @ FL Learning Problems

• In 1994, Stanovich published a paper titled, “Does Dyslexia Exist?”

• “Obviously, in order to answer the question posed in the title, we must specify what we mean by the term dyslexia. And, in doing so, we immediately encounter the crux of the problem.”

• What is the definition of dyslexia and how is it diagnosed?

• Stanovich refuted arguments that dyslexia: a) is an etiologically distinct disorder; and b) can be diagnosed by determining a discrepancy between IQ and achievement on standardized testing measures
Some History @ FL Learning Problems

• Stanovich concluded that the term *dyslexia* is not useful because it has not been distinguished from other terms such as reading disabled, poor reader, reading difficulties, etc.

• He concluded that it would be more useful to conceptualize dyslexia on a *continuum* of developmental language problems rather than as a specific, conceptually distinct disorder.
Some History @ FL Learning Problems

• The notion of a continuum underlies all of our work
• At first, we viewed FL learning problems as a conceptually distinct disorder, but in retrospect, we were wrong (and should have known better!) Why?
• Because by 1994, our studies had found that FL learning problems result from L1 deficits
• All language skills, including FL learning and FL aptitude, run along a continuum from very good (99\textsuperscript{th} percentile) to average (25-75\textsuperscript{th} percentile) to very poor (1\textsuperscript{st} percentile)
• Everyone has a place along the continuum-- one individual can be at different places in different skills on continuum
FL aptitude on the MLAT and language skills continuum

FL aptitude-Sally
FL aptitude-Bobby
FL aptitude-Susie
FL aptitude-John

Average Range

Standard Score
70 85 100 115 130

SD
-2 -1 +1 +2
Academic achievement skills continuum

Reading/Math-Katie
Reading/Math-Sally
Reading/Math-Bobby
Reading/Math-Susie
Reading/Math-John

Standard Score  70  85  100  115  130
SD         -2 -1 +1 +2

Average Range
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<td>Ganschow, Sparks, et al., 1991</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X X O O O O O O</td>
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- **Standard Scores**: 70, 85, 100, 115, 130
- **SD**: -2, -1, 0, +1, +2
- **Percentile Ranks**: 2, 16, 50, 84, 98

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* M = 100, SD = 15
Some History @ FL Learning Problems

• Why is continuum notion of language skills important?
• Many educators believe that all individuals have same language learning aptitude (potential)
• If so, then the reasons for FL learning problems are not language learning skill differences
• Instead, hypothesize that poor FL learning is due to low motivation, high anxiety, lack of effort, all of which are important, but have not been found to be causal
• See FL anxiety studies--Sparks & Patton (2013). Relationship of L1 skills and L2 aptitude to FL anxiety..., Language Learning, 63 (4), 870-895. [1991-2013]
In the early 90s, the new term “foreign language learning disability” (FLLD) appeared in the LD and FL literature.

In the US, it quickly became popular to associate FL learning problems with LD.

Researchers such as Gajar (1987), Keeney & Smith (1994), Barr (1993), Mabbott (1994), Pompian & Thum (1984), Reed and Stansfield (2004), and the Second Language Testing Institute website, ad for MLAT, a FL aptitude test (www.2lti.com), have contributed to this field.

Some suggested FLLD is a conceptually distinct disorder like reading or math disability.
Some History @ FL Learning Problems

• By mid-1990s, universities explicitly linked LD and FL learning by: a) suggesting students classified as LD will have problems with FL learning, b) making substitutions/waivers of FL requirement available; and c) awarding course substitutions only to students w/LD label
• In US, students receive waiver/course substitution not for excelling in FL but because they are classified as LD
• By late 1990s, LD label for college students became valuable because many students waived from FL courses, LD diagnoses increased, number of waivers increased
Some History @ FL Learning Problems

• Grigorenko (2002) linked term FLLD to Sparks & Ganschow
• We had used the term in 1987 and 1991 publications, asking whether there might be such a disability
• But, our use of the term FLLD was premature and, in retrospect, incorrect—why? (1993 paper)
• Because since 1991-2017, no studies found differences on cognitive, L1 achievement, FL aptitude, and FL outcome measures between secondary/postsecondary students classified as LD enrolled in FL courses vs. low-achieving students with FL learning problems not classified as LD
As a result of our empirical findings, we hypothesized that FL learning occurs along a *continuum* of very good to very poor FL learners.

Likewise, because the evidence showed that FL learning exists along a *continuum* of language learning, any diagnosis of a FL “disability” will be arbitrary and depend entirely on where the line (“cut point”) is drawn.

To date, no studies have refuted this hypothesis and the empirical evidence has supported the hypothesis.
Arbitrary cut point for “FL disability”—30th percentile
Arbitrary cut point for “FL disability”—20th percentile

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MLAT
WJ-III Written Lang
WJ-III Vocabulary
WJ-III Reading
Arbitrary cut point for “FL disability”—40th percentile

Standard Score

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</table>

Average Range

MLAT
WJ-III Written Lang
WJ-III Vocabulary
WJ-III Reading
Some History @ FL Learning Problems

- So, which “cut point” is the correct one?
- There is no empirical evidence that any “cut point” is correct, e.g., below $X^{th}$ percentile, all fail FL courses
- Likewise, there is no evidence that only students classified as LD will have FL learning problems
- Lots of students, most not LD, have FL learning problems
- Evidence shows that students without substantial impairments in L1 skills--LD and otherwise—pass FL courses
Summary-History @ FL Learning Problems

• What was the important lesson that we learned from our research with secondary and postsecondary students who had FL learning problems?
• ...... with students who had received waivers and course substitutions?
• ......with students who had high levels of anxiety and low motivation for FL learning?
• That diagnosis of LD is not important
• The important lesson is that individuals who fail FL courses display substantial impairment in language skills
III. Is there a “Disability” for FL learning? (The Problem with LDs and Discrepancy)
Is there a “disability” for FL learning?

• In 2006, as number of FL waivers and course substitutions increased and spread to secondary schools, Sparks reviewed the empirical evidence and found that evidence does not support the notion of a FL “disability”

• He expanded on the paper in a FL journal in 2009


• Sparks, R. (2009). If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll wind up somewhere else: The case of FLLD. *Foreign Language Annals, 42*, 7-26.
Is there a ‘disability’?

• In those papers, Sparks explained that FLLD can be operationally defined and diagnosed only in an arbitrary manner by choosing a criterion (“cut point”) in a continuous distribution.

• But, what is the criterion and how is it measured?

• The criterion becomes even more arbitrary because no empirical evidence showing students classified as LD in FL courses are different vs students not classified as LD in FL courses on cognitive, L1 achievement, FL aptitude, and FL outcomes.
Is there a “disability”? 

- The problem is the term, Learning Disability (LD).
- In U.S., the primary problem with the LD concept is (and continues to be) its ambiguity.
- The term LD has never had a logically consistent, easily operationalized, and empirically valid definition and classification (diagnostic) system.
- Discrepancy became operational definition of LD in U.S. but was criticized on empirical grounds since 1980s (now excluded from DSM-5).
- In practice, the discrepancy criterion varied from state to state, clinician to clinician, school to school.
A Brief Departure—How is Discrepancy Used?

- Since the 70s, IQ was thought to represent “potential” to learn—“potential” was measured by one’s IQ score.
- Thus, if achievement was not consistent with intellectual ability on a standardized IQ test, LD was often diagnosed.
- In U.S., states used different discrepancy criteria (15, 20, 22.5, 30 standard score points) that resulted in mass confusion (move from state to state, LD or not LD).
- States were also required to have an “override procedure” for students who did not meet discrepancy criteria (Ysseldyke’s, Kavale’s research on LD in 1980s).
A Brief Departure—How is Discrepancy Used?

• By late 90s, empirical evidence had falsified discrepancy as the marker for diagnosing LD
• Instead, evidence showed that discrepancies are normal/expected
• By 1990s, researchers had shown that diagnoses of LD were arbitrary and ignored the assessment data
• Despite the evidence, the use of IQ-achievement discrepancy as the primary diagnostic marker has persisted in U.S. [see Stanovich, K. (2005). *The future of a mistake: Will discrepancy continue to make learning disabilities a pseudoscience?* LDQ, 28, 103-106.]
Summary-Is there a FL disability?

- To know whether there is a FL disability, we must agree on the definition and diagnostic criteria for LD
- The evidence from the LD field shows that we do not agree on definition and diagnostic criteria for LD
- The definition and diagnostic criteria most often used--aptitude/achievement discrepancy--has been falsified
- If we don’t agree on definition and diagnostic criteria for LD, e.g., for L1 reading and writing disabilities, we will have great difficulty with a definition of and diagnostic criteria for a FL “disability”
IV. Problems with the FL “Disability” Concept
The problem with FLLD

• I applied Stanovich’s points about the definition and diagnosis of dyslexia to the idea of a FLLD

• *In order to answer the question of whether there is a FLLD, one must specify what is meant by the term FLLD. In doing so, the crux of the problem is immediately encountered*

• I contended that the FLLD concept has same problems as the concept of LD (and dyslexia): The lack of a logically consistent, easily operationalized, and empirically valid a) definition, and b) no agreed upon diagnostic criteria

• My contention became particularly important because the notion of discrepancy as a marker for LD persisted
IV. Problems with FLLD concept

• From 1991-2008, we conducted numerous studies that asked whether students classified as LD in FL classes.......  
• .....exhibit weaker cognitive, L1 achievement skills, and FL aptitude than low-achieving (non-LD) FL learners?  
• ....who have varying degrees of IQ-achievement discrepancy exhibit lower scores on IQ and L1 achievement measures than other FL learners classified as LD who do not have IQ-ach disc?  
• ....who w/draw from or do not pass FL courses exhibit cognitive, L1 achievement, or demographic differences when compared to students classified as LD who pass FL courses?  
• ....display worse FL outcomes (grades, proficiency in the FL) than low-achieving students not classified as LD?
Problems with FLLD concept

• In all of our studies, we found that students classified as LD in FL courses....... 
• Exhibited NO differences in L1 skills and L2 aptitude when compared to low-achieving, non-LD students 
• ...with and without IQ-achievement discrepancies exhibited NO differences on cognitive, L1 achievement, and FL aptitude measures 
• ...who withdrew from or did not pass FL courses exhibited NO cognitive and L1 achievement differences compared to students classified as LD who passed FL courses (we found many students classified as LD who passed FL courses) 
• ...displayed similar FL outcomes (course grades, FL proficiency) as low-achieving, non-LD FL learners
Problems with FLLD concept

- In addition, findings showed students classified as LD....
- Did *not* generally have problems w/FL learning
- Did *not* exhibit different learning profiles or more severe FL problems than low-achieving, non-LD students
- Did *not* exhibit achievement profiles distinct from those with less severe or no IQ-achievement discrepancy
- Who received FL course substitutions/waivers showed *NO* significant differences on testing measures (IQ, L1 academics, GPA, ACT/SAT) when compared to LD students who passed FL courses
- Passed FL courses if not given waiver or substitution
- Rarely exhibited substantial impairments in L1 skills
L1 and L2 skills, L2 aptitude of high-achieving, low-achieving, and LD students in FL classes.
In sum, studies’ results suggested that……

Students classified as LD did not have unique cognitive and L1 achievement profiles on standardized measures of oral/written language.

Students classified as LD did not exhibit FL learning problems different from non-LD students.

FL classroom achievement and FL proficiency, like all achievement skills, run along a continuum of very strong to very weak learners.
Problems with FLLD diagnosis

• The two papers also tackled the issue of how a FL “disability” would be diagnosed

• What would the diagnostic criteria be and how would the criteria be applied to diagnose a FL disability?

• Several possibilities were proposed

• IQ-achievement or achievement-achievement discrepancy

• Failure or poor performance in FL courses

• Discrepancy between IQ and FL aptitude (on a FL aptitude test)

• Low score on a FL aptitude test
Problems with FLLD diagnosis

1. *IQ-achievement or achievement-achievement discrepancy*

   Notion of discrepancy rests on assumption that one *should* achieve at a level commensurate with IQ and *should* achieve equally well in all subjects.

   In all of our studies, we found that students classified as LD with and without IQ-achievement discrepancies exhibited NO differences on cognitive, L1 achievement, and FL aptitude measures.

   In all of our studies, we found that students classified as LD with varying IQ-achievement discrepancies (<1.0, 1.0-1.5, 1.5-2.0, 2.0+ SD) exhibited NO differences on cognitive, achievement, and FL aptitude measures.
Problems with FLLD diagnosis

- **2. Poor performance in or withdrawal from FL courses**
  - Advocates of FLLD concept suggested using poorer than expected performance in or withdrawal from FL courses as diagnostic criteria.
  - However, evidence had shown that neither marker is a reliable indicator of ability to pass FL courses or fulfill FL requirement.
  - *Almost all* students classified as LD had passed FL courses in high school and college with average or better grades (A, B, C).
  - *Most* students classified as LD received grades of WP (withdraw passing) in FL courses.
  - *Very few* LD students failed FL courses, even without accommodations.
Problems with FLLD diagnosis

• Findings suggest that using FL grades is problematic....

• FL grades will not identify a group of learners who have a “disability”—most pass FL courses

• Students withdraw from courses for reasons other than failure (maintain high GPA, distaste for subject, dislike of teacher, too much work)

• There are reasons other than learning problems why students do not do well in courses (effort, attendance, persistence)

• In addition, many institutions allow relatively to very easy access to course substitution option for FL requirement
Problems with FLLD diagnosis

3. *Discrepancy between IQ and FL aptitude scores*

Most common FL aptitude test is Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) (Carroll & Sapon, 1959)

But, this would be an *aptitude-aptitude* discrepancy because the MLAT measures aptitude *for*, not proficiency (achievement) *in*, a FL

But, research has shown that: a) most students’ score on MLAT and their L1 achievement scores are *not* significantly different, and b) students who exhibit discrepancies between MLAT and L1 achievement scores consistently fail FL courses or have FL learning problems
Problems with FLLD diagnosis

4. **Low score on a FL aptitude test (MLAT)**

Many think that FL aptitude test is used to determine: a) whether one can learn a FL; and b) at what level one can learn a FL

However, Skehan (2002) summarized the notion of aptitude from FL aptitude researcher’s point of view:

- Everyone can learn a FL
- Aptitude tests predict whether a particular level of proficiency can be achieved in the time available
- Aptitude researchers are careful to avoid the claim that some students should be “deselected” from FL study
V. Myths about FL learning and LDs
V. Myths about FL learning and LDs

- Since publication of my papers, U.S. colleges and universities as well as high schools have continued to use the term FLLD, associate FL learning problems with LDs, and grant course waivers and substitutions.
- Random search of websites of 50 U.S. colleges found that all allowed waivers and substitutions but only for students classified as LD (in contradiction of all evidence).
- Some states have policies for high school students, but most have informal policies for course waivers (ASL).
Myths about FL learning and LDs

• Why is the evidence about FLLD (and LDs) ignored?
• Misunderstanding and misuse of LD concept (discrepancy)
• Students gain access to course accommodations and modifications, thus pleasing parents
• Diagnosticians benefit from increased referrals
• Attorneys benefit from larger client base for lawsuits
• High schools/colleges benefit from avoiding lawsuits
• High schools /colleges benefit from increased enrollment
• Schools save inordinate number of hours on meetings and conferences to discuss students’ issues with FLs
• Professional organizations benefit from increased visibility and funding as a result of advocacy
What are the Myths about FL learning and LD?

• I was inspired to write this paper after reading Julian Elliott’s paper in *LD Australia*: “The Dyslexia Debate: Some Key Myths” (Vol. 46, Nos. 1 and 2, May 2014)

• Elliott is co-author of new book, *The Dyslexia Debate*, with Elena Grigorenko

What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

• **Myth #1**
  
  Students who are classified as LD will exhibit FL learning problems and either fail or withdraw from FL courses

• Most LD students pass FL courses without accommodations

• Students classified as LD will pass/fail/struggle with FL courses at same rates as low-achieving FL students

• LD should not be used as the *sine qua non* for determining who will have FL learning problems

• Student’s language skills should be examined (more later)
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- **Myth #2**
- Withdrawal from FL courses is evidence of an undiagnosed LD, problems with FL learning, and/or a “disability” for FL learning
- Students classified as LD who withdraw have WP-passing
- Most who are assigned WP grades have passed previous FL courses with A, B, C grades
- No differences in language skills, cognitive ability, college entrance exam scores, and FL aptitude between LD classified students and low-achieving FL learners
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

• **Myth #3**

• *Students classified as LD in FL courses exhibit weaker language learning skills and lower FL aptitude than low-achieving, non-LD students*

• There are no significant differences in L1 reading, spelling, writing, vocabulary, memory, phonological processing skills between students classified as LD and low-achieving FL learners

• LD students are *supposed* to be different from low-achieving, non-LD students—hallmark of LD!
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- **Myth #4**
  - *Students classified as LD who are granted course substitutions or waivers exhibit low (below average) levels of language learning ability and are different from students classified as LD who pass FL courses*
  - Students classified as LD with waivers/substitutions exhibit *average* (or better) native language skills
  - No differences between native language skills, cognitive ability, college entrance scores between students classified as LD who were granted substitutions and LD students who passed FL courses (important finding!)
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- **Myth #5**
  - A low score on a FL aptitude test and/or discrepancy between IQ and FL aptitude scores are evidence of a LD and/or potential FL learning problems
  - Low score on a FL aptitude test (MLAT) does not predict failure in FL courses, or whether student will need accommodations to pass FL course
  - Students with low FL aptitude scores generally pass FL courses (FL aptitude ≠ FL achievement)
  - Students classified as LD and low-achieving FL learners do equally well on FL aptitude tests and achieve equal outcomes in FL courses and FL proficiency
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- Myth #6 (most problematic myth--old habits die hard, or like zombies, don’t die at all!)
- Discrepancy between IQ and academic achievement is evidence of a LD as well as a “disability” for FL learning
- Students classified as LD with/w-out discrepancies in FL courses exhibited no differences in native language skills, FL aptitude, FL grades, and FL proficiency
- Discrepancy is irrelevant in predicting who will experience problems with FL learning
- Most students with discrepancies do well in FL courses
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

• What about the gifted/LD (G/LD) concept?
• High IQ (120-130) and average achievement (95-105)
• Have discrepancy but no academic impairment
• Lovett & Sparks (2010, 2013) have examined G/LD notion
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

• Despite its intuitively appealing nature, very little research on the G/LD concept
• In our literature review, only 46 empirical studies over 30-35 years
• Numerous theoretical and psychometric problems
• Wide variability in Gifted and LD criteria
• Dubious methods of LD diagnoses
• Lack of academic impairment in participants, most of whom had average academic skills
• No studies regarding G/LD students and FL learning
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- So, is there such a person who is Gifted and LD?
- Yes, but not in the way that is traditionally thought
- If IQ is not used, then the use of the Gifted term is not necessary
- But, let’s use IQ and do a thought experiment
- We will use IQ-achievement discrepancy to illustrate the problems with the G/LD concept
Gifted, but not LD (why not?)

R.L., Age 18-5

**WAIS-III**
- FSIQ = 136
- VIQ = 120
- PIQ = 133

**WJ-III Ach**
- Broad Rdg. = 102
- Reading Fluency = 95
- Letter-Word Rdg. = 99
- Passage Comprehension = 105
- Broad Math = 110
- Broad Written Language = 98
Gifted and LD (why?)

J.S., Age 18-5

WAIS-III FSIQ = 136
VIQ = 120
PIQ = 133

WJ-III Ach
Broad Rdg. = 80
Reading Fluency = 73
Letter-Word Rdg. = 82
Passage Comprehension = 83
Broad Math = 110
Broad Written Language = 85
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- **Myth #7** (second most problematic myth—occurs because of the lack of an agreed upon definition of LD and lack of empirical criteria for diagnosing LD)

- *Students in FL classes who are classified as LD meet criteria for the LD diagnosis*

- Sparks, Ganschow, and colleagues have conducted a number of studies on this topic

- Here is a summary of a few studies
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- We used absolute minimum (very loose) criterion for IQ-achievement discrepancy (1.0 SD)
- Of students classified as LD who received FL waivers, substitutions, accommodations........
- Only 40% met criterion, and only 24% had academic impairment--Sparks, Philips, & Ganschow (1996)
- Only 43% met criterion, and only 36% had academic impairment—Sparks & Javorsky (1999)
- Only 44% met criterion, and only 16% had academic impairment (Sparks, Philips, & Javorsky, 2002)
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- In studies investigating college students receiving accommodations in colleges and universities......
- 55% did not meet minimum criterion for LD, few had academic impairments (Sparks & Lovett, 2009)
- 58 % did not meet minimum criterion for LD (Sparks & Lovett, 2013)
- 80+% did not meet minimum criterion for LD (Weis, Sykes, & Unadkat, 2012; Weis, Speridakos, 2014, Weis et al., in press)
- 70+% did not meet minimum criterion for LD (Harrison & Larochette, 2008)
What are the myths about FL learning and LDs?

- In the U.S., large numbers of students classified as LD do not meet any criteria for LD diagnosis.
- In the U.S., many students classified as LD do not have academic impairments, i.e., deficits in L1 reading, writing, spelling.
- In the U.S., most students with high IQs (>115) classified as LD (or “dyslexic”) do not have L1 reading, spelling, and writing impairments.
- For FLs in U.S., the LD (or “dyslexic”) label is valuable because it leads to accommodations, waivers, etc.
Which students merits concern for FL learning? (Scores are $M = 100$, $SD = 15$)

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<td>112</td>
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<td>128</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>105</td>
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<tr>
<td>FL Aptitude (MLAT)</td>
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<td>102</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>80</td>
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VI. FL Reading “Disability: The Simple View
(Or, Who has a FL “Disability”?)
FL Reading “Disability”—The Simple View


FL Reading “Disability”—The Simple View

FL Reading “Disability”—The Simple View

- Random sample of US students completing 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2\textsuperscript{nd}, and 3\textsuperscript{rd} year Spanish courses in high school
- Spanish I (n = 293), Spanish II (n = 268), Spanish III (n = 51)
- 50% males and 50% females
- Middle SES public, suburban district, 4 high schools
- All monolingual English speakers
- 5 days per week, 180 days per year, 160 total hours
- This study is part of a much larger study in which all students administered large battery of L1 tests, L2 aptitude test, Spanish achievement and proficiency tests
FL Reading “Disability”—The Simple View

- Instrument: *Bateria III Woodcock-Munoz Pruebas de aprovechamiento* standardized on native Spanish speakers
- Measures of word decoding and reading comprehension administered at end of each year of Spanish I, II, and III
  - Spanish word decoding
  - Spanish pseudoword decoding
  - Spanish reading comprehension
  - Spanish vocabulary and listening comprehension
Figure 1
Simple View of Reading Model

Decoding
- Phonemic Awareness
- Phonics

Language Comprehension
- Vocabulary
- Text Comprehension

Fluency
### Types of Readers Proposed by the SVR Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decoding</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Poor</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dyslexia</strong></td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Specific decoding deficit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Garden Variety</strong></td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Decoding and comprehension deficits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hyperlexia</strong></td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Specific language comprehension deficit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Dyslexia: Specific decoding deficit
- Good: No deficits
- Garden Variety: Decoding and comprehension deficits
- Hyperlexia: Specific language comprehension deficit
FL Reading “Disability”—The Simple View

• Participants compared to monolingual Spanish norms ranging from $1^{st}$-$9^{th}/10^{th}/11^{th}$ grades
• Participants grouped into 4 types of readers proposed by the SVR model (Decoding and Reading Comprehension)
  • Good reader (Decoding $SS \geq 85$, Comprehension $SS \geq 85$
  • Garden Variety (Decoding $SS < 85$, Comprehension $< 85$
  • Hyperlexic (Decoding $\geq 1.5 SD$ than Comprehension)
  • Dyslexic (Comprehension $\geq 1.5 SD$ than Decoding)
• Did same with Listening comprehension
$M, SD$ on Spanish measures for US High School Students completing Spanish II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish subtest</th>
<th>9$^{th}$ grade</th>
<th>6$^{th}$ grade</th>
<th>3$^{rd}$ grade</th>
<th>1$^{st}$ grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>Word decoding</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>103.9</td>
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<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
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<td>28.6</td>
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<td>31.2</td>
<td>38.5</td>
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<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>18.3</td>
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## Types of Readers at End of Spanish II

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<th>Grade</th>
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<th>Garden Variety</th>
<th>Dyslexic</th>
<th>Hyperlexic</th>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>260</td>
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3rd Grade Norms

Standard Score

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<th>70</th>
<th>85</th>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>-1</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
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</tbody>
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X

Vocabulary
Reading Comp
Listen Comp
Word Decoding

Average Range

-2 -1 +1 +2
FL Reading “Disability”—The Simple View

• **Results**
  
  • Most US high school FL learners are classified as hyperlexic after 1, 2, 3 years of high school Spanish.
  
  • Spanish decoding skills *much* stronger than Spanish reading comprehension and listening comprehension.
  
  • Primary problem hindering Spanish comprehension is *very* low levels of Spanish vocabulary.
  
  • All U.S. high school students meet criteria for a FL reading disability, at least until compared to 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade monolingual Spanish learners.
FL Reading “Disability”—The Simple View

• Question: Who has a FL Reading “Disability”?

• Answer: All U.S. high school FL learners have a reading “disability”
VII. Best Practices: Do’s and Don’ts Based on the Evidence
Best Practices-Do’s

• Adopt policies for LD diagnosis that include verifiable histories of L1 learning problems and substantial impairment in language skills on standardized testing measures

• Examine student’s history for evidence of academic impairment in native language (L1) skills

• Employ a rigorous process to show that the student has a history of serious problems (failure) in FL courses

• Refer students for tutoring before beginning a FL course or during the FL course
Best Practices-Do’s

• View only FL grades of F as evidence of course failure
• Examine a student’s history of performance in high school and college FL courses
• Examine a student’s current performance in FL courses (i.e., consult with the FL instructors)
• Teach directly and explicitly the language skills that are necessary for communication and success in the FL course
• Allow students with L1 learning “problems” to participate in FLs
Best Practices-Don’ts

- Allow students’ self-reports as evidence of LD or inability to pass FL courses
- Treat grades of withdrawal (W) in FL courses as evidence of inability to pass FL courses or fulfill FL requirement
- Use MLAT as the sole criterion to determine whether students can pass FL courses or fulfill FL requirement
- Use a student’s MLAT score to calculate a discrepancy with a student’s IQ
Best Practices-Don’ts

• Use classification as LD or the presence of IQ-achievement discrepancies as a criterion for FL course substitution or waiver
• Assume that students classified as LD or those with IQ-achievement discrepancies cannot pass FL courses
• Assume that students classified as LD are different from low-achieving, non-LD students in FL courses
• Assume that a student with average to above-average cognitive ability and low FL grades must have a LD
• Diagnose students with a FL “disability”
In closing

“With regard to....FL course substitutions and waivers, Sparks (2006, 2009) has recommended that if an educational institution allows substitutions or waivers for the FL requirement, there are only two empirically defensible positions the institution can adopt: Either all students, not just those classified as LD, should be eligible on the basis of predetermined, and strict, criteria, or no students should be eligible for course substitutions and waivers. To do otherwise is to ignore the empirical research on this issue and, in all likelihood, discriminate against students without a disability diagnosis.”