

From Red Flags to Action: Knowing When to Initiate Special Education Evaluations for CLD Learners

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Juliana Ramirez, EdS NCSP

- Colombiana in Ohio
- Graduated from The Ohio State University
- Raising bilingualitos in the Midwest
- I love Instagram and traveling
- Grew up in Florida and Colombia
- Absolutely obsessed with Boba tea
- Owner and founder of PERA Services Inc.



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PERA Services



- PERA Services® is your partner in thorough bilingual learner evaluations
- PERA Services Inc. was founded in March of 2018. At PERA we provide bilingual evaluation support to SPED teams assessing bilingual learners across the state of Ohio.
- We support districts and building school psychs with evaluations in Spanish in the areas of cognition, achievement, communication, social emotional, and behavior.
- We also help parents navigate the process and assist schools increase parent participation and communication during the special education evaluation process.
- At PERA, in our spare time, we also support school psychs across the nation that want to become independent.

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Welcome & Objectives



- Understand the types of bilingual learners and their educational implications
- Identify common myths and misconceptions about bilingualism
- Learn when to initiate culturally responsive evaluations
- Recognize red flags that warrant evaluation for CLD students
- Apply the BRAVO Method™ in daily practice
- Foster collaboration between bilingual and monolingual psychs

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Who Are our CLD Students?

► ENGLISH LEARNERS IN OHIO

- Ohio's English Learners (EL) represent a variety of home/native languages, cultural backgrounds and levels of English proficiency. They may be refugees, or U.S. born, and they may have extensive formal school experiences or little/no prior schooling. Although ELs have limited English proficiency, their native/home language skills and cultural experiences can be useful assets in their learning process.

Ohio Department of Education. English Learners. Retrieved from <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/English-Learners>



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Who Are our CLD Students?

► ENGLISH LEARNERS IN OHIO

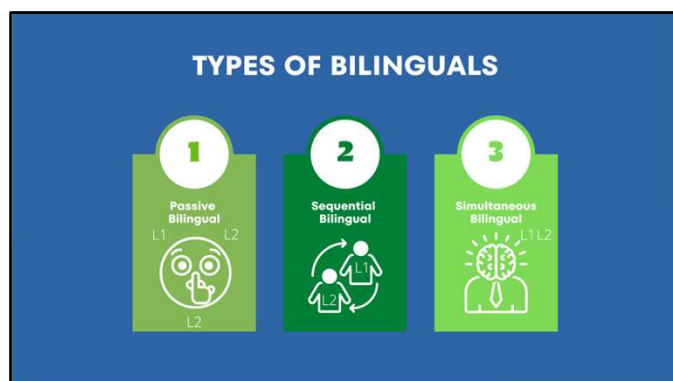
- Ohio schools currently serve over 80,000 students who are English learners. Spanish is a home or primary language of about one-third of the state's English learners. Somali, Arabic, Swahili, Chinese, Japanese, Nepali, Pennsylvania Dutch, French, Turkish, and over 90 other languages are also spoken by Ohio's English learners.

It's not a matter of will I evaluate an CLD learner, it's a matter of When will I evaluate a CLD

Ohio Department of Education. English Learners. Retrieved from <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/English-Learners>



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Case Examples of Bilingual Learner profile

- Ana is a 10-year-old who was exposed to Spanish at home until age 5 but once she started Kindergarten, she communicates predominantly in English. She has mainly spoken English since she entered school. At home, mom reports that she understands conversational Spanish but cannot speak it fluently. When her grandmother speaks to her in Spanish, Ana always responds back in English.
- What's her bilingual profile?

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Case Examples of Bilingual Learner profile

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- What's her bilingual profile? PASSIVE BILINGUAL- Understands both languages and has receptive skills in L1 and L2, but expressive language skills occur mostly in one language

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Case Examples of Bilingual Learner profile

- Luis is a 17-year-old who moved from El Salvador to Ohio at age 15. He was fully immersed in Spanish until his move. He is currently learning English as a second language and is receiving EL support services. His Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills are developing nicely. He currently has some difficulties with math achievement.
- What's his bilingual profile?

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Case Examples of Bilingual Learner profile

- Luis is a 17-year-old who moved from El Salvador to Ohio at age 15. He was fully immersed in Spanish until his move. He is currently learning English as a second language and is receiving EL support services. His Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills are developing nicely. He currently has some difficulties with math achievement.
- What's his bilingual profile? SEQUENTIAL BILINGUAL, He developed L1 well and established his first language, first, and English was introduced way after that.

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Case Examples of Bilingual Learner profile

- Sofia is a 4-year-old who has been exposed to both English and Spanish since birth. Her parents speak Spanish at home, but at daycare and preschool, where she spends a great part of her day, she is exposed to English. Currently, she demonstrates fluency and use of both languages depending on the context.
- What's his bilingual profile?

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Case Examples of Bilingual Learner profile

- Sofia is a 4-year-old who has been exposed to both English and Spanish since birth. Her parents speak Spanish at home, but at daycare and preschool, where she spends a great part of her day, she is exposed to English. Currently, she demonstrates fluency and use of both languages depending on the context.
- What's his bilingual profile? SIMULTANEOUS BILINGUAL, she is developing L1 and L2 at the same time.



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Myths & Misconceptions

- Myth: Bilingualism causes language delays
- Myth: Learning two languages causes confusion
- Myth: Bilingual students go through the "silent period"



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BILINGUALISM DOES NOT CAUSE LANGUAGE DELAYS

- Fact: Research shows that bilingualism does not cause language delays in typically developing, bilingual children, of average intelligence. In fact, many bilingual children develop language skills at the same rate as monolingual children.

Bilingual children are not more likely than monolingual children to have difficulties with language, to show delays in learning, or to be diagnosed with a language disorder (see [Paradis, Genesee, & Crago, 2010](#); [Petitto & Holowka, 2002](#)).



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Fact: Bilingual children are not more likely than monolingual children to have language delays or disorders (Paradis, Genesee, & Crago, 2010; Petitto & Holowka, 2002). What often causes confusion is that bilingual children might know fewer words in each individual language. But when you combine their vocabulary across both languages—accounting for words that mean the same thing in both—bilingual kids know just as many concepts as monolingual peers (Pearson et al., 1993; Marchman et al., 2010).

Consider a student's ENTIRE LANGUAGE REPERTOIRE



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BILINGUALISM DOES NOT CAUSE LANGUAGE DELAYS

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As an example, if a Spanish/English bilingual toddler knows 50 Spanish words and 50 English words, she will probably not appear to be as good at communicating when compared to her monolingual cousin who knows 90 English words. However, assuming 10 of the toddler's Spanish words are also known in English, then the toddler has a conceptual vocabulary of 90 words, which matches that of her cousin. Even so, knowing 50 vs. 90 English words could result in noticeably different communication abilities, but these differences are likely to become less noticeable with time.



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BILINGUAL CHILDREN ARE NOT CONFUSED BECAUSE THEY ARE EXPOSED TWO LANGUAGES

- Fact: Codeswitching among bilingual children is a misunderstood behavior, which is often taken as evidence for confusion. Code switching is when a bilingual child or adult mixes words from two languages in the same sentence. In fact, code mixing is a normal part of bilingual development, and bilingual children actually have good reasons to code mix ([Pearson, 2008](#)).



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Kids may mix because it's common in their community or because they're still developing vocabulary in both languages (Pearson, 2008; Comeau et al., 2003; Lanza, 2004). Instead of confusion, this shows their adaptability. Even toddlers know which language to use with different people, and their code switching follows consistent rules—just like adults (Genesee et al., 1996; Paradis et al., 2000).



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THE SILENT PERIOD

- The silent period is a hypothesis that came from adult learners and adult bilinguals. While it is part of language development, there is still language and learning occurring during the Silent Period. It's also not meant to last years and years. According to linguists, this stage lasts 2-6 months.



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LET'S RECOIN THE SILENT PERIOD, THE QUIET PERIOD

- The silent period is a hypothesis that came from adult learners and adult bilinguals. While it is part of language development, there is still language and learning occurring during the Silent Period. It's also not meant to last years and years. According to linguists, this stage lasts 2-6 months.
- Fact: Not all bilingual students experience a silent period. When it does happen, it's a natural and temporary stage of second-language acquisition—not a reason to delay support or assume a disorder. Educators should observe for red flags unrelated to language learning.



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REFRAMING THE NARRATIVE

I like to think of it as L2 pre-production or "receptive phase," the pre-production stage is the language learners first encounters with the language in which they are exposed, but not yet speaking it. This stage often lasts up to six months.



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REFRAMING THE NARRATIVE

- Students are observing and surviving
- BICS are developing
- Not a pass to delay Child Find
- Does not last years



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Misguided Statements we hear in the schools..

- Misguided but common statements we hear:
 - "She's confused because she knows two languages."
 - "He's quiet because he doesn't understand—let's wait until he learns more English."
 - "They mix Spanish and English in one sentence—they seem confused with both."
 - "If they speak Spanish at home, they'll never catch up in English."
 - "Being bilingual is probably why they take so long to do work"
 - "They'll get more confused if we keep both languages going."



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The BRAVO™ Method

- The BRAVO Method is a comprehensive and structured approach designed to guide school psychologists through the intricate process of conducting bilingual evaluations for special education. This method is segmented into five key areas: Background, Referral, Assessment, Validity, and Opinions, each representing a critical step in the evaluation process.
- The BRAVO Method is a dynamic framework that empowers school psychologists to conduct bilingual evaluations with confidence and precision, ensuring fair and effective educational outcomes for bilingual students.



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B- Background: Unearthing the Roots of Learning - A Deep Dive into Students' Academic, Cultural, and Linguistic Histories.

- **Background (B):** This initial phase involves gathering extensive background information about the student. It includes exploring the student's academic, medical, immigration, educational, family, and language history. This thorough understanding of the student's context is vital for an informed evaluation.



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R- Referral: Navigating the Why and How - Thoroughly Examining the Grounds and Context of Each Bilingual Student's Evaluation Referral.

- **Referral (R):** In this stage, the focus is on analyzing the referral's basis, including the primary concerns leading to the referral, the history of interventions and responses, and input from teachers, staff, and family. It's crucial to ensure that the referral for bilingual evaluation is appropriate and based on a well-rounded understanding of the student's needs.



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A- Assess or Advocate The Pivotal Point - Where Decisive Action Meets Advocacy, Determining the Path for Either Comprehensive Assessment or Strategic Advocacy.

- **Assessment (A):** This core part of the method involves selecting and administering culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment tools. It includes evaluating the student's language proficiency, academic and cognitive abilities, as well as their social-emotional and behavioral aspects, ensuring a holistic view of the student's abilities. A also stands for Advocate, you will have to decide if you initiate Child Find or go back to providing more interventions.



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V-Validity: Ensuring Accuracy - Rigorously Evaluating the Integrity and Appropriateness of Assessments in Bilingual Contexts.

- **Validity (V):** Here, the emphasis is on ensuring the validity of the assessment results. This involves using tools like the Culture and Language Interpretive Matrix (CLIM) and considering factors like test content relevance, cultural influences, and the student's performance consistency across various settings.



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O- Opinions: Informed Judgment - Formulating and Expressing Professional Conclusions Based on Comprehensive Bilingual Evaluation Data.

- **Opinions (O):** The final phase is about formulating and communicating professional opinions. This involves synthesizing all the gathered data to make informed conclusions, providing clear and actionable recommendations for educational planning, and ensuring these are communicated effectively and sensitively.



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When to Initiate Child Find with Bilingual students



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WHEN TO INITIATE CHILD FIND: BILINGUAL NEWCOMERS

Student arrives with SPED documents from Puerto Rico or home country

Student has medical or mental health diagnosis that warrants an evaluation

Parents share concerns with child's skills AND there's a history of developmental milestone delays



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WHEN TO INITIATE CHILD FIND: BILINGUAL PRESCHOOLER

Developmental delays and concerns evident and/or documented

Speech or Language delays in native language and L2

Adaptive behavior concerns in home culture

Skills and development not similar to other culturally and linguistically diverse peers



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WHEN TO INITIATE CHILD FIND: BILINGUAL SCHOOLAGE STUDENT

Student fails to respond to interventions

Student is not performing similarly to other culturally and linguistically diverse peers of average intelligence

Parents notice concerns and are alarmed by student progress

Academic difficulties noted by more than one staff member, i.e. Gen Ed teacher, EL teacher, maybe even SLP



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Evaluating Bilingual Learners involves:

- ▶ Lengthy and thorough student background info, typically obtained from parent interview
- ▶ Then some language dominance testing *
- ▶ Test in language student is stronger
- ▶ I personally, also use nonverbal measures like the CTONI
- ▶ Use the C-LIM to determine validity of scores



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Biggest issues assessing bilingual learners

- ▶ Delaying an evaluation
- ▶ Waiting for students to "have more English skills"
- ▶ Stressing about testing in Native language



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OELPA Score Guidance

- The Ohio English Language Proficiency Assessment (OELPA) is the state-required summative test that measures an English learner's progress toward proficiency and readiness to exit EL services.
- It is aligned to Ohio's English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards, which are based on college-and-career-ready content area expectations.
- The OELPA assesses four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Scores reflect performance in three broader modalities: receptive (listening and reading), productive (speaking and writing), and interactive (combined).
- The OELPA is administered annually to K-12 EL students in public, community, and participating chartered nonpublic schools.
- Federal and state laws require that all ELs take the OELPA or, for eligible students with significant cognitive disabilities, the Alternate OELPA (Alt-OELPA).



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OELPA Score Guidance

- Unlike WIDA, the OELPA standards and expectations vary by grade level.
- The 10 ELP Standards are grouped into two categories:
 - **Standards 1-7** focus on content-related language use: interpreting, discussing, reasoning, and adapting language for different purposes.
 - **Standards 8-10** support those practices by targeting vocabulary, coherence, and accuracy in speech and writing.
- School psychologists should consider whether a student demonstrates grade-appropriate proficiency across these areas before moving forward with a monolingual evaluation.



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OELPA Score Guidance

- WIDA stands for **World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment**.
- It is a national consortium that supports states in serving English learners through assessments, standards, and educator resources.
- While Ohio uses the OELPA as its primary summative assessment, many educators still reference WIDA's ACCESS scoring scale and standards as a framework to understand English language proficiency levels.
- WIDA scores range from 1.0 (Entering) to 6.0 (Reaching) and can be helpful when collaborating across state lines or interpreting out-of-state records.



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When to Consider Monolingual Evaluation in English

- ▶ According to Ohio's English Language Proficiency Standards, ELs are expected to demonstrate mastery across three modalities: receptive (listening, reading), productive (speaking, writing), and interactive (combination of all four)



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When to Consider Monolingual Evaluation in English

- ▶ A monolingual psychoeducational evaluation in English may be appropriate when a student can:
 - **Receptive:** Understand and interpret oral and written grade-level text (Standards 1, 8)
 - **Productive:** Speak and write about complex texts using evidence and adapting to audience (Standards 3, 4, 7)
 - **Interactive:** Engage in two-way exchanges, conduct research, and respond to peers using grade-level English (Standards 2, 5, 6)



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When to Consider Monolingual Evaluation in English

- These skills align with an OELPA performance level of **Proficient** and roughly correlate with a **WIDA score of 4.0 or higher**.
- Below these benchmarks, an English-only evaluation may not provide valid results, and additional language supports or bilingual tools should be considered.



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When to Consider Monolingual Evaluation in English

- ▶ **Why this matters:**
 - Students scoring below 4.0 (Entering, Beginning, Developing) are still acquiring foundational English skills.
- Testing at these levels—especially with English-only assessments—may not yield valid results because:
 - They may misunderstand test items due to limited English.
 - Their performance may reflect language acquisition, not cognitive ability.
 - It's hard to rule out language barriers as the cause of low performance.



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WIDA Score Guidance

- ▶ A student should ideally score at least a 4.0 ("Expanding") on the WIDA before being considered for a monolingual psychoeducational evaluation to ensure language proficiency isn't confounding the results.



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What if the score is below 4.0 or below Benchmarks?

- ▶ **Remember:**
 - You should not delay an evaluation; EL students deserve timely evals for SPED
- Consider a bilingual evaluation or use of nonverbal tools as part of a comprehensive assessment.
- Use the BRAVO method to gather extensive contextual data: **B**ackground, **R**eferral, **A**ssessment, **V**alidity, **O**pinions.
- Gather detailed background



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What an EL Evaluation Involves

- ▶ **Key Components**
 - Detailed background
 - Educational history (U.S. and abroad)



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What an EL Evaluation Involves

- ▶ **Language Dominance Testing**
 - When and how to use
 - Cautions with standardized tools



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What an EL Evaluation Involves

- ▶ **Nonverbal & Verbal Tools**
 - When appropriate



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What an EL Evaluation Involves

- ▶ Interpreter Considerations
 - More time, prep, consistency



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What an EL Evaluation Involves

- ▶ Things to Avoid
 - ▶ Waiting for more English
 - ▶ Assuming delay is always language-based



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Soapbox Moment

- ▶ Timely Evaluations Matter
 - EL students deserve timely evaluations
 - Let's not wait



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Best Practices in Working with Interpreters



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In my 13 years of experience working as a bilingual school psych, here's what I know:

**Bilingual Evaluations are complex
Bilingual Evaluations are hard
Bilingual Evaluations are not linear
Bilingual Evaluations take more time**

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Assessment Allies

- ▶ Monolingual & Bilingual School Psych Collaboration
 - Shared responsibility amongst educators
 - Using interpreters *



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**And sometimes using Interpreters is Crucial
to completing an evaluation**

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Best Practices in Collaborating with Interpreters

- ▶ First, keep in mind the proper terminology
- ▶ Translator: relates to written work
- ▶ Interpreter: relates to oral language



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**Fact: 4.6 million public school students are
English language learners**

**Interpreters assist and facilitate communication
with non-English families**

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BUT...

there is a lack of proper vetting for language proficiency in
school districts.

Most interpreters lack the educational background as
trained translator and interpreters

And most lack training in special education terminology

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BRIEFING SESSIONS

Consider a briefing session before and after the
interpreted encounter OR testing session

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PRE Session

Discuss or train your interpreters in:

- psychoeducational language
- assessment terminology
- psychometrics
- and discuss the importance of being attentive to body
language, while being mindful of cultural implications

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PRE Session Benefits

- is that you minimize misunderstandings during session
- more effective with time
- better psychometrics

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POST Session

- Discuss observations
- nonverbal
- what is culturally relevant?

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Ensuring Effective Communication:

using simple, short sentences for clarity and ease of interpretation-nonverbal

Avoid idiomatic expressions and professional jargon, or provide clear explanations if used.

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Checking for Understanding:

Try the teach-back method instead of yes/no questions to confirm understanding.

Emphasize the importance of being attentive to body language, while being mindful of cultural interpretations.

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Ethical Considerations

Remind the interpreter about confidentiality

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Key Takeaways

- Bilingualism does **not** cause language delays. Misunderstandings around bilingual development can lead to misidentification or delays in needed services.
- The "silent period" is **not** a reason to delay evaluation—it's a normal part of language acquisition but should not mask genuine red flags.
- Use the OELPA and WIDA as tools—but understand what each score really tells you about language proficiency and readiness for assessment.
- A monolingual evaluation in English should only be considered when the student demonstrates proficiency across **receptive, productive, and interactive modalities**.
- Use the **BRAVO Method™** to guide your decision-making and ensure a culturally and linguistically responsive assessment process.
- Collaborate with bilingual colleagues, interpreters, and families. You don't need to be bilingual to advocate for bilingual learners—you just need the right tools and awareness.

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Resources and Tools



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Special Education and
Bilingual Learners
Book Recommendations for
Specialists and
School Psychologists

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Special Education
Considerations for English
Language Learners, 2nd ed.
by Hanayan, Marler,
Sanchez-Lopez, and Damico

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Dual Language Development
and Disorders
by Fred Genesee

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Supporting English Language
Learners in the Classroom
by Haas and Esparza Brown

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Seven Steps to Separating
Difference from Disability
by Catherine Collier

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The PERA Services® Team is dedicated to serving Pk-12th grade, English language learners and their families within the Latinx community. By supporting school districts and ETR teams, we guarantee the best culturally and linguistically responsive support services for students.

Serving public school districts throughout the state of Ohio with specialized bilingual school psychology services since 2018.

If you need support with your bilingual evals, please reach out to PERA Services at info@peraservicesinc.com or visit www.peraservicesinc.com




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✦ Q & A time ✦

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Thank you!



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