1

Migrant Students, Schools, and Culture



1. Cultural Differences

Traditions, family values, and individuals themselves vary greatly. Differences should not be interpreted as deficiencies nor cultures contrasted so as to imply that one is better than another. In trying to avoid culture-specific lists of behaviors—which can be interpreted as stereotyping—the following insights apply to students from many cultures. Students who have limited proficiency in English may or may not display the following behaviors:

- Some students are not accustomed to looking directly at an authority figure or an older person. They may feel more comfortable looking down or away. This is a sign of respect in some cultures.
- Many students who are limited in English refrain from asking for help and will not answer voluntarily. They may smile or nod, seeming to indicate that they understand what is being said, when in reality they do not. Make eye contact and smile, go over to the student's desk to offer individual coaching and questioning, and assign the student a peer tutor (selecting someone who really wants to take on that responsibility). If the tutor knows the student's native language, so much the better.
- Some students may be apprehensive about speaking out in a group, either because the teacher—who is seen as a respected "elder"—is present, or because they may not have a specifically meaningful thing to say. Silence may—in some students' cultures—be a sign of respect rather than a sign of an inability or a refusal to participate. Many students have experienced teacher-centered classrooms in their native countries and are not comfortable with being asked to take an active role.
- Due to cultural background, some students may not be accustomed to physical education activities and may resist participating at first.
- Cultures perceive personal space differently. Comfortably close in one culture may be perceived as an invasion of space or an aggressive posture in another. Allow time and provide opportunities for adjustment to these differences—for both LEP students and other students in your classroom.
- Many LEP students prefer to work cooperatively on assigned tasks. Others may prefer to work individually. What may look like cheating to a teacher is actually a culturally acquired learning style—an attempt to "mimic," see, or "model" what has to be done. This is an attempt to participate in the learning process, not do the wrong thing.
- Cultural groups have differing attitudes toward the importance of time and being on time. Students may arrive at school late on a consistent basis. Some students may be absent quite frequently due to activities that the family finds more important than school, e.g., babysitting younger children or working. This does not mean that they don't value education. It is simply an attempt to survive economically and to adapt to the mandatory educational system of the United States (not the case in many other countries). They also need time to adjust to the fact that there may be legal consequences for parents who don't send their children to school regularly (an entirely new expectation for them). Use an interpreter if necessary to inform parents of these expectations and educational policies.
- Misunderstandings due to communication problems or cultural differences are quite common. Practice patience and understanding as these students adjust to new situations. Use an interpreter to address abstract or complex behaviors or situations. Recognize that in the transitional second-language acquisition and acculturation period, unintentional "mistakes" will be made, especially as students first transfer what they know as acceptable behaviors from their own culture to the U.S. classroom or school.

2. Four Stages of Acculturation

The challenge of learning a new language and the culture that goes with it is one that all LEP students face. They require a period of adjustment to the new and baffling ways of saying and doing things that they encounter every day. Four successive stages that each student will pass through on the road to acculturation have been identified:

1. **Euphoria**. During this initial phase the students will experience a period of excitement over the newness of the surroundings.

2. **Culture Shock**. This term refers to phenomena ranging from mild irritability to deep psychological panic and crisis. Culture shock is associated with the learner's feelings of estrangement, anger, hostility, indecision, frustration, unhappiness, sadness, loneliness, homesickness, and even physical illness. Persons undergoing culture shock view their new world with resentment and alternate between being angry at others for not understanding them and being filled with self-pity.

3. **Anomie**. This is a stage of gradual—and at first tentative and vacillating—recovery. This stage is typified by what is called "culture stress": some problems of acculturation are solved while others continue for some time. As individuals begin to accept the differences in thinking and feeling that surround them, they slowly become more empathic with other persons in the second culture. Anomie might be described as a feeling of homelessness, where one feels neither bound firmly to one's native culture nor fully adapted to the second culture.

4. **Assimilation or Adaptation**. This fourth stage represents near or full recovery as shown by acceptance of the new culture and self-confidence in the "new" person who has developed in this culture.

Excerpted from *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, H. Douglas Brown, 1994, Prentice Hall Regents, 1-800-223-1360.

3. Learning the Students' Names

The first order of business is to make sure that you know how to pronounce a student's name. The easiest way is to ask the student what his or her name is—listen carefully and repeat it until you've gotten it. If they prefer a nickname, that's fine, but it should be of their choosing. Getting the name right seems like a small thing, but remember what it feels like to you when someone mispronounces or misspells your name. It's important that the teacher model the correct name for the other students, just as she should help the LEP student to learn how to pronounce names in English.



4. Characteristics of Migrant Students and Parents

Students

Migrant students are students who move with their families as many as two or three times each school year. Their parents are usually farm workers who are compelled to move frequently in order to harvest and/or process seasonal crops. A family who spends the winter in Florida picking oranges begins to move north in the spring to pick peaches in Georgia and then to New York in the fall to pick apples. Once the apples are picked and the cold weather begins, the migrant family heads back to Florida until the following spring, when the cycle begins again.

This means that migrant students—who are primarily of Mexican, Central American, or Puerto Rican origin—will move **through** your school without ever finishing a grade, and may or may not come back the following year after encounters with other schools. These students—whose English proficiency is often limited—face the challenge of adapting to a new school, new teachers, and new classmates many times each year. It is essential to find out what each student knows both from schooling in the home country and schooling in the United States. In this way, you can contribute in a meaningful way to maintaining the educational continuity that is vital for these students to succeed.

Parents

The parents of migrant students work very hard, make little money, and often live in substandard housing. They tend to come from rural areas of their native countries and often have a marginal level of education because they had to begin working at an young age. The vast majority of migrant parents speak Spanish, while some speak an indigenous language or Haitian Creole.

They know little about schooling and the requirements that your school system may have. Find out about these parents and communicate with them. You will probably need to ask a bilingual person to help you know what language is used in the home, and what the parents know about the schools. The bilingual person may be an ESL teacher or aide, a migrant education specialist, or a volunteer. With the help of a bilingual person, you can either send notes home or call in order to maintain contact with them. Remember, migrant parents want what's best for their children, and you should keep them informed and elicit their support. (See Chapter 7, "Fostering Home-School Partnerships," for more in-depth information.)

5. Home Language

In the homes of most migrant children, the principal language is Spanish. On occasion, the family members communicate using an indigenous language (Mixteco, Kanjobal), although they often know Spanish as well. This is important because you cannot assume that a Mexican or Central American student who enters school will be fluent in Spanish. Find out the language(s) used in the home and the child's schooling history to determine how much Spanish the student knows.

In the migrant community, the parents—as a rule—have limited proficiency in English. Their literacy level in Spanish may also be quite limited. They often rely on their children who have learned English in U.S. schools to translate for them—thus placing their children in adult roles and situations very early. Generally speaking, the children who have lived in the United States the longest are the ones who use the most English, although their Spanish remains essential as a means to converse with their parents and older relatives.

"My family and I still do things together here; they are just different things from what we did in Mexico. When we first moved here, we all worked together. We worked in the cebollitas (green onion) fields. We worked as a family because it's faster. We helped each other. One person pulls the onion out of the ground, the other person shakes it, another cleans it, and then one of us ties them up together. I think doing things working together is important. It makes our family stronger. Sometimes we stay home and I help my father work on our car. We try to eat dinner together, and when my parents aren't working too late, we go to church together.

My parents don't think I should work in the fields when I get older. They tell me that I shouldn't lose a career like a lot of people in the fields. They've also told me that some people get sick because of the work they do in the fields. I think they tell me these things for my well-being, so that I'll study and finish high school."

Victor Machuca—a migrant student—talks about his family. (*Voices from the Fields*, S. Beth Atkin, p. 50)

6. Do You Have Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students?

Most limited English proficient students speak another language in their homes. If you've ever studied a foreign language, you surely remember what a painstaking discovery process it is. Keep in mind that it generally takes from **5-10 years** for a second language learner to perform like a native speaker **academically**. Usually, the younger the student, the sooner he or she will "catch up." Be patient with yourself and your students. Maintain high yet realistic expectations, and remind yourself frequently that "limited English proficient" *does not* mean "limited Thinking proficient."

Here are some basic suggestions for working effectively with LEP students:

1. Be warm and welcoming. Speak clearly and simply; using gestures when possible.
2. Assign buddies and peer tutors to LEP student (bilingual ones when possible). Be sure to include the child in all class activities.
3. Encourage the student to share his/her language and culture with you and your class. Don't tell LEP children that they shouldn't use their native language; this negatively affects their sense of identity and they may become ashamed of their first language. We want them to grow up knowing and valuing two languages (at least!), not just English.
4. Focus attention on key vocabulary. Use pictures, charts, graphs, and stories to teach vocabulary in context.
5. Keep talking to the student. It is normal for him/her to experience a "silent period" that can last for days, weeks, or even months. If a child in the early stages of learning English is reluctant to speak in English and shows clear signs of anxiety, do not force production.
6. Arrange for the student to receive intensive help with English whenever possible.
7. Instead of using textbooks with LEP students, try making use of your school library. Almost any topic or subject area you're teaching is contained in a children's book that generally has more pictures and simplified English. Many textbooks are available in Spanish editions.
8. Use a grading system that shows progress, but does not unfairly compare your LEP student with his/her peers' performance. Standardized tests are usually not a valid measure of an LEP student's performance; these test scores should not be used for placement purposes.
9. Many LEP students have either repeated a grade or have been placed in lower grades in the erroneous belief that they will learn English more quickly. Keep these students at grade level, while modifying and adapting their assignments, and offer additional help with English as frequently as possible.

7. Will the LEP Student Understand My Classroom Rules and Follow Directions?

LEP students will follow your classroom rules very much as other students do. Indeed, the LEP students should learn your classroom management system as soon as possible; otherwise, potential discipline problems may arise such as unruly behavior, classmate ridicule, and feelings of resentment. Although the first weeks may be confusing, the LEP student should understand your expectations from the very beginning.

Displaying charts, graphs, and reward systems will assist in communicating your expectations. Illustrate with symbols or pictures if there is any doubt about the difficulty of the language level.

Demonstrate consistency, concern, and control. These may be conveyed nonverbally, and an alert student will recognize classroom routines and expectations, like checking homework or going to the office for a tardy slip, very early in the school year. The LEP student's understanding of common classroom rewards such as "stickers," "outside," "treats," and "grade" are proof that the LEP student knows what is happening in the classroom. He or she must therefore be held to the same standards of appropriate behavior as the other students, and be rewarded or punished accordingly. Moreover, the other students need to see that the LEP student is treated as an equal.

At the beginning, LEP students will attempt to follow verbal directions while actually observing modeled behavior. So, while speaking about a math problem in the text, for example, point to someone who has his or her math book open; hold up a ruler when telling the students to use a ruler for their work; when students are coloring maps for social studies, have a student show the LEP student his box of crayons, point to the map and nod "yes."

While others are doing seat work, the LEP student may copy from the board or a book, practice using appropriate worksheets, work quietly with a peer, listen to tapes, work on a computer, or illustrate a topic.

Design a list of commonly used "directional" words such as circle, write, draw, cut, read, fix, copy, underline, add, subtract. Have the LEP student find these "action" words in a picture dictionary with a buddy or alone. Then have the student illustrate these words with symbols or translate them into the native language. The student may keep these words in the front of a notebook, on the desk, or in a pencil case. They will help the LEP student become an independent learner, capable of being resourceful and occupied when you are not available to help. Underline or circle these terms on the board, on worksheets, or in consumable texts. When the student recognizes these words, you can expect him or her to complete the assigned tasks independently.

8. Spanish - Español

Common Expressions

Hola	Hello
Por Favor	Please
Buenos Días	Good Morning
Muchas Gracias	Many thanks
¿Cómo Estás?	How are you?
Bien	Good, fine
Me Llamo	My name is
¡Muy Bien!	Very good!
¿Cómo Te Llamas?	What's your name?
Adiós	Goodbye
¿Dónde Está?	Where is?
Hasta Mañana	See you tomorrow
¿Comprendes?	Do you understand?
Si, Comprendo	Yes, I understand
No, No Comprendo	No, I don't understand

Classroom Expressions

El Maestro, La Maestra	Teacher
El Papel	Paper
La Ventana	Window
La Puerta	Door
La Pluma	Pen
Las Tijeras	Scissors
El Autobús	Bus
El Lápiz	Pencil
La Pizarra	Chalkboard
La Bandera	Flag
La Silla	Chair
La Tiza	Chalk
La Regla	Ruler
La Mesa	Table
El Teléfono	Telephone
El Baño	Bathroom
Los Creyones	Crayons
El Agua	Water

Commands

		Es La Hora De	(It's time to:)
Escucha	Listen	Dormir	To sleep
Mira	Look	Jugar	To play
Dame	Give me	Trabajar	To work
Levántate	Get up	Leer	To read
Vamos Afuera	Let's go outside	Hablar	To speak
Siéntate	Sit down	Escribir	To write
Silencio	Be quiet	Dibujar	To draw
Quita, Deja	Stop, quit it	Comer	To eat

Colors

Rojo	red
Amarillo	yellow
Negro	black
Café	brown
Verde	green
Azul	blue
Blanco	white

Days of the Week

Lunes-Monday
Martes-Tuesday
Miércoles-Wednesday
Jueves-Thursday
Viernes-Friday
Sábado-Saturday
Domingo-Sunday

Months

Enero-January	Julio-July
Febrero-February	Agosto-August
Marzo-March	Septiembre-September
Abril-April	Octubre-October
Mayo-May	Noviembre-November
Junio-June	Diciembre-December

Numbers

1-Uno	10-Diez
2-Dos	11-Once
3-Tres	12-Doce
4-Cuatro	13-Trece
5-Cinco	14-Catorce
6-Seis	
7-Siete	
8-Ocho	
9-Nueve	

9. Identifying and Placing Limited English Proficient Students

Why should you identify limited English proficient students?

You should identify language minority migrant students who need ESL instruction, or those who will be reasonably expected to have difficulty in the regular classroom due to limited English proficiency, because failure to do so will jeopardize their future in school.

How can you assess English language proficiency?

There are several oral language proficiency tests that will help you determine if your students are non-English speaking, limited English speaking, or fluent English speaking. Valid and reliable assessment instruments are

1. BINL (Basic Inventory of Natural Language). Checkpoint Systems, 1558 N. Waterman, Suite C, San Bernardino, CA 92404
2. IDEA Oral Language Proficiency Test. Ballard and Tighe, Inc., 580 Atlas St., Brea, CA 92621, 1-800-321-4332
3. LAS (Language Assessment Scales). CTB/McGraw Hill, Del Monte Research Park, 2500 Garden Road, Monterey, CA 93940, 1-800-538-9547

What else should you know about the student?

Important factors in gauging the student's ability are age, previous education in native country, previous education in the United States, and proficiency in the home language.

What should you consider when placing a student?

Remember that "limited English proficient" does not mean "limited Thinking proficient." A 10-year-old student may speak very little English, but he/she may also have the experience, interests, and maturity of a fourth grader. He/she may be even further ahead on some subjects than U.S. fourth graders. When placing students, you should consider the following:

Student factors

The extent and continuity of previous education
Language proficiency in English
Language proficiency in home language
Degree of home support for second language learning

Teacher factors

Knowledge of the language acquisition process
Cross-cultural skills
Flexibility in teaching and modifying lessons and assessments
Empathy for the LEP migrant student

How do you determine appropriate placement for LEP students?

You will need a wide variety of information to make an informed decision (see p. 10). Generally, physical education, art, music, science, and math teachers model, act out, gesture, show diagrams, do experiments, or ask other students to show what is expected of the class. These subjects are good for LEP students to take with peers. For reading, writing, or social studies, you might consider using bilingual aides, a sheltered class, a pull-out class, or in a combined grade level—say 3,4, and 5—placing students at a lower level. These are the most "language-laden" classes, and are apt to place a burden on students until they can gain more proficiency in English.

Student/Home Language Survey

Most often when a student arrives in school a student or home language survey is completed to determine if the child speaks another language in the home. Attached are two such surveys, one in English, and one in Spanish.



Student Language Survey

Student's Name _____ Date _____

School _____ Grade _____

Teacher _____

Circle the best answer to each question.

1. Was the first language you learned English?	Yes	No
2. Can you speak a language other than English? If yes, what language?	Yes	No
3. Which language do you use most often when you speak to your friends?	Other (Specify: _____)	English
4. Which language do you use most often when you speak to your parents?	Other (Specify: _____)	English

Adapted from *The Identification and Assessment of Language Minority Students: a Handbook for Educators,* Hamayan et al., 1985. Illinois Resource Center, Arlington Heights, Illinois.

Encuesta Del Idioma

Nombre del/de la estudiante _____ Fecha _____

Escuela _____ Grado _____

Maestro/a _____

Indica la mejor respuesta para cada pregunta.

1. ¿Fue español el primer idioma que aprendiste?

   Sí No

2. ¿ Puedes hablar otros idiomas aparte del inglés y español?

   Sí No

   Si respondiste que sí, ¿cuáles otros idiomas puedes hablar?

3. ¿Cuál (es) idioma(s) usas cuando hablas con tus amigos?

   Español Inglés Otro _____

4. ¿Cuál (es) idioma(s) usas cuando hablas con tus padres o familiares?

   Español Inglés Otro _____

_____

Adapted from *The Identification and Assessment of Language Minority Students: a Handbook for Educators,* Hamayan et al., 1985. Illinois Resource Center, Arlington Heights, Illinois.

Language Minority Student Information Sheet

Student's Name _____ Age _____ Grade _____
School _____ Academic Year _____

1. What language do you speak most often at home?

2. What language do you speak most often with your friends?

3. How many years have you been in school in your native country?
   in the United States?

4. What grade were you in at the last school you attended?
   What is the name of the last school you attended?

5. Can you read in Spanish (your native language)?
   Is your reading ability: Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Very Limited _____?

6. Can you write in Spanish (your native language)?
   Is your writing ability: Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Very Limited _____?

7. Do you think that you need help learning English? Yes _____ No _____
   If yes, in which areas do you need the most help?
   Speaking
   Listening
   Reading
   Writing

Comments _____
_____
_____

10. Grade Retention: A Common Yet Misguided Option

Description of the Problem

Statistics show that very few migrant students graduate at age 20, and almost none have graduated at older than 20 (Bigler and Ludovina, 1982). Therefore, **any child who is placed two or more years below his/her grade level is virtually doomed to drop out** of school. Even one year, with the added possibility of losing another year because of migrancy or credit loss in the upper grades, may doom a child to dropping out.

Why Are Migrants Older Than Their Peers?

- They look young (are small).
- The family members do not speak English and do not protest the placement.
- The school personnel think that they will learn English faster in lower grades.
- The students have never or rarely attended school.
- The students or parents inform the school of the last grade attended (which may not be equivalent, or may reflect a year of traveling, or sporadic schooling).
- The schools group migrant children with other migrant or LEP students.

The Story of Maria Gutierrez

Sooner or later you will face the dilemma of where to place and whether to promote your migrant students. See if you recognize Maria:

Maria Gutierrez is being retained in kindergarten this year. Last year Maria was very shy and did not talk much throughout the year. Maria had never used scissors (her mother did not allow it) and she did not know all of her alphabet when she entered kindergarten for the first time. At home Maria is a very normal child and in fact she often helps care for her three-year-old brother. With other children, Maria appears to be as alert and active as her playmates and she often emerges as a leader. School tests show her to be of average intelligence, despite the possibility that the testing may be skewed by the fact that Maria is bilingual.

When the teacher informed Maria's parents that she was to be retained, she did not say it was due to English language development or inability to perform the required kindergarten tasks (often uncited reasons for retention); she merely said that Maria was immature, and small for her age and that she felt she would benefit from another year in kindergarten.

What Maria's teacher did not say and probably does not know is that

1. Maria's chances of dropping out of school have just been increased by 50% because she is retained.

2. No research data indicate that retaining Maria will in any way improve her educational performance.

3. The psychological and emotional impacts of retention are real. Estimates indicate that, next to parent divorce, this is the most traumatic of common events that could happen to Maria.

11. When are Special Education Referrals Appropriate?

Specialists assume that approximately the same proportion of very bright individuals, cognitively limited individuals, language disabled individuals, etc. will be found in any population. Statistically, about 12% of the language minority population in the United States may require special education. In some school districts, language minority students are over-represented in special education, while in other districts there may be an under-representation of handicapped language minority students.

The Prereferral Process

This is a screening and intervention process that involves identifying problems experienced by students in the regular classroom, identifying the source of the problems (student, teacher, curriculum, environment, etc.) and taking steps to resolve the problems in the context of the regular classroom. This process seeks to eliminate unnecessary and inappropriate referrals to special education.

Assessment and Referral

A referral to special education should happen only after all other avenues have been explored, and you conclude that the child's needs cannot be met by the regular education program. Confirmation of a handicap and identification of its specific nature are provided by a comprehensive assessment of the student. **All referrals of LEP students to special education should include the results of tests in the child's native language and in English**, and all records and reports on which the referral is based. **Verify the appropriateness of the school's curriculum, the qualifications and experience of the teacher, and the appropriateness of instruction provided to the student (e.g., continuity, proper sequencing, the teaching of prerequisite skills)**. Document the child's problems across settings and personnel and provide evidence that the child's difficulties are present in both languages, and that he or she has not made satisfactory progress despite having received competent instruction. However, because many of these children are losing or have not fully developed first language skills, it may be difficult to ascertain that the learning difficulty exists across languages. The ESL teacher, bilingual education teacher, and classroom teacher who work regularly with the LEP student will have the most important school-based observations and input in the assessment process. This, coupled with input from parents and guardians, becomes the foundation for the assessment process.

Excerpted from *Referring Language Minority Students to Special Education*, ERIC Digest, P. Olson, 1991, Center for Applied Linguistics.

12. What Specific Activities Will Prepare the LEP Student for School?

Explain, demonstrate, and anticipate possible difficulties with everyday routines and regulations whenever time permits. If there is a large LEP population in your school or district, perhaps volunteers could compile pictorial or bilingual guidelines or handbooks with details of policy and procedures. Depending upon the student's experience(s) with formal education, the need for explanations may vary greatly. Consider the following routines as "teaching opportunities" to prepare the students for American culture:

In Class

- Class rules: Rewards, enforcement, consequences.
- School conduct.
- Morning rituals: Greetings, calendar work, assignments, collection of money, homework.
- Library conduct: check out, book return.
- Field trips/permission slips.
- Gym: Participation, showers, attire.
- School photographs: Dress, payment.
- Substitutes.
- Seat work/group work.
- Tests, quizzes, reports.
- Grades, report cards, incompletes.
- Treats.
- Free time.
- Teams: Choosing, assigning.
- Standardized testing and exemptions.
- Exams.
- Special projects: Extra credit, double grades.

In School

- Breaks: Bathroom, water, recess.
- Cafeteria routines: Line formation, lunch passes.
- Fire drills.
- Assemblies: Pep rallies, awards, awards ceremonies.
- Contests and competitions.
- Holidays: Festivities, traditions.
- Fund raisers.
- Routine health exams, screening.
- Suspension.
- Guidance counseling.
- Disciplinary methods: In-school suspension.
- Free lunch: Income verification.
- Family life education: Sex education.

After School

- Parent conferences and attendance.
- PTA meetings.
- Proms, dances, special events.
- Field days.
- Clubs, honor societies, sport activities.
- Detention.
- Summer school.

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