

Working with Spanish-speaking Special Education Students

Using music, drawings, and teatro in SDC classrooms

Assessing students for SST and IEP teams

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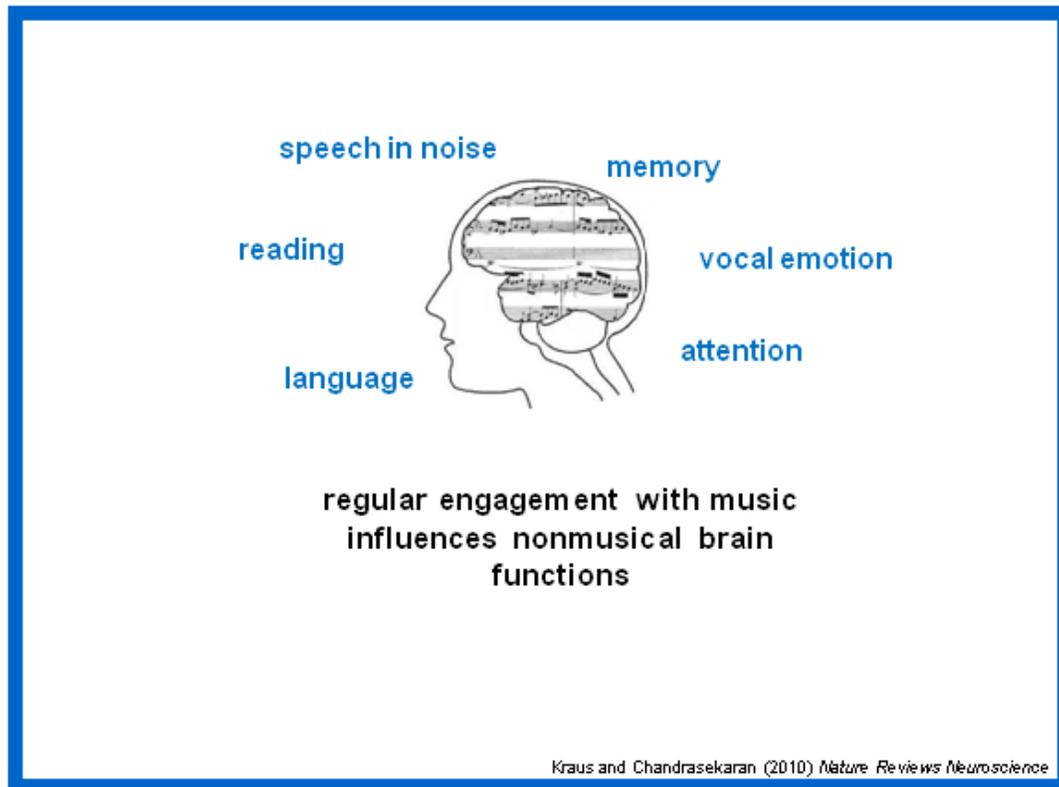
Stanley A. Lucero

From 1994 through 2006 I worked in the field of bilingual special education.

Bilingual Special Education Resource Teacher - Madera Unified School District

Special Day Class Teacher - Madera Unified School District [Easton Elem & Madera High]

Special Day Class Teacher - Fresno Unified School District [Leavenworth Elem, Roosevelt High, & Jefferson Elem]



A case of severe cultural shock

Guadalupe

I was assigned to go do language and bilingual academic assessments for a 5-year-old girl in a school with only mainstream English classrooms. Lupe was in Kindergarten. No one had heard her speak a word since she entered school [three months]. She had many accidents with her bladder and her family had to come to school to bring her a change of clothes. No one in her classroom or school was allowed to speak Spanish. A bilingual aide was assigned to work with her about twice a week for a half hour but the bilingual aide was strongly encouraged to speak mostly English. Her monolingual English-speaker teacher suspected Guadalupe was retarded and had no language.

I looked through her cum folder and found that her initial home language survey indicated only Spanish in the home. Her BSM oral language results placed her at level one in both English and Spanish. These low oral language scores placed her as non-English speaker and non-Spanish speaker in the Special Diagnosis category.

I made a home visit to gather more information. Her mother told me Lupe was a “perica” at home and played teacher with her younger brothers and sisters. She told me there were complications at birth and that Lupe started talking later [between age 2-3]. Her mother also told me that no one from the school had ever come to make a home visit.

I went back to school and administered a series of tests in both English and Spanish. I used the pre IPT and the PPVT/TVIP tests because they started with receptive language questions. On the Pre IPT, she scored level one in English but level 3 [survival to intermediate] in Spanish. On the WMLS and the PPVT/TVIP assessment Lupe tested very low in English at about the 1-2 age equivalents category. In Spanish she scored low at about the 3-4 age range.

I assisted the school psychologist with a battery of receptive, nonverbal assessments in Spanish. Lupe scored below average in most of the assessments.

At the IEP meeting, the decision was reached that Lupe was in the well below average in Spanish. Her low scores in English were attributed to her level of English Language proficiency. The IEP team arranged for support from a bilingual aide in Spanish on a daily basis for a minimum of 30 minutes a day.

The following year I was reassigned to teach a K-8 Spanish special day class and Lupe was assigned to my class. She was repeating Kindergarten. I sang many songs with my students and Lupe was always the first student to memorize all of the songs. She never learned to write her name Guadalupe unless she could refer to her printed name. She did learn to write Lupe. She spoke to me in Spanish every day without any problems. I focused my teaching on building up her confidence and self esteem.

It appears to me that Lupe had experienced a severe case of culture shock by being forced into a foreign language [English] at school with almost no support in her primary language {Spanish}. Her reaction to the culture shock was to become a selective mute [deciding not to talk at all] and her body reacted with limited bladder control.



- ✓ The lyrics of songs reflect the four domains of language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
- ✓ The lyrics of songs reflect creative, poetic written language.
- ✓ The musician who performs the songs must utilize listening and speaking skills.
- ✓ The musician might use reading and writing skills in the process of learning the lyrics to a song.
- ✓ Musicians who read music will also utilize music reading and writing skills.

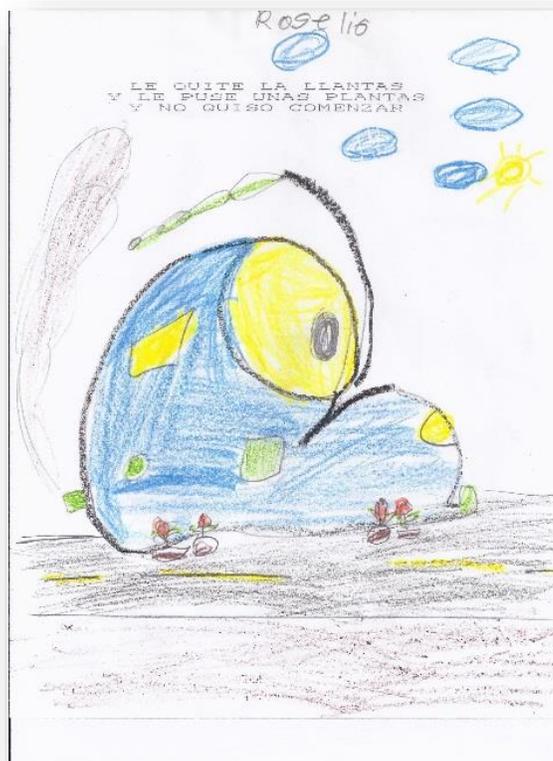


Figure 1 El carro Ford by Rogelio

Based on the following verse from the song:
"Le quité las llantas y le puse unas plantas y no quiso comenzar."

Rogelio came from a monolingual Spanish-speaking home and was about 10 years old.

**Unable to progress in English skills but never taught in his native language [Spanish]
Martin**

At an IEP meeting, Martin's parents had been informed that Martin was still reading at the 1st grade level. Martin's father asked if Martin would be reading if he have ever been taught to read in Spanish.

I was assigned to do oral language assessments and Spanish academic assessments of a special day class [SDC] 5th grade student identified as mentally retarded. He was in a monolingual English SDC classroom where only English was permitted in the classroom and in the school.

I went through his cum folder and found the initial home language survey indicated only Spanish in the home. His initial BSM oral language results were level one in English [no English] and level 3 in Spanish [survival]. All other assessments had been conducted in English including the academic and intelligence assessments used in Kindergarten to classify him as mentally retarded and placed in an SDC classroom conducted entirely in English.

My home visit to the parents didn't indicate any health, birth, trauma, etc. issues.

I went back to school and started the assessments. On the BSM he scored level 3 in English [survival] and level six in Spanish [advanced]. On the Spanish math section of the WMLS he scored about the third-grade level. Grade three is where math word problems become more common. He couldn't read the English word problems. In Spanish he scored slightly higher but again encounter the inability to read Spanish work problems. On the WMLS English reading assessments, he scored between the 1-2 grade level. In Spanish he scored between the 2-3 grade level. On the IPT oral language assessments I noticed a complete difference in his speaking ability. On one of the items, I read a short paragraph and then asked Martin to tell me what I read. He responded in short, broken English. However, in Spanish he almost repeated the entire paragraph word for word.

I assisted the school psychologist with intelligence assessments in Spanish and non-verbal assessments in Spanish. The school psychologist reported that Martin was not mentally retarded but had a learning handicap. His lack of progress in English on both academic and ability in the school was a result of only receiving instruction in his second, and weaker language, English. Some of Martin's Spanish academic standard scores were higher than his English ability standard scores.

The IEP team changed his classification to learning handicapped and required a minimum of 30 minutes daily instruction in Spanish reading and support in Spanish. He was still placed in the same monolingual English-speaking SDC classroom.

I have not had contact with Martin since I was reassigned to work as a Spanish SDC classroom the following year. It would be very interesting to see how he progressed in Spanish and was able to transfer his newly acquired skills to English.



Figure 2 The Little Apple by Lupe

Based on the following verse in *La manzanita* by Carol Perkins.

“This apple is a good house just for me.”

Lupe came from a monolingual Spanish-speaking home and was 6 years old.

Speech Therapist recommended language disorder Maria

Maria was a sixth-grade student in a monolingual classroom who had gone through the Student Study Team process and was already in the IEP process. The Speech Therapist had determined that Maria had a language disorder based on speech assessment conducted in English. However, since Maria came from a Spanish speaking home, I was assigned to do oral language assessments and Spanish academic assessments.

When I looked through her cum folder I noticed that her initial home language survey indicated Spanish only in the home. Both her English and Spanish initial BSM scores were level three [survival] and placed her in the Special Diagnosis category. All of her instruction had been provided in English from Kindergarten through the Sixth grade. I noticed that all of the IEP assessments had been conducted only in English.

My home visit did not reveal any clues to pursue.

I administer the BSM oral language assessments and she scored level six [advanced] in both English and Spanish. These scores placed her in the advanced proficient bilingual category. I also assessed her with the IPT 1 and the WMLS survey. She scored at her age level in the oral language portions of both sets of assessments. I don't remember her English and Spanish reading levels but did notice she was slightly higher in Spanish. I think she was reading near the second grade level in both languages. She was unable to do math word problems in either language.

I spoke to the school psychologist and showed her the results of my language and academic assessments. I told her that it didn't make sense for someone with high oral language scores in both English and Spanish would have a language disorder. The decision was reached to refer Maria to a bilingual Speech Therapist to assess her in both English and Spanish. I assisted the school psychologist with the ability assessments in Spanish and non-verbal tests in Spanish.

The IEP team reached the conclusion that Maria did not have a language disorder but did have a learning handicap. She was placed in an English RSP program with daily Spanish support.

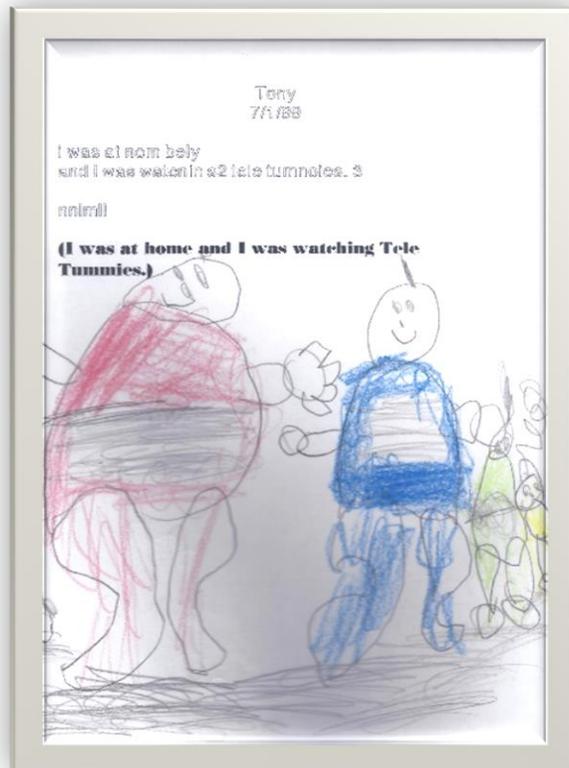


Figure 3 Drawing by Tony about his family.

First Tony drew a picture of what he was doing at home.

Second Tony typed what he was doing.

Third, Tony read his sentence to me and I typed in what he said.

Tony came from a bilingual English/Spanish speaking home and was about 9 years old.

ESL high school student repeating ESL in 10th grade

Lupe

Lupe, a 1st grade English Learner, was referred to the Student Study Team because she was not progressing in English. At her high school she was in the English curriculum with SDAIE classes plus ESL classes. Her ESL teacher was concerned because Guadalupe was repeating ESL 1 in her second year in high school.

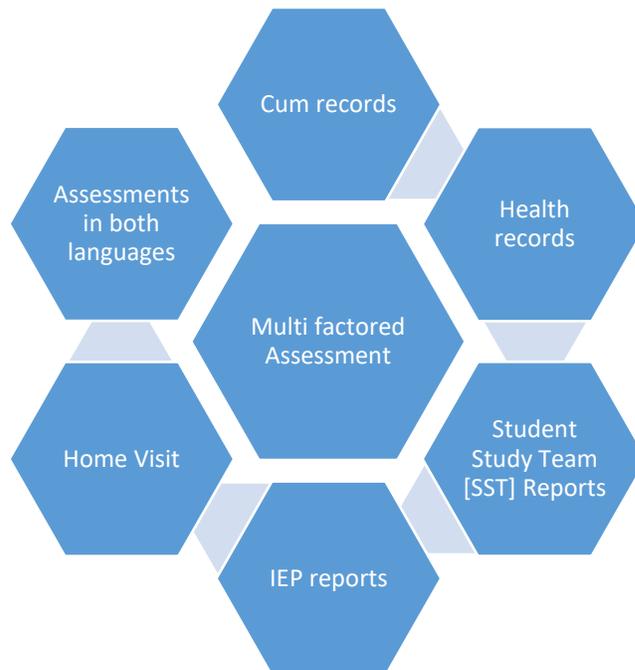
Her cum folder showed she came from a monolingual Spanish speaking home. She transferred in from another school district as a 9th grade student. I think she had gone to school in Mexico for a few years until the family moved to the United States about 6th or 7th grade. Her initial BSM scores were both level four [intermediate]. As far as I could tell she was only instructed in English in the United States and only assessed in English.

The biggest clue came when I made a home visit and spoke to her mother. She told me Guadalupe had started speaking at about age 2. She had a history of many ear infections. She had just gone to the doctor to have tubes placed in both ears. Her stronger ear was the left ear.

I spoke to the school nurse about the home visit and found that there were no records of ear infections and none concerning tubes in Guadalupe's ears. The nurse recommended that all teachers give Guadalupe a seat in the front row to the right side of the room. The nurse said she would monitor Guadalupe's health issues.

The Student Study Team recommended following the nurse's advice and wait to see how Guadalupe progressed in ESL. This was the last I heard about Guadalupe. The ESL teacher told me that Guadalupe was beginning to show progress in the ESL class.

This referral gave me the insight as to the importance of accurate and updated health records. The main reason Guadalupe was not learning English was because she had difficulty hearing the lessons.



The assessment of Spanish speaking students to Special Education has been the topic of many books, seminars, journals, and conferences. PL 94-145 (1975) outlines the need for a multi-disciplinarian, multi-factored assessment of the whole child in both the home language and the school language.

A student who displays a potential learning disorder in English must display the same potential learning disorder in the home language.

Distinguish between a potential learning disorder across all languages and a stage in acquiring a second language.

La Bamba:
The power of music

I went to visit a Spanish SDC classroom with a bilingual speech therapist. I was going to be assigned as a K-8 Spanish SDC teacher and wanted to get as many ideas as possible to use in my new classroom. The principal of the school found out that I played guitar and sang songs in Spanish and asked if I would sing to the entire school at an assembly. I said yes and took my guitar with me to the school visit. After visiting the Spanish SDC classroom, we went to the assembly.

This was a small country school with about 60 students. We met in a large room and I sang with the children grades K-8. About 30 minutes into the program, I was asked to sing La bamba since the movie had just been released. So, I sang La bamba. All of a sudden, the teachers stopped singing along and looked at students in front row on the floor. I continued singing and looked over the students and saw most of them were singing. This appeared normal to me.

After the assembly I asked the bilingual speech therapist why the teachers were looking at the students in the front row. She told that an older student who had not spoken a word all year was singing along with me.

I had always known that music was powerful but had never observed the power of music in action.

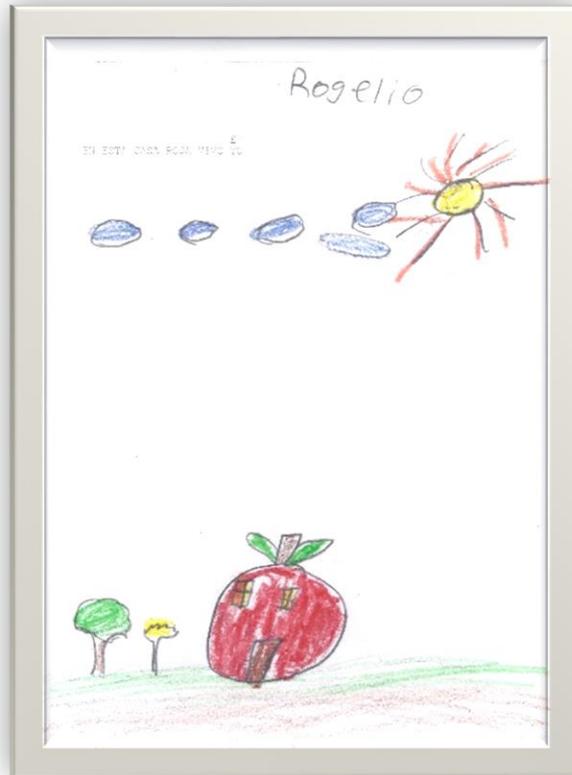


Figure 4 La manzanita by Rogelio

Drawing based on the following verse of La manzanita by Carol Perkins.

"En esta casa roja, roja, vivo yo."

Rogelio came from a monolingual Spanish-speaking home and was about 10 years old.

Caperucita Roja

Skit performed at various schools by my bilingual SDC students

As a Spanish SDC class, we learned to sing the song Caperucita Roja by Linda Quiroz. I noticed that some of my students liked singing the song, others liked making hand motions to the song while some students liked to pretend to be the characters in the song. I decided to use my teatro skills and turn the song into a skit.

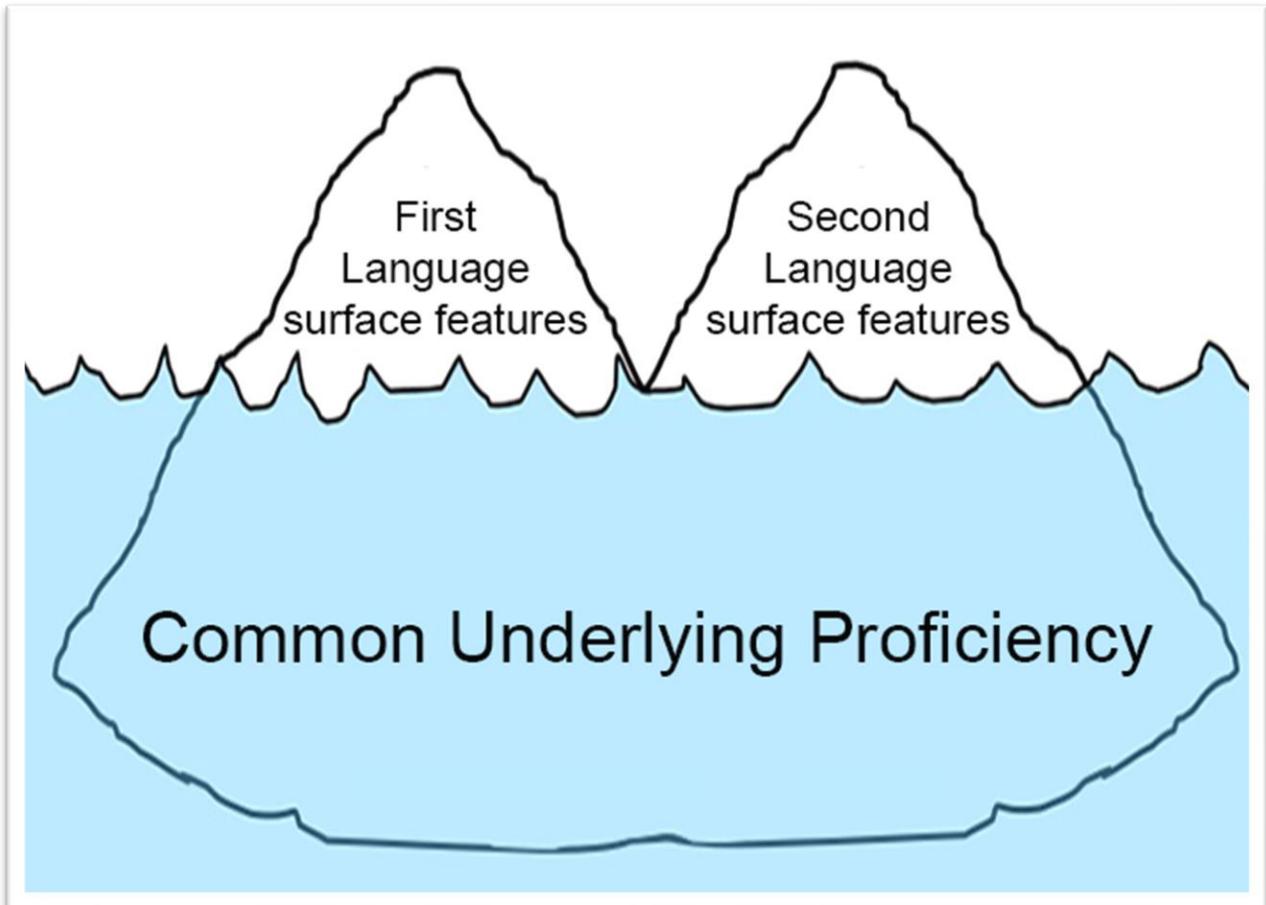
We chose four students to be the character actors: Caperucita Roja, la abuelita, el lobo, and el leñero. The students went home and with the help of their parents put together the costumes to be worn by each actor/actress.

As a group we wrote out the movements for each character as mentioned in the song. We decided how each actor would enter and exit the stage and where they would move on stage. We came up with props such as a basket full of tamales, pan dulce, etc. El leñero needed to have an axe that we made out of cardboard. All of the singers stood to the side of our "stage" to sing the song. We had backstage helpers for the props and sound effects.

When our short skit was ready and after we had practiced the skit many times in our classrooms, I arranged to go to other classrooms in the school to present our skit. We also sang a few other songs as a part of the program. We performed in front of the classrooms with the students as our audience. We probably went to at least ten classrooms. By this time our school principal decided we needed to take our show on the road. She arranged for us to go to other schools to perform Caperucita Roja.

Common Underlying Proficiency – CUP

Dr. Jim Cummins



- Above graph by Dr. Jim Cummins
- Songs learned in the native language enter CUP surface features.
- Songs learned in the second language enter CUP surface features.
- Bilingual speaking individuals can access songs learned in both the native language and the second language.
- Higher level features of songs include music and poetry.
- Using drawings creates more connections to the songs.
- Using theater brings the songs to life.

Remember

Always use the native language of your students as a part of your instruction and your daily classroom routine.

Your goal is for each student to reach their highest potential in two languages.

Start with the home language first and then reinforce concepts and vocabulary in the second language.

Do not contribute to Language Loss.

Help student maintain their home language and
ADD a second language.

Placing students in classrooms that only use their second language results in adding another barrier to their reaching their highest potential.