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Editorial

Necessary Paradigm Shifts in Bilingual Education: Rethinking Assessment in Bilingual Classrooms

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Keywords: bilingual education, assessment of students in bilingual education

This is the third and last Editorial in a series on Necessary Paradigm Shifts in Bilingual Education. The initial two Editorials focused on Rethinking Language (*JMER's* Volume 4, 2013) and the second on Rethinking Multilingual Literacy (*JMER's* Volume 5, 2014). The necessary paradigm shift discussed here focuses on the role of assessment in bilingual classrooms and the novel conceptualization of bilingual assessment.

In general, assessment of bilingual students should be based on the principles of educational equity and the dual role of assessment in bilingual classrooms. Both are central to understanding any necessary changes to ideologies in assessing bilingual students. First, educational equity calls for the use of reliable, valid, and fair assessment to effectively inform instruction (Gotlieb, 2006; Lindholm-Leary, 2007; O'Malley & Valdez-Pierce, 1996). Second, assessment in the bilingual classroom should have a combined focus on documenting language development, conceptual academic learning, and growth in bilingualism, biliteracy, and multiculturalism (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2009; Escamilla et. al., 2014; García, 2009; Gotlieb, 2006).

Anchored on these two principles, educators in bilingual classrooms should be versed on the multiple types of assessments (New York State Education Department, Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages, n.d.) and in aligning their use to the purpose for which they were designed (Black, 1998; Earl, 2013). Typically, there are six purposes for student assessments (i.e., identification and placement; monitoring and evaluating student's progress; enhancing teaching and learning; accountability; reclassification; and program evaluation), which could be achieved through the implementation of multiple classroom-based and large-scale assessments (Earl, 2013; Gotlieb, 2006; 2016; Lindholm-Leary, 2007). Some argue that the use of assessment for summative purposes (i.e., identification and placement; evaluation of student's progress; accountability; reclassification; and program evaluation), particularly in the

form of standardized testing, dominates practice in education. The finite and negative implications of this practice, particularly when assessment is done in only one of the languages of the student, are well documented in the literature (Baker & Wright, 2017; Cummins, 1984; González, 2012; Kohn, 2000; Menken, 2008; Shohamy & Menken, 2015; Soláno-Flores, & Soltéro-González, 2011; Valdés & Figueroa, 1994).

Educators in bilingual classrooms should alter the predominance in using assessment for summative purposes, also identified as Assessment *of* Learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2009; Davison & Leung, 2009; Earl, 2013; Gottlieb, 2016), to incorporate ways that assessment can inform instruction and guide students' metacognitive growth. These researchers conceptualize alternative views of the purposes of assessment as:

1. Assessment *for* learning—teachers' use assessment to modify teaching and learning activities,
2. Assessment *as* learning—students' use assessment to construct new learning in bilingual academic contexts

One innovative understanding which underlines these alternative views is that in addition to the teacher's role in designing and implementing assessment, the role of students in monitoring their own learning and creating a personal path for language and academic growth has to be underscored (Bisai & Singh, 2018; Butler & Winne, 1995; Clark, 2012; Earl, 2013).

Multilingual and multicultural classrooms require that a critical lens is applied to analyze the ways that assessment and testing results are used in schools. Researchers describe these as tools to exercise power and control by those in authority; to serve as a gatekeeper; to influence the curriculum, textbooks, and teaching; and to operate as a de facto language policy in the United States (Alcalá & Martín Rojo, 2010; Cummins et al., 2007; Menken, 2008; Rueda, 2005; Shohamy, 2001). Unfortunately, the types of detailed analyses (i.e., analysis of patterns of performance) more useful for instructional purposes are often ignored in statewide testing (Buly & Valencia, 2002; Rueda, 2005). In addition, researchers such as, Gorter and Cenoz (2016) and LaCelle-Peterson and Rivera (1994) question the usefulness of current and past assessments, since their design and use fails to demonstrate the breadth and depth of knowledge and abilities that multilingual learners bring to the learning process.

Historically, most of the assessment conducted in bilingual education has been designed from a monolingual normative perspective (Bisai & Singh, 2018; García, 2009) and has been suspect of bias (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994). That is, assessments often ignore students' bilingualism and assess students' abilities and knowledge either in the majority language (Menken, 2008) or in each separate language of instruction (Brisk & Harrington, 2000; García, 2005; Moll & Díaz, 1985, 1987; Rueda, 2005; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

To counter the shortcomings of testing and monolingual assessment, in the past four decades researchers have proposed novel perspectives and tools designed to trace the linguistic and content knowledge of multilingual learners, using their rich linguistic repertoire, and aligning the assessment to accountability demands, that informs instruction and curricular design.

For instance, emergent bilingual students have traditionally been given test accommodations (Rueda, 2005; Wright, 2015). However, research clarifies that, a reduction in the performance gap between bilinguals and other students is observed only when linguistic modification of questions is done (Abedi, 2004; Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord, 2004; Abedi, Lord, & Plummer, 1997). This argument is also supported by Butler and Stevens (1997) when they recommend that for accommodations to work they must be matched to the specific characteristics and needs of students taking the test.

Some researchers have advanced a proposal for the creation of local norms so the teachers compare students to their own bilingual peers, as well as, linguistic protocols that inform teachers about students' language skills practices within their families. See, for instance, publications by Escamilla et al., 2014; García, 2009; Gottlieb & Nguyen, 2007; Moll & Diaz, 1985; 1987; Morell & New York Education Department, 2017; and Soltéro-González, Escamilla, & Hopewell, 2010.

Specifically, assessing bilingual students should consider both language and content proficiency (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2009; Gottlieb, 2006; 2016). García (2009) identifies the need to:

1. Include bilinguals as part of the norming sample
2. Consider the threat of content bias
3. Use assessment according to the purpose for which it was designed
4. Develop scoring criteria sensitive to differentiating between content knowledge and abilities and language.

Other researchers point to the unique notion of testing bilingually as a viable alternative in effectively assessing the knowledge and abilities of multilingual students. Studies have identified some weaknesses in relying on test translations as a way to assess bilingual students (August & Hakuta, 1998; García, 2009). Alternatively, García (2009) suggest three ways to assess bilingually:

1. *Translanguaging mode* – questions are presented in one language and answers in the other language are accepted
2. *Bilingual tap mode* – instructions and questions are given in the home language and answers are only accepted in the additional language; and
3. *Performance-based mode* – show knowledge through a project, activity, or demonstration.

Specifically, Bisai & Singh (2018) cite the work of López, Turkan, & Guzmán-Orth (2017), arguing that, “translanguaging as a process of assessment is necessary to assess a complex and new languaging practices in the classroom because it helps them to demonstrate what they know and can do even if their English language and literary skills are not fully developed” (pp. 313-314). Actually, these researchers advocate for an approach to multilingual assessment that integrates: (a) socio-cultural assessment; (b) translanguaging; and (c) dynamic assessment.

Abedi (2004) clarifies that the language of instruction needs to be the language used for assessment. Therefore, if two languages are used to teach students, these

languages should also be used to assess them (Peña & Bedore, 2011). Bisai & Singh (2018) agree with González, 2012, by emphasizing that, “the first language of students should not be totally ignored to assess the students as it plays a mediating role in recognizing the competencies in other languages” (p. 310). Shohamy (2011) describes studies, which suggest ways that multilingual assessment practices can be valid measures of the knowledge and skill bilingual students possess.

Another area of novel thinking is on the design of guidelines and assessment tools that may dynamically trace the linguistic and content knowledge of multilingual students. For instance, Gottlieb and Nguyen (2007) suggest some guidelines to design comprehensive assessment and accountability system for schools with a multilingual student population (p. 21):

1. document student’s [additional language] growth and proficiency, including listening, speaking, reading, & writing;
2. Document student’s [home language] growth and proficiency, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing;
3. Document students’ academic learning growth and achievement in core academic subjects;
4. Report student learning growth, proficiency, and achievement to parents and establish accountability;
5. Inform and guide classroom instruction on an ongoing basis, and shape the school improvement plan.

An additional advancement is in terms of assessment tools. Work has focused on designing assessment procedures that consider multilingual students rich linguistic repertoire, monitor students’ general linguistic and language-specific performance along progressions and through continua of biliteracy lenses, and align the assessment to accountability demands; see, for instance, Escamilla et al., 2014; García, Ibarra Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017; Gottlieb & Nguyen, 2007; Moll & Diaz, 1985, 1987; Schissel, Leung, López-Gopar, & Davis, 2018; and Soltéro-González et al., 2010.

Although the debate over assessment in terms of purposes, implementation, and design in bilingual schools is vast, scholarly discussions of promising assessment alternatives that more effectively identify the knowledge and skills of multilingual learners has grown in recent decades. The challenge for bilingual educators is to analyze the implications of their use. I invite readers to rethink assessment in bilingual classrooms by pondering the questions posed below:

1. What is your stance on the best way(s) to assess the linguistic repertoire of students as well as their academic knowledge and skills?
2. What has influenced your thinking and practice in adopting this stance?
3. Explore more deeply some of the scholarly discussions regarding assessment in bilingual classrooms presented here. How do they support or challenge assessment implementation in your classroom and school?
4. In what ways can you rethink the design and implementation of assessment in your bilingual classroom to more accurately reflect the knowledge and

skills of your students in terms of their diverse linguistic repertoires as well as academic knowledge?

5. How can you as an educator in a bilingual education program, challenge other educators in your school to meaningfully explore and rethink assessment of multilingual learners?

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