CHAPTER 1

Looking at Assessment Through the Lens of Multilingual Learners

Sem um senso de identidade, não pode haver luta real.
Without a sense of identity, there can be no real struggle.

—Paulo Freire
The Dilemma

But English learners isn’t an appropriate term (or label), and initial screening only in English isn’t an accurate depiction of who our multilingual learners are and what they can do!

Neruda School in a K–12 unified school district in a sprawling suburb has a principal who is a strong advocate of multilingual learners and their families. Over the years, Carmen Hernández has supported the growth of dual language education in her building, which started with kindergarten six years ago, and has been an outspoken activist across the district network. Carmen speaks Spanish and English, and understanding the value of bilingualism, she encourages her students, teachers, and families to communicate in the languages they feel most comfortable using.

The same sentiment is not felt across the district; in fact, Carmen feels quite isolated in her leadership role. Her quest to promote the exclusive use of assets-driven language in referring to the students, their languages, and their cultures seems to be at a standstill. She realizes that these beliefs are a precursor to her goal of introducing common assessment in multiple languages to the other principals, and currently she doesn’t know where to turn.

District administration insists on using the terminology of federal legislation and designated by the state—namely English learners, long-term English learners, and English learners with disabilities—in part to be aligned with the intact system, but also because data are collected exclusively in English. Consequently, most of the schools have dutifully adopted these terms to be in accord with the district’s accountability plan. Carmen believes that these rather pejorative labels have a negative impact on multilingual learners’ identities. She wants to ensure that all students have positive self-images and are proud to represent the multilingual multicultural world in which we all live.

As Carmen refuses to perpetuate language that defines multilingual learners as a liability and the gathering of information only in one language, the principal has started suggesting changes in the terminology for students and language education programs at school and district meetings. The teachers at Neruda support their principal’s action and have taken the initiative to delve into the literature on the social-emotional effects of categorizing and labeling minoritized students in negative ways, especially those from multilingual backgrounds. Additionally, they have had critical conversations with their multilingual learners to gain firsthand knowledge of the students’ feelings and attitudes toward current labels.

Bolstered by her faculty and community, Carmen decides to push district leadership a bit further. Using her building-level power, she initiates a campaign to update and transadapt enrollment forms and important communiqués with hopes the initiative will extend to collecting intake information in multiple languages for district screening measures. Based on the initial enthusiasm for the project, she requests to form a district task force to research how to capture the strengths of her multilingual learners through assessment in multiple languages.
Let the truth be known. "When a bilingual individual confronts a monolingual test . . . both the test taker and the test are asked to do something they cannot. The bilingual test taker cannot perform like a monolingual. The monolingual test cannot ‘measure’ in the other language" (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994, p. 87). Today’s reality reverberates this sentiment. Although increasing numbers of multilingual learners are immersed in grade-level content in multiple languages, assessment at school and district levels generally remains in the language of accountability—English. Participation in language education programs that are striving to meet the goals of bilingualism, biliteracy, biculturalism, cultural competence, and the most recent pillar, critical consciousness (Palmer, Cervantes-Soon, Dorner, & Heiman, 2019), is skyrocketing. Yet rather than having an assets-based orientation to education, reports from large-scale assessment, in particular, still tend to demoralize multilingual learners by emphasizing what these students lack, English language proficiency (Gándara, 2015).

In the pages before you, we attempt to overturn this negativity toward multilingual learners and their families that has prevailed in U.S. schools and districts. Rather than view these students as “disadvantaged” (who typically depress large-scale test scores), we take a more positive strengths-based stance where language and culture are viewed as a right and resource (Ruiz, 1988). In fact, we prioritize the term bi/multilingual learners (bi to accentuate bilingual) throughout this book to highlight an assets-based orientation toward languages, literacies, and learning. It comes with growing recognition of the richness of bi/multilingual learners’ linguistic repertoires (Martínez, 2018; Ortega, 2014).

In this chapter, we offer a historical backdrop and rationale for assessment in multiple languages. We suggest how language and assessment policies pose ways in which school leaders and district administrators can agree on how to infuse multilingualism and multiculturalism into educational life. Finally, we explore how translanguaging and social-emotional learning from a multilingual perspective can shed some light on how we might envision assessment for multilingual learners in multiple languages.

Thinking about linguistic equity and social justice (e.g., as exemplified by the beliefs of Carmen and her staff), assessment for multilingual learners that is only in English fails to represent the whole child and tends to exacerbate the “achievement gap” mentality. Let’s turn this perception around and follow Wong’s
suggestion to use multilingualism as a tool for actually closing the achievement gap. Multilingual learners have the distinct advantage of having multiple languages and cultures at their disposal. School should be a place to nurture those resources; advance these students’ language, conceptual, and social-emotional development; and assess more equitably.

This book is devoted to offering educators in leadership roles, including district administrators, principals, coaches, teachers, and other school leaders, ways to thoughtfully plan and execute assessment in multiple languages using an assessment cycle as a guide. In doing so, we offer ideas and strategies for documenting multilingual learners’ growth over time. This ongoing process led by school and district leaders, with input from the community, will hopefully result in systemic educational change while making a difference in the lives of multilingual learners and their families.

FEDERAL INFLUENCE ON TERMINOLOGY AND ASSESSMENT

The United States has historically been and continues to be a multilingual multicultural mosaic with a long precedent of schooling in multiple languages that can be traced back to its colonization. In fact, by the late 17th century, at least 18 different languages were spoken by European ethnic groups (Crawford, 1987). Throughout American history, there have been waves of nativism and xenophobia followed by acceptance and promotion of multilingualism that have been reflected in our educational systems.

Fast-forward to the early 1960s. With the influx of Cubans post la revolución cubana, Coral Way Elementary School in Miami, Florida, was established as an exemplar for enrichment dual language education. For the first time in recent U.S. history, there was substantiation of assessment data that support bilingualism. As Crawford (1987) elaborates, “In English reading, both language groups did as well as, or better than, counterparts in monolingual English schools, and the Cuban children achieved equivalent levels in Spanish.”

Since the mid-1960s, much of the terminology related to “bilingualism” and “bilingual learners” in kindergarten through twelfth-grade (K–12) settings has been influenced by legislation and litigation. The power of the precedent set by the courts and the federal government has come with deficit language and, in large part, emphasis on compensatory or remedial rather than enrichment education. Ironically, federal bilingual education policy was born as a legislative attempt to remedy the inequities experienced by language minority students in the educational system (Wiese & García, 1998); now, well into the 21st century, the goal of equity, especially as it applies to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, remains in question.

Federal Legislative Directives

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a federal assistance and education reform package, was enacted in 1965 as part of Lyndon Johnson’s
War on Poverty and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Reauthorizations of ESEA over the years have moved away from bilingual/multilingual acceptance to monolingual assimilationist perspectives and policies as the basis for educational reform.

As shown in Figure 1.1, in 2015, almost a half-century after the landmark Bilingual Education Act of 1968, references to bilingualism or multilingualism were nowhere to be seen in K–12 federal legislation. Consequently, states paid little heed to the possibility of developing or using tests or measures other than

**FIGURE 1.1** Changing Terminology and Provisions for Language Assessment in Reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ESEA LEGISLATION</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TERMINOLOGY FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS</th>
<th>PROVISIONS FOR ASSESSING ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual Education Act (BEA), Title VII of ESEA</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Students with limited English speaking ability (LESA)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reauthorization of the BEA</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Children of limited English proficiency (LEP)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA)</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Children and youth of limited English proficiency (LEP)</td>
<td>LEP students in state assessment systems but no mention of English language proficiency assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Limited English proficient (LEP) students</td>
<td>Annual English language proficiency testing required based on state- or consortium-wide K–12 English language proficiency/development standards aligned to state content standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>English learners (ELs)</td>
<td>Requirements under NCLB, (although accountability moves from Title III to Title I), plus uniform statewide procedures to determine classification criteria for entrance (identification) and exit from language support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ones in English. This stripping of bilingualism has served as a national de facto language policy where English stands as the ultimate language of power (Menken, 2008), which, in turn, has tended to negate state acceptance of data from large-scale assessment in multiple languages as part of accountability provisions.

In 1994, assessment of “children and youth of limited English proficiency (LEP)” was first mentioned in federal legislation, the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA), along with the introduction of state academic content standards, state testing, and accountability. The identical wording has been used in successive iterations of ESEA, notably the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), with reference to assessment in the students’ home language: “to the extent practicable, assessments [shall be] in the language and form most likely to yield accurate data on what such students know and can do in academic content areas, until such students have achieved English language proficiency.” In other words, for over 25 years, the value-added nature of assessment in home languages for bi/multilingual learners has been part of federal policy, yet states have paid little attention to it (G. Solano-Flores & Hakuta, 2017).

Furthermore, both NCLB and ESSA call for:

- The inclusion of English learners (ELs) in annual state academic assessment (minimally in mathematics, reading/language arts, and now science)
- ELs to be assessed in a valid and reliable manner and provided with appropriate accommodations [Section 1111(b)(2)(B)(vii)(III)]
- States to exclude ELs from one administration of reading or language arts assessment (but not math) for those who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for less than a year
- States to name in their plans the languages other than English that are present to a “significant extent” in their participating student population, and to make “every effort” to develop such assessments [Section 1111(b)(2)(F)]

As of the 2013–2014 academic year, 13 states offered reading/language arts, mathematics, or science assessments in languages other than English (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Under ESSA, states may assess students in their “native” language for three to five years on the state reading/language arts achievement tests with no limit to assessing mathematics and science in a student’s “native” language. We italicize the term native language (students’ home language) as it is a misnomer; today the majority of multilingual learners have been born and raised in the United States and are learning two or more languages simultaneously. Now is the time to seize the moment and for schools and districts to design “accountability systems [to] provide information that triangulate[s] with state and local English Learner plans and visions that have been developed to align with a state’s theory of action” (Goldschmidt & Hakuta, 2017, p. 40).
The deficit-ridden language in ESEA legislation tends to perpetuate educational inequity. At the federal level, what has prevailed over the years as the official definition of an EL is as follows:

An individual, aged 3 through 21, who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English where difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny him or her the ability to meet challenging academic standards, the ability to meet the State’s proficient level of achievement on State assessments, the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English, or the opportunity to participate fully in society. (Sections 3201 and 8101 of ESSA, 2015)

Stop-Think-Act-React

Relax and Reflect: What does federal legislation tell us about assessment in multiple languages?

For almost two decades, the U.S. Department of Education has endorsed the development of state annual achievement testing in multiple languages. Are you in one of the states that offers a test in a language other than English for accountability purposes? If so, you may wish to investigate whether it is a translation (and, thus, not a truly valid representation of ELs’ languages and cultures), whether it is a transadaptation (with considerations for linguistic and cultural nuances), or whether it has been developed specifically for multilingual student populations.

There are two provisions in ESSA that trigger state assessment in languages in addition to English. One is that ELs must be present in the student population to “a significant extent,” and the second reference is to the fact that the state must make “every effort” to develop assessments in additional languages.

- How has your state interpreted these provisions?
- Do you believe that there is a fair representation of your multilingual student population in state assessment?
- How might you exert yourself to move conversations forward to bring equity to student assessment whether in one or multiple languages?

The defici-fficient language in ESEA legislation tends to perpetuate educational inequity. At the federal level, what has prevailed over the years as the official definition of an EL is as follows:

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The Name Game: Implications for Assessment

By now you should have noticed that we prefer the inclusive term multilingual learners to capture all students who are or have been exposed to and identify with multiple languages and cultures inside and outside of school. At times we add bi/ in front of multilingual to represent bilingual learners within multilingual learning environments. We retain the label English (language) learners (ELs), however, when referring to the legal term for the subset of multilingual learners who represent a protective class of students under federal legislation (i.e., ESSA) and accountability.
To recap, ESSA requires states to create a uniform process for identifying ELs and a standard set of criteria for their “exiting” from language support programs. This directive, however, does not preclude screening of new students in languages other than English. As shown in Figure 1.2, according to Title I of ESSA, annual assessment results of ELs are to be disaggregated by specific designations.

There has been increasing focus on the accurate identification, assessment, and referral of multilingual learners with disabilities, especially those who qualify as ELs. Attention to this issue, in part, has been sparked from both the under- and overidentification of ELs, as compared to non-ELs, for special education services.

**English learners with disabilities** qualify for language support *and* services for their named disability; both are to be included in the students’ **individualized**

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**FIGURE 1.2** English Learner Subgroups Recognized in ESSA
CHAPTER 1  •  LOOKING AT ASSESSMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Long-term English learners (LTELs) are generally in middle and high schools, having attended U.S. schools for more than five years without having attained a threshold of academic language proficiency in English. Some LTELs are considered students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) while other SIFE are refugees or migrants, have inconsistent attendance records, are transient, or are the product of discontinuity in educational services. M. D. Brooks (2020) claims that these terms are problematic as they:

• Use single measures in English to judge students

• Undervalue the students’ out-of-school interests, strengths, and abilities

Related Resources for Identifying Multilingual Learners With Disabilities

You might explore the following resources:

• Your state education agency should offer guidance for multilingual resources (or ELs) with disabilities consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). This federal law states, “assessments and other evaluation materials are provided and administered in the language and form most likely to yield accurate information on what the child knows and can do academically, developmentally, and functionally, unless it is not feasible to so provide or administer” [Section 1414(b)(3)(A)(ii)].

• State frameworks inclusive of multilingual learners should have provisions for supporting assessment in the students’ languages. Consider following the recommendation from the Council of Chief State School Officers’ English Learners with Disabilities Guide—“State frameworks for identifying English learners with disabilities should include comprehensive evaluation measures” (Park, Martínez, & Chou, 2017, p. 17)—or check out the Minnesota Department of Education’s Evaluation Lending Library with materials in Spanish and other languages (https://tinyurl.com/y3b4bh2x).

• There is a growing library of books dedicated to English learners with disabilities that treat assessment through a strengths-based lens, such as Focus on Special Educational Needs (Sánchez-López & Young, 2018) and Special Education Considerations for English Language Learners: Delivering a Continuum of Services (Hamayan, Marler, Sánchez-López, & Damico, 2013).
• Overlook the context for learning (oftentimes these students are labeled “remedial”)

• Do not consider languages and cultures as integral to student identity

• Do not represent students’ opportunities to engage in grade-level content

• Do not value student input in decision making

Recently arrived English learners, also known as newcomer students, are a heterogeneous mix of multilingual learners. Some have been schooled outside the United States and have reached high levels of literacy and achievement in a language other than English. Others have had years of “English as a foreign language” and, while not yet commensurate with their peers, do communicate effectively in English. Still others, who know varying degrees of English, carry a SIFE label, and finally there are refugees who arrive at our shores, as in unaccompanied minors, without knowing a word in English.

Although not mentioned in federal legislation, historically there has been an underserving of multilingual learners as gifted and talented due to heavy reliance on test results in English. State and/or local policies determine gifted and talented English learners with identification criteria and assessment measures that, in large part, privilege proficient English speakers. Typically, identification involves the assessment of cognitive abilities in combination with achievement testing (Mun et al., 2016)—in English—with norms skewed toward proficient English students with little or no consideration for students’ strengths in their other languages.

Absent in classifying ELs or other multilingual learners as gifted and talented is assessment in multiple languages. A recommendation from an exploratory study has suggested to “create alternative pathways to identification, allowing schools to use a variety of different assessment instruments (including native language ability and achievement assessments and reliable and valid nonverbal ability assessments) and apply flexible criteria to ensure that students’ talents and abilities are recognized” (Gubbins et al., 2018). We must expand exceptionality for multilingual learners at the upper end to encompass multiple measures and data points to include a spectrum of cognitive, social and emotional, linguistic, and reasoning abilities expressed in multiple languages.

The Power of Labels

Most labels for English learners (and other multilingual learners) act as liabilities as they are based on monolingual constructs, standard English, and high-stakes testing data in English. As a result, educators tend to stigmatize rather than elevate the status of bilingualism and biliteracy. The dominant narrative that accompanies these labels is that these students are deficient linguistically and academically (M. D. Brooks, 2020). These negative labels become a deterrent to student learning, which, in turn, adversely impacts their self-esteem. This kind of framing essentializes students’ abilities and masks their assets and educational experiences.
A growing number of researchers and educators question the pejorative labels applied to multilingual and other students who are marginalized by educational institutions (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Kibler & Valdés, 2016; Seltzer, 2019). Many educational leaders are aware of the destructive nature of these labels, yet blindly follow the language of legislation rather than challenge the status quo. There is no reason why schools and school districts cannot take on the entrenched system and create more meaningful designations while retaining separate terminology for state and federal accountability.

To summarize, there is a social stigma attached to the classification scheme designed to sort multilingual learners that has tangible and lasting effects on multilingual learners’ opportunities in school (Umansky & Dumont, 2019) and their identity formation. Even though the vast majority of multilingual learners function in more than one language, large-scale assessment remains directly aligned to a monoglossic language ideology. Unfortunately, there is little attention to the worth of bilingualism in language testing practices (Shohamy, 2011).

**Subgroups of Multilingual Learners, Specifically English Learners**

Rarely is the heterogeneity of the student population considered, no matter the labels. For example, ELs, one of the many groups of multilingual learners, are identified based on mandated assessment data rather than their unique characteristics, histories, or contexts of learning. Given this cautionary note, Figure 1.3 is a table of subgroups of ELs with space to provide eligibility criteria, associated assessments, and the language(s) of data collection. It is partially completed here for gifted and talented multilingual learners with a blank duplicate as Resource 1.1.

**FIGURE 1.3  Defining Subgroups of Multilingual Learners With Assessment Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBGROUP OF MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS</th>
<th>TYPICAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA</th>
<th>APPLICABLE ASSESSMENT DATA</th>
<th>LANGUAGES OF ASSESSMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gifted and talented</td>
<td>Multiple measures (in English), including upper-end percentiles on achievement tests</td>
<td>Student oral, written, graphic, and visual samples; teacher recommendations; and a student interview</td>
<td>English and the student’s other language(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELs with individualized education programs (IEPs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with interrupted formal education (SIFE)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term English learners (LTELS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recently arrived English learners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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More Subgroups of Multilingual Learners

Multilingual learners, by definition, possess a single linguistic repertoire composed of multiple languages; they are not to be considered two monolinguals in one (Grosjean, 1989). Just as there are terms for different subgroups of ELs, so, too, there are terms that are more strengths-based that have been gaining acceptance over the past decade. Besides multilingual learners, these include **bilingual/dual language learners**, and **emergent (or emerging) bilinguals** (Escamilla, 2006; Garcia, 2009; Garcia, Kleifgen, & Fachi, 2008; Menken, 2013).

There are other multilingual learners who have been exposed to multiple languages, or continue to be, besides the heterogeneous group of ELs. These students, considered multilingual learners due to their flexible use of two or more languages, are included in broad categories of “proficient English learners.” Figure 1.4 offers the broad categorization scheme of multilingual learners, in addition to English learners, including the following.

1. **“Exited” English learners** (aka former ELs) are students who have previously participated in language support programs and have met state “exit” criteria; in most states after four years post-participation, their educational status as ELs is officially changed; however, they remain from multilingual multicultural homes.

2. **Heritage language learners** are students who come from home backgrounds with family connections to multiple languages and cultures, although the students may not be proficient in a language other than English, such as members of Indigenous communities (e.g., Navajo, Hawaiian, Arapaho) who are studying their heritage language for preservation, restoration, or maintenance (Kelleher, 2010). Some may have been ELs.

3. **Never English learners** may be **simultaneous bilinguals** who grow up proficient in multiple languages (one of which is English). Some of these multilingual learners are considered **balanced bilinguals** as,
depending on the context, they are equally proficient in two languages. Additionally, there are learners from “upwardly mobile, highly educated, higher socio-economic status” families participating in language education programs in this category (de Mejia, 2002). In large part, for these elite bilinguals participating in immersion or dual language programs, English is the sole language at home.

Reframing Language Education Models

Besides a broad classification scheme for defining multilingual learners, there is an equally wide range of language education models for instructing these students. Currently, more and more multilingual learners are learning in English and a partner language. In 2000, there were an estimated 260 dual language education programs in the United States where K–8 students were learning in multiple languages for minimally half a day. By the 2012–2013 academic year, the number of programs had risen exponentially to over 2,000 in over 39 states (Boyle, August, Tabaku, Cole, & Simpson-Baird, 2015). Given the tremendous growth of dual language/multilingual programs, states and school districts should be open to the option of assessment in multiple languages. Not only could the assessment yield more valid inferences for multilingual learners; it could also serve as a response to the call for equity.

Notice the relationship between named instructional models and the language(s) for assessment shown in Figure 1.5, a continuum of language models for multilingual learners (see the Glossary for definitions of the models). It is a broad range of programs that begins with submersion (“sink or swim”), one with no built-in language support, and proceeds to dual language, one-way or two-way immersion programs with systematic inclusion of two languages to support learning. Structured English immersion (SEI), English as a second language (ESL), sheltered English, and English language development (ELD)
programs are almost exclusively in English. Transitional bilingual programs introduce two languages with a gradual movement to English. The goal of the last two categories of programs (and schooling) in the continuum is to develop and nurture bi/multilingual individuals minimally in two languages. Although there is mixed recognition of the value and use of multiple languages for instructional purposes, there is no reason to deny multilingual learners access to the languages of their choice for classroom assessment (Gottlieb, 2021).

Deficit-laden terminology related to multilingual learners serves as a gatekeeper to prevent their educational advancement. Remember, language is a resource,
not a barrier. Educators need to make the commitment to use more constructive affirmative language. There should be “enrichment” for multilingual learners, not “remediation.” There should be linguistically and culturally sustainable resources that help empower and inspire multilingual learners rather than “intervention” programs that discourage their attempts to learn in creative ways. After all, it is equity, not equality, that should prevail throughout educational systems.

Equally distressing are some of the ways we describe and treat language education. Are our multilingual learners who are “submersed” in English going to sink or swim? What does “English as a second language” mean? Students should not be seen as “second language” learners if they are allowed to use their entire language repertoire to make meaning (Kleyn & García, 2019). The term dual language, referring to two distinct languages, is also being contested with preference for the descriptor dual language bilingual education to better attend to the sociolinguistic realities of acceptance of translanguaging as part of language learning of bi/multilinguals (M. T. Sánchez, García, & Solorza, 2017).

**Examining Language Allocation in Immersion Models**

Each program type or instructional model for multilingual learners represents a unique learning environment that has implications for assessment. Even within the same program type there can be varied language allocations that affect instruction and assessment. For example, in one-way or two-way dual language immersion programs there may be different configurations of language distribution, such as:

- Beginning with 90% of the day in a partner language and 10% in English (generally in kindergarten) and gradually decreasing 10% each year in the partner language with subsequently increasing English until reaching 50% in both languages (in fifth grade)

- Beginning with and maintaining a 50/50 division of languages

- Alternating languages each day

- Associating languages with specific content areas (e.g., math in one language, science in another)

- Not having a specified language allocation plan but allowing for the flow of two languages

There is simply no single program or pathway that addresses all the needs of the multifaceted group of students known as multilingual learners (California Department of Education, 2020). Nor is there necessarily a strict adherence to one or more languages when it comes to assessment for multilingual learners; it depends on the local context.

School leaders and administrators must be mindful of the inequities in policies that still prevail in the world of multilingual education. Hopefully the tide is
turning so that multilingual education is seen as an invitation for embracing multiple perspectives and a stimulus for deep thinking for all stakeholders. However, skepticism still remains, and when enacting assessment, there are many misconceptions to dispel. Let’s take a look at our students through a multilingual lens and strive for educational programs that are linguistically and culturally sustainable.

**Linguistically and Culturally Sustainable Schools**

Any and all language education programs or models that embrace bilingualism or multilingualism should aim to operate within linguistically and culturally sustainable schools. These schools are ones where the climate, pedagogies, policies, and practices are responsive and representative of the language and cultural experiences of multilingual learners and their families. Everyone is

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**Stop-Think-Act-React**

**Relax and Reflect: How might you describe your language education program(s)?**

How would you describe the language allocation of instructional models that involve two languages in your school and district? What is the corresponding assessment, and in which languages? Is there a 1:1 match between the percentage of language allocation and the languages of assessment? How might you strike a better balance of assessment between languages?

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**Stop-Think-Act-React**

**Relax and Reflect: How might you enhance the linguistic and cultural sustainability of your school or district?**

In the introductory vignette, Carmen pushes her colleagues to initiate a districtwide campaign to update the terminology of its enrollment forms and the use of multiple languages to administer the initial screening of multilingual learners and interpret the results. What can you do personally or collectively (as a school, district, or community) to make terminology more descriptive of the students’ multiple languages? What might you do, or whom can you contact, if there are no provisions for assessment in multiple languages upon students’ initial entrée into your district?
committed to supporting students in enhancing the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously accessing the ways of other cultures.

THE RESURGENCE OF BILINGUAL AND DUAL LANGUAGE EDUCATION

The rise and fall of bilingual education in the United States has a long history. In recent times, there has been less emphasis on transitional bilingual education (where the goal is achievement in English with the “home” language gradually removed from instruction) in favor of models that recognize the strength of growing two languages (with the goals of bilingualism and biliteracy). In essence, dual language education has become the norm and gold standard (Palmer et al., 2019). However, there are also apprehensions that in “this neoliberal multicultural era of dual language education, bilingualism and cultural diversity are too often commodified off the proverbial backs of [multilingual] Latinx youth” (García & Sung, 2018).

Multilingual Education

Multilingual education is an umbrella term that represents the infusion of linguistically and culturally relevant and sustainable practices into teaching and learning. Multicultural education operates within a sociocultural context under the umbrella of comprehensive school reform. At its heart is a critical pedagogy that represents social justice, which is important for all students (Nieto, 2018). Multilingualism and multiculturalism support culturally sustaining pedagogy that fosters and maintains linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling (Paris, 2012).

In this book, the concepts of multilingualism and multilingual education are considered an extension of Cenoz and Gorter’s 2015 definition: “multilingual education refers to the use of two or more languages in education, provided that schools aim at multilingualism and multiliteracy” (p. 2). In school, multilingualism is inclusive of multilingual learners’ multiple languages and cultures as resources for curriculum, instruction, and assessment in their pursuit of deep and sustained learning in two or more languages. Like many educational concepts, multilingualism is not monolithic with one set way of being; in fact, it is so diversified within the multilingual population that it might be envisioned along a continuum (de Jong, 2019b).

Research That Supports Bilingualism/Multilingualism

A growing body of evidence worldwide favors bilingualism and the benefits of multilingual education. In the brief review of research in Figure 1.6, we see that multilingual learners, including those with special needs or “disorders,” tend to possess a greater linguistic skill set than their monolingual counterparts. There is strong evidence that biliteracy development tends to be value added—that is, multilingual learners can simultaneously enhance their literacy in two languages. However, systematic assessment to document growth in multiple languages is absent.
COMPETING THEORIES AND VIEWS OF ASSESSMENT

Two theories of language learning are competing for how we envision assessment in one or more languages. Both stem from linguistics (the study of language) and its related fields of applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics,
which have strongly influenced the instruction and assessment of multilingual learners. Having these dueling language theories is causing angst for school leaders who, on one hand, must comply with federal mandates (a structuralist orientation) yet, on the other hand, understand the value of the social nature of learning that occurs in every classroom (a sociocultural orientation).

**Structural linguistics**, dominant for more than a half-century, has traditionally governed large-scale language assessment. In this theoretical approach, language is viewed as static, linear in development, and composed of underlying interrelated structures within a linguistic system. Language tests have been designed, in large part, to assess students’ proficiency in different areas or language domains, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, in isolation. As an extension of this structuralist thinking, students’ performance has been equated with the measurement of their language learning at a given point in time with results that fall within a predictable straightforward progression.

Another tenet of structuralist theory is equating the end point of a language proficiency scale with reaching the proficiency of an “idealized native speaker” (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). However, fitting into a native-speaking norm does not necessarily imply superior or more effective language use. The bar of being “native” or native-like is not sufficient or necessary for becoming a successful and effective teacher or learner (Mahboob, 2019). The structural stance counters educational perspectives that see teaching and learning as cultural, social, and interactional (Hawkins, 2019).

Counterstructuralism language assessment, especially in the classroom, is seen as a socially embedded interactive process for improving teaching and learning (Bachman & Damböck, 2017; P. Moss, 2008). Here language development is seen as fluid, which is a function of students’ familiarity with a topic, audience, and particular context. Consequently, there is tremendous variability in the pathways to language proficiency with no one trajectory. At the classroom level, assessment as, for, and of learning occurs within a sociocultural context that is student-centered where teachers act as facilitators.

**Sociocultural theory** sees language as a social activity with active student engagement and interaction. A sociocultural theoretical orientation takes on a more democratic approach that is open to the participation of stakeholders (Lynch, 2001; Shohamy, 2001). There is greater acceptance of bi/multilingual learners’ use of multiple languages as instructional tools and acknowledgment of translanguaging as a classroom instructional and assessment practice (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017).

Depending on a school’s language policy, translanguaging may occur naturally, such as in the hallways, or in specified learning situations, such as engaging in cross-linguistic comparisons. The growing recognition of translanguaging as an expression of sociocultural theory has helped transform the acceptance of multiple languages and languaging as part of schooling (García & Wei, 2018). Translanguaging in school reflects the natural linguistic practices of bi/multilingual learners who have access to and use of their full linguistic repertoires, irrespective of the language(s) of instruction (García et al., 2017; Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015).

In dual language and bilingual education classroom contexts that have a strong presence of two languages, assessment may be dynamic, inclusive of
translanguaging, to show what multilingual learners can do with language(s) in different circumstances. Assessment of multilingual learners revolves around these students’ competencies to make meaning to act as scientists, historians, or literary authors, for example (Kleyn & García, 2019). Although the notion of translanguaging has been proposed for large-scale language assessment, this more socially oriented way of languaging has yet to be accepted and operationalized by the language testing community (Chalhoub-Deville, 2019).

The challenge for educators is how to respond to the medical model and discrete-point or multiple-choice tests that exemplify structuralism when this model simply cannot relate the complexity of the interaction among multiple languages. To counter this long-standing precedent, there has been a push toward more socioconstructivist perspectives and social justice ideologies that are inclusive of the cultural and linguistic variety of multilingual learners (V. González, 2012). At the heart of the shift toward more student-centered learning and assessment is the social embedded nature of learning, which accounts for the broader communities where students live (Kaul, 2019).

So for now both theoretical orientations are alive and well in the world of multilingual education. Thus, the potential conflict between data from large-scale standardized testing (that are structuralistic in nature) and information from classroom assessment (that exemplifies socioculturalism) remains. Teachers, school leaders, and district leaders must navigate these dueling theories in supporting language development and assessment for multilingual learners whether in one or multiple languages.
CREATING LANGUAGE AND ASSESSMENT POLICIES

Language policy is educational policy; language and assessment policy should help shape local accountability. To do so, programs for multilingual learners need to craft and maintain an infrastructure to support state and district accountability systems in ways that promote valid, appropriate, and useful assessment (Howard et al., 2018). Therefore, from the outset, a district’s policy for incoming and ongoing information for multilingual learners should include multiple languages. Additionally, multilingual learners participating in dual language programs should be assessed in multiple languages to allow for measurement of student growth rather than absolute outcomes (Menken, 2008).

School Policy

School leaders, instructional leaders, school staff, community representatives, family members, and students should join in building consensus around how to portray their school as a haven for multilingualism and multiculturalism. A stunning example of how multilingualism has become engrained into the fabric of teaching and learning is Lincoln International School (Asociación Escuelas Lincoln) in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Led by a language coach, its teachers have crafted and adopted a set of belief statements and evidence-based practices to form a language philosophy that highlights the strength of multilingualism. Some of these language-centered, research-based principles have become engrained in the school’s practices. As multilingualism and multiculturalism are critical to family communication, cultural identity, making meaning, and thinking, the school promotes and reinforces their continuous development. Equally important, in learning through multiple languages, students, through teacher facilitation:

- Construct understandings about interculturalism and global interdependence
- Develop competencies in conflict resolution in socially responsible ways
• Formulate insights to foster movement across cultural and linguistic boundaries

• Respect multiple perspective taking

Consequently, school-level assessment policy stems from language policy, reflecting consensus reached by multilingual learners, teachers, school leaders, and families.

District Policy

Districtwide policies should establish coherent K–12 language programming for multilingual learners, articulate the district’s stance toward multilingualism and multiculturalism, and support families along with the greater community. A school district language policy should consist of a dynamic action statement that defines the positive role of language (and culture) in areas of each school’s operation. It should include expectations for linguistic parity and pride of multilingualism. An effective district language policy should:

• Represent and be responsive to local community needs, interests, and issues

• Promote the development and implementation of educationally and theoretically sound programs for multilingual learners that deliver positive results with fidelity

• Be formulated and supported by all stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students, parents, community members)

• Exemplify or be embedded in the school’s mission, vision, and values

• Comply with (and exceed) all federal, state, and local assessment and accountability requirements (August, Goldenberg, & Rueda, 2010)

A district language policy that embraces multiple languages sets precedent for establishing an assessment policy that is inclusive of multiple languages. Within the districtwide system, a multilingual assessment policy should include provisions for:

• Multiple sources of data among an array of stakeholders

• Linguistic and cultural equity

• Multiple languages reflective of teaching and learning

• Acceptance of multiple perspectives

• Balance of assessment approaches

• Validity of large-scale and interim measures

• Student and teacher voice
CHAPTER 1  •  LOOKING AT ASSESSMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

In this age of everyday stress filled with uncertainty for everyone that has been complicated by persistent worldwide crises, multilinguals’ social and emotional development and well-being are as important as academics. Issues of health, economics (e.g., living in poverty or homelessness), fearing deportation of family members, and having students serve as the family spokesperson all factor into multilingual learners’ social-emotional state. Administrators have to be sensitive to social and emotional issues that plague multilingual learners and their ties to the students’ linguistic and cultural identities.

The state of Delaware defines social-emotional learning (SEL) as “a process through which students acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions” (see Rodel Teacher Council, 2018). For multilingual learners, SEL should always reflect multicultural norms and traditions rather than those valued by a monoglossic society.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) describes SEL as a lever of equity in creating inclusive school communities (see CASEL District Resource Center, 2021). As all learning is in fact social and emotional (Frey, Fisher, & Smith, 2019), it is critical for multilingual learners and their families to be part of that conversation. Equally important, school leaders need to have a pulse on documenting SEL as part of the core instructional program, and of course, for multilingual learners, that means collecting information in one or more languages.

TIPS FOR ASSESSMENT IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

Multilingual learners are talented individuals who deserve every opportunity to have language choice when engaged in learning with or without embedded assessment. Remember that there is much intersectionality or crossover in this

Relevant Research on Assessment Policies

Shohamy (2011), among others, asserts that assessment policies and practices are generally based on monolingual constructs whereby multilingual test takers are expected to demonstrate their language proficiency in one language at a time.

Duarte’s (2019) research substantiates that translanguaging, the interdependence of skills and knowledge across languages, among secondary multilingual learners in mainstream classrooms facilitates students’ co-construction of ideas that are embedded in complex collaborative talk during engagement with content-based tasks.

Which assessment policy do you recognize as advantageous to understanding multilingual learners and documenting their growth over time? How might you pursue or enhance it?

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student population with other groups—in particular, race. As we have mentioned before, one unique variable, language proficiency, is going to vary, not necessarily based on test scores, but according to multilingual learners’ personal and educational experiences, social-emotional influences, the situation at hand, the audience, and the purpose of the task.

Assessing bi/multilingual learners in multiple languages is a complex undertaking. Therefore, school and district leaders need to formulate ground rules or policies with other educators. Here is some general advice for what to do to help form a community that values instruction and assessment in multiple languages.

1. Ensure that multilingual learners are comfortable using multiple languages by creating a warm, inviting, and safe school environment, whether in person or remote, that accentuates and supports their assets.

2. Maintain caring empathetic relationships with multilingual learners and their families whether online or in person; show compassion for stressful situations by supporting social-emotional development and learning in multiple languages.

3. Adopt assets-based terminology for students, families, programs, curriculum, instruction, and assessment that makes multilingual learners proud of who they are and strengthens their identities.

4. Create and disseminate a district and/or school language and assessment policy with leadership teams, other educators, and family members to help set parameters for multiple language use.

5. Insist that initial screening of new students is comprehensive, minimally with provisions for collecting information about multilingual learners’ use of multiple languages, and, to the extent possible, includes language samples in the students’ multiple languages.

6. If necessary, augment district or school policy on the assessment of multilingual learners to make provisions for treatment of data in one or more languages.

FACING THE ISSUE: RETHINK TERMINOLOGY AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION MODELS

Multilingualism is a worldwide norm. Gaining acceptance of a multilingual stance in U.S. educational circles when the power of English is irrefutable and xenophobia prevails in some circles is indeed a challenge. Federal terminology simply does not reflect multilingual learners’ full linguistic repertoire, nor does it reflect students’ strengths.

The educational future of today’s children and youth rests in our hands. Take that privilege to maximize the potential of multilingual learners by cultivating their most enduring assets— their languages and cultures. Use these questions as a starting point to engage in ongoing discussion about how to make multilingualism and multiculturalism the new education normal in your setting with assessment central to maintaining linguistic and cultural sustainability of your district and schools.
For School Leaders

➢ How might you amend the initial enrollment process to more accurately capture multilingual learners’ abilities in multiple languages?

➢ What might you do to change terminology around multilingual learners to be more strengths-based (if warranted) and their participation in different instructional programs?

➢ Does current assessment in your school represent the whole student, including multilingual learners’ full range of language use? If not, what might you do to ensure that the students’ languages and cultures are fairly represented?

For District Leaders

➢ How might you enhance the initial enrollment and screening process to more accurately depict the languages and cultures of multilingual learners?

➢ What might you do to enhance terminology for multilingual learners, their participation in language education programs, and related assessment while adhering to state/federal regulations?

➢ Do you believe that assessment procedures adequately reflect your district’s mission, vision, and values? Do they represent the students’ and families’ languages and cultures? Do assessment practices capture multilingual learners’ full range of language use? How can you make assessment more equitable and just?

RESOLVING THE DILEMMA: ACCENTUATE EQUITABLE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS!

As the district task force that Carmen is chairing tackles issues of intersectionality of language, culture, race, and economics, on one level, the educators realize that they are applying a bandage to a deep wound and serious educational concern that deserves immediate attention. School leaders brainstorm how to enhance multilingualism and multiculturalism in schools. Here are some ideas that the group has generated:

• Have friendly and visually appealing signage around schools and the district office; welcome families in the languages of the students and the community

• Display original student work in multiple languages and murals that depict multiple cultures

• Encourage multilingual learners to use multiple languages per school language policies
• Ensure that all communication that touches families is in the languages they understand

• Insist that any instructional program with provision for multiple languages assesses multilingual learners in those languages

Specifically, in thinking about assessment in multiple languages, the task force makes the following recommendations:

• Pledge that school- and district-related technology, such as computers or handheld devices, has greetings, important information, and initial enrollment forms in the languages of the students and their families

• To obtain comprehensive and more equitable baseline data, give incoming students opportunities to record orally and respond in writing in languages of their choice in addition to English

• Urge multilingual learners to complete surveys on their use of multiple languages in a variety of contexts as well as their language choices for instruction and assessment

• Throughout the school year, revisit results from assessment in multiple languages to ensure a balanced representation of data for multilingual learners

How might classrooms, schools, and districts around the nation begin to recognize the moral imperative of promoting and infusing multilingualism and multiculturalism into educational practice? We suggest beginning with broadcasting the benefits of multilingualism and multiculturalism by adopting positive terminology to describe the learners and their educational programs. One clear-cut way to advance the assets of multilingual learners is to value and highlight their languages and cultures in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Assessment in multiple languages should be engrained into the psyche of school. Simply stated, federal language and assessment policy has generally overlooked a national resource and treasure—multilingual learners along with their languages and cultures. That's where districts and schools can make a difference.
Compare eligibility criteria including applicable assessment data in one or more languages for different groups of multilingual learners from the table that follows. Do you feel that the criteria accurately portray the strengths of the students? How might you make the criteria and assessment data more equitable?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBGROUP OF MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS</th>
<th>ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA</th>
<th>APPLICABLE ASSESSMENT DATA</th>
<th>LANGUAGES OF ASSESSMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gifted and talented multilingual learners, including ELs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilingual learners, including ELs with individualized education programs (IEPs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with interrupted formal education (SIFE)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-term ELs (LTELs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recently arrived English learners</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Available for download at resources.corwin.com/assessingMLLs-LeadersEdition
RESOURCES 1.2
Categorizing Terminology: References to Students, Languages, Teachers, and Programs

To what extent does asset or deficit terminology prevail in your setting?

First, select words and phrases from the following categories that your school or district uses: (1) multilingual learners, (2) multilingualism, (3) teachers of multilingual learners, and (4) instructional models or programs.

Next, revisit the lists that follow and select terms to describe your personal stance on multilingualism.

Finally, repeat the activity with other educational leaders to describe their stance. Through discussion, figure out how to reconcile the different visions and how together you might move forward to advance more assets-based terminology to make a positive lasting impact on communities, schools, classrooms, and multilingual learners.

1. Multilingual Learners: References to Students
   - Balanced bilinguals
   - Bi/multilingual learners
   - Dual language learners (DLLs)
   - Elite bilinguals
   - Emergent bilinguals (EBs)
   - English as an additional language (EAL) learners
   - English language learners (ELLs)
   - English learners (ELs)
   - Heritage language learners
   - Language learners
   - Language minority (majority) students
   - Limited English proficient (LEP) students
   - Linguistically and culturally diverse students
   - Long-term English learners (LTELs)
   - Minoritized students
   - Newcomer students
   - Plurilingual learners
   - Proficient English speakers (acquiring an additional language)
   - Second language learners
   - Sequential bilinguals
   - Simultaneous bilinguals
   - Students with interrupted formal education (SIFE)

2. Multilingualism: References to Language(s) of Multilingual Learners
   - Dynamic bilingualism
   - English (or language X) dominant
“First” language (L1) vs. “second” language (L2)
“Foreign” language(s)
Heritage language(s)
Home language(s)
“Native” language
Partner language
World languages

3. Teachers of Multilingual Learners
- Bilingual teachers
- Content teachers
- Co-teachers (or cooperating teachers)
- Dual language teachers
- English (language) learner (EL or ELL) teachers
- English as a second language (ESL) teachers
- English language acquisition (ELA) teachers
- English language instructional coaches
- English language development (ELD) teachers
- English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) teachers
- General education teachers

4. Language Models for Multilingual Learners in English or Multiple Languages
- Content and language integrated learning (CLIL)
- Dual language (DL) programs
- English as an additional language (EAL) programs
- English as a second language (i.e., ESL, ESOL) programs
- English language acquisition (ELA) programs
- English language development (ELD) programs
- “Foreign” language education programs
- Global studies/world language programs
- Language “intervention” programs
- Maintenance/late exit/developmental bilingual programs
- One-way immersion programs
- Sheltered English programs
- Structured English immersion (SEI) programs
- Transitional bilingual education (TBE) programs
- Two-way immersion programs