

AccELLerate!

The quarterly review of the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition

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Ideas on Assessment for EL Students

Welcome to the winter issue of *AccELLerate!* Assessment of English learners continues to attract much attention from educators throughout the U.S., and the articles in the new issue emphasize various factors that should be considered when designing and implementing ELP and content-area assessments. We begin with three papers that look at ELP assessment. Wilde summarizes what we know and what we should know about ELP assessments and provides a national context for discussing ELP assessments; Cook describes what we are learning about the relationship between ELP assessments and academic content assessments and provides insight into how long it takes to reach English proficiency; and Winter builds on what we know and discusses the next steps in assessing ELP. Willner and Rivera continue with the topic of content-area assessment and discuss how EL needs might be defined appropriately and linguistic accommodation support provided during testing that applies Universal Design (UD) principles in the computer-based format.

The last set of papers provides information on effective PD and foreign language programs and resources: Casteel, Haynes, and Williford present some of the highlights from a recent NCELA-hosted OELA meeting of Foreign Language Assistance Program grantees (October 13-14, 2010), the Center for Applied Linguistics has compiled a list of online language assessment resources, and DiCerbo illustrates four research-based principles that guide effective PD, using examples offered through the TA network.

We hope you enjoy the issue and wish you happy holidays and a wonderful new year!

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What Do We Know about ELP Assessments? What More Should We Know?

Judith Wilde

In this set of three papers, my role is to provide a national context for discussing ELP assessments. These graphs and tables provide information on the number of ELs, the languages they speak, and the ELP assessments currently used.

Numbers of EL students identified and served

Title VII, the Bilingual Education Act (as it was known until 2001), was created in the 1968 reauthorization of ESEA as a competitive grant program to provide “seed” money to states, districts, and institutions of higher education for the design and implementation of new and innovative programs for EL students. In the last year for this type of funding, 2000-01, funds were distributed through 1,500 grants issued under 12 discretionary grant programs; roughly 15 percent of ELs participated in these programs.¹ As a comparison, in the 2007-08 school year, funds were distributed to 50 states and the District of Columbia (DC) which, in turn, provided funding to nearly 4,800 “subgrantees” that served 95 percent of designated ELs across the country.²

Although data collection efforts have improved greatly over recent years, it remains difficult to determine exactly how many K-12 EL students there are. Numbers from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) are based on individuals aged 5-17

years who speak a language other than English at home and who are reported to “speak English less than ‘very well’” [1]. The Consolidated State Performance Reports (CSPRs) of the USDE provide data from a central source within each state, DC and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (PR); EL students are designated based on an ELP assessment [2]. Data reported by NCELA are collected from the states, DC, PR, and outlying areas (e.g., Pacific Island Entities) [3]. As evidenced in Figure 1, these sources report rather different numbers of ELs based on data collected at different times of year, from different offices or individuals, as well as defining “English learner” differently.

There are multiple ways to look at these data. Table 1 provides some other information about the K-12 ELs—numbers, density, and growth. Generally speaking, there is a wide range of numbers of ELs in the various states (from about 1.5 thousand to about 1.5 million), the density of students within a given state (from under 1 percent to over 31 percent), and the growth in numbers of ELs (from a count 45 percent less than 10 years ago, to a count more than 800 percent greater than 10 years ago). Schools that find the most difficulty in providing educational services for ELs tend to be urban and rural and to have very many or very few ELs.

Editor’s Notes

The following signs and abbreviations are U.S.ed in the issue.



— *Success stories* describe a successful project or an instructional approach



— Information pieces



— *Resources to Know* provide information regarding PD and teaching foreign languages

EL—English learners

ELP—English-language proficiency

ESEA—Elementary and Secondary Education Act

LEA—Local education agency

PD—Professional development

U.S.DE—U.S. Department of Education

Citations in the text are in [bracketed numbers]. The reference list follows each article in same numerical order. Notes are marked by consecutively numbered superscripts and immediately follow each article.

Languages spoken by EL students

The U.S. English Foundation reports that there are 322 languages spoken within the U.S., including English [4]. The Foundation further indicates that 26 states each record more than 100 languages. The U.S. Census Bureau reported in 2010 that there are 304 languages spoken in the U.S., 134 of which are Native American languages [5].

Based on the CSPR data, Spanish is the most commonly spoken native language of ELs in over 40 states and DC for both school years

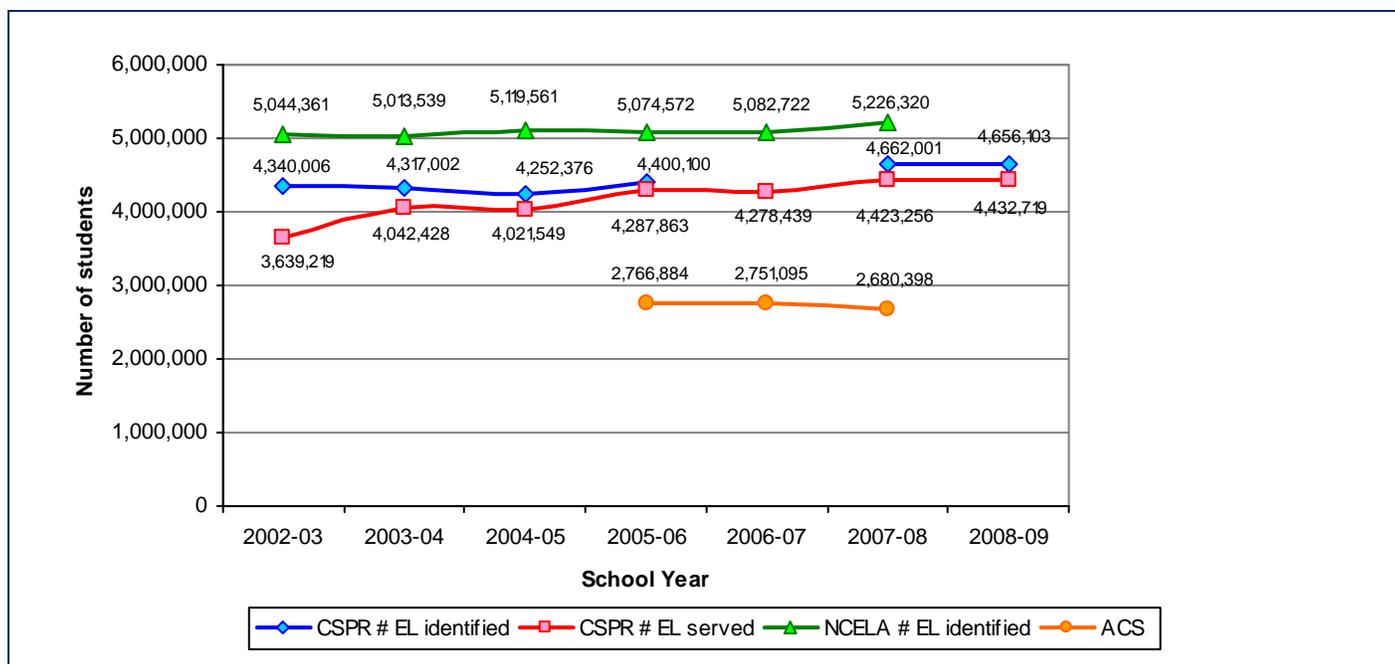


Figure 1. Number of K-12 EL students identified and number participating in Title III-funded language instruction educational programs, school years 2002–03 through 2007–08 [1, 2, 3]

Note: The CSPR did not ask for the number of EL students identified in school year 2006-07. Also, Puerto Rico generally identifies EL students, but serves Spanish-learner students.

2006–07 and 2007–08 [2]. For the remaining states, the most commonly spoken languages reported are Native American/Alaska Native languages and languages that are relatively new to the U.S. (e.g., Somali, Serbo-Croatian).

Within the current CSPR system, each state reports the five languages most frequently spoken by K-12 EL students in that state and the number of students speaking each of these five languages. By summing the number of students speaking each of the reported languages, it is possible to estimate the total number of students speaking each language and to identify the most frequently spoken languages. Table 2 lists the ten most frequently spoken native languages or native language groups of ELs for school years 2006-07

and 2007-08. Because the data are collected only for the top five languages in each state, the numbers presented in Table 2, with the possible exception of Spanish, are undercounts since all states actually have ELs from many more than five language backgrounds.

Most states have students from various different linguistic backgrounds. When looking at the numbers of students speaking those languages, a somewhat different picture may appear. As shown by these figures from 2007-08 [2]:

- 49 states and DC reported that Spanish was among the top five languages spoken by ELs;
- 14 states reported that 80 percent or more of their ELs were Spanish-speakers;

- 13 states reported that no group of ELs constituted a linguistic majority (i.e., no language was spoken by more than 50% of these states' ELs); and
- 9 states without a linguistic majority reported that the language with the most speakers was a Native American/Alaska Native language (e.g., Navajo, Yup'ik), or the language of a newly-arrived group (e.g., Serbo-Croatian, Somali).

Immigrant children and youth

The term "immigrant" refers to those who come from another country, and does not necessarily reflect language background. According to The Urban Institute, immigrant populations are concentrated in six states, with 67 percent living in California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New

Table 1. Numbers and percentages of EL students in the U.S., school year 2007-08 [3]

	Nationwide	State with highest #/%		State with lowest #/%	
Number of students	5,318,164	California Texas Florida	1,526,036 701,799 234,934	West Virginia Vermont Wyoming	1,615 1,741 2,349
Percentage of students (density)	10.7%	Nevada California New Mexico	31.3% 24.3% 18.4%	West Virginia Mississippi New Hampshire	0.6% 1.1% 1.6%
Growth in number of students since 1997-98 (baseline data)	52.3%	South Carolina Indiana Georgia	827.8% 409.3% 406.4%	South Dakota Montana Alaska	-45.1% -24.4% 20.7%

Jersey, and the remaining 33 percent dispersed throughout the country in large numbers [6].

There are several key factors that The Urban Institute identified regarding school-aged children of immigrant parents:

- 86 percent of children with immigrant parents were U.S. citizens;
- 19 percent of the school-aged children of immigrants were EL,

but 61 percent of them had parent(s) who were EL;

- 82 percent of the children of immigrants lived in two-parent families (as opposed to 70 percent of children with native parents);
- 22 percent of the children of immigrants lived in poverty (as opposed to 16 percent of children with native parents); and

- Few immigrant families with children use public benefits, despite their relatively low incomes.

Assessment of ELP

Students' families generally indicate on a Home Language Survey, completed when they register for school, whether there is a language other than English spoken in the home; if there is, students are assessed for ELP.

Table 2. Ten native languages most frequently spoken by K-12 EL students, and number of speakers, school years 2006-07 and 2007-08 [2]

2006-07		2007-08	
Language	# Speakers	Language	# Speakers
Spanish	3,739,644	Spanish	3,757,098
Vietnamese	85,683	Vietnamese	85,414
Hmong	54,416	Hmong	51,536
Arabic	39,040	Arabic	40,774
Native American/Alaska Native languages	34,443	Chinese	39,566
Chinese	33,788	Philippine	35,436
Philippine	31,948	Haitian/H-Creole	34,958
Haitian/H-Creole	28,819	Native American/Alaska Native languages	31,413
Korean	19,733	Korean	16,266
Russian	17,517	Somali	16,064
Total # EL students designated	Not reported	Total # EL students designated	4,662,001

Note: "Arabic" includes varieties identified as Standard Arabic, Egyptian Arabic, Lebanese Arabic, and Sudanese Arabic. "Chinese" includes Mandarin, Cantonese, and "Chinese." "Philippine" includes Tagalog, Ilokano, and "Filipino" or "Pilipino." "Native American/Alaska Native" languages include 11 Native American languages (the most frequently spoken is Navajo) and 2 Alaska Native languages (the most frequently spoken is Yup'ik).

ESEA requires states to demonstrate that EL students are (1) making progress in learning English and (2) attaining ELP.

Each state sets its own targets for the percentage of students making progress and attaining ELP. In addition, each state establishes its own standards, assessments, and criteria for exiting students from the subgroup of EL students. Table 3 lists the types of assessments currently being used to measure ELP; as of June 2010, there were 20 assessments being used [7].

Where do we go for the future of ELP assessment? Over the past months, much has been said about the reauthorization of the ESEA. As of June 2010, the USDE proposes, in the *Blueprint of Education*, to "establish new criteria to ensure consistent statewide identification of students as English Learners, and to determine eligibility, placement, and duration of programs and services, based on the state's valid and reliable English language proficiency assessment" [8, p. 20].

Various national groups also have suggested that the assessments of ELP, and the overall accountability with regard to programs for EL students, must be improved.³ For instance, the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), the National Council of La Raza, National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA), the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), the National Congress of American Indians, and the Hispanic Education Council all have developed statements regarding the reauthorization of ESEA. All of these statements include recommendations for accountability systems, educational programs, and assessment in the content areas; many of them specifically mention the assessment of ELP as well.

The following two articles on ELP assessment present current research on the relationship between ELP and content assessment as well as on the length of time students may need to become proficient in English. A summary of current assessments of ELP follows, along with specific

recommendations of ways ELP assessment can be improved in the future. We stress that these recommendations, from a symposium presented at the annual CCSSO conference in June 2010, are those of an individual and do not reflect the views or policies of NCELA or OELA.

Notes

¹ Numbers calculated by NCELA for the first *Biennial Report to Congress*, covering school years 2002-2004.

² These numbers come from the 2007-08 *Consolidated State Performance Reports* that states are required to complete each year. "Subgrantees" usually are individual school districts, although districts may combine to form a consortium.

³ For the full statements by these and other groups, see the NCELA website: http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/content/2_esea_reauthorization.

References

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2. Consolidated State Performance Reports are available at <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/t3sis/>.
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Table 3. Assessment systems used by states, current as of June 2010

Caveat: The listing of an assessment or a test publisher does not indicate an endorsement by either NCELA or USDE.

Development of ELP Assessment System	# States Using Assessments	Example Assessments
Developed through an Enhanced Assessment Grant (EAG) from the U.S. Department of Education	31 states + DC	Assessing Comprehension and Communication State to State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs®) English Language Development Assessment (ELDA)
Developed by or for a specific state	11 states	CO English Language Acquisition Assessment Program KS English Language Proficiency Assessment (KELPA) NY English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT)
Used by several states with appropriate modifications	8 states	IDEA Proficiency Test Title III Testing System LAS Links English Proficiency Assessment

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8. United States Department of Education (March 2010). A blueprint for reform: The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Alexandria, VA: Author. Available at http://www.ncele.gwu.edu/content/2_esea_reauthorization

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On ELP Assessments, Content Assessments, and ELP Development

H. Gary Cook

The WIDA Consortium has a multifaceted research agenda set by its membership states. Of the many projects currently underway, two are of particular interest:

1. What is the relationship between ELP assessments and academic content assessments? and
2. How long does it take to reach English proficiency?

This article briefly describes what we are learning in these two areas. Much of what is presented here is taken from a presentation given at the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) national conference on student assessment given in June 2010 in Detroit, Michigan.

What is the relationship between ELP assessments and academic content assessments?

Title IX (§9101(25)(D)) of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) [1] describes an LEP or limited-English-proficient student (herein English learner or EL) as "an individual whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language

may be sufficient to deny the individual (i) the ability to meet the State's proficient level of achievement on State assessments described in section 1111(b)(3); (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society."

The law identifies several features of ELs. Of particular interest is the law's focus on the relationship between students' ELP and state content achievement (§9101(D) (i)). ELs are students whose current ELP level limits their ability to meaningfully participate on state content assessments in English (see §1111(b)(3)). Accordingly, exploring the relationship between ELP and academic content assessments should provide insight into where language proficiency might be established. One could conceive of several ways to establish where ELP might be. For example, correlations between tests could be explored. Regression techniques could be used to examine how ELP tests predict

content performance. Another method could look at how both tests classify students as proficient.

Figure 1 is a graph of a method that explores language and content proficiency classifications called decision consistency. Decision consistency is an analytic approach that looks at the proficiency classifications of ELP assessments and content proficiency assessments. This particular graph shows an analysis of a language proficiency assessment (ACCESS for ELLs) and a state reading content test for the 3rd-to-5th-grade cluster. The horizontal axis displays proficiency levels in 0.5 proficiency level increments starting at 2.0 (Note: These proficiency levels range from 1.0 to 6.0 in 0.1 increments.) The vertical axis shows the proportion of students classified as proficient on the state's reading assessment relative to the ELP level increments. Notice that as proficiency increments increase, the proportions also increase, to a point. After the 4.5 to 4.9 increment, the classification proportions decrease. That is, were we

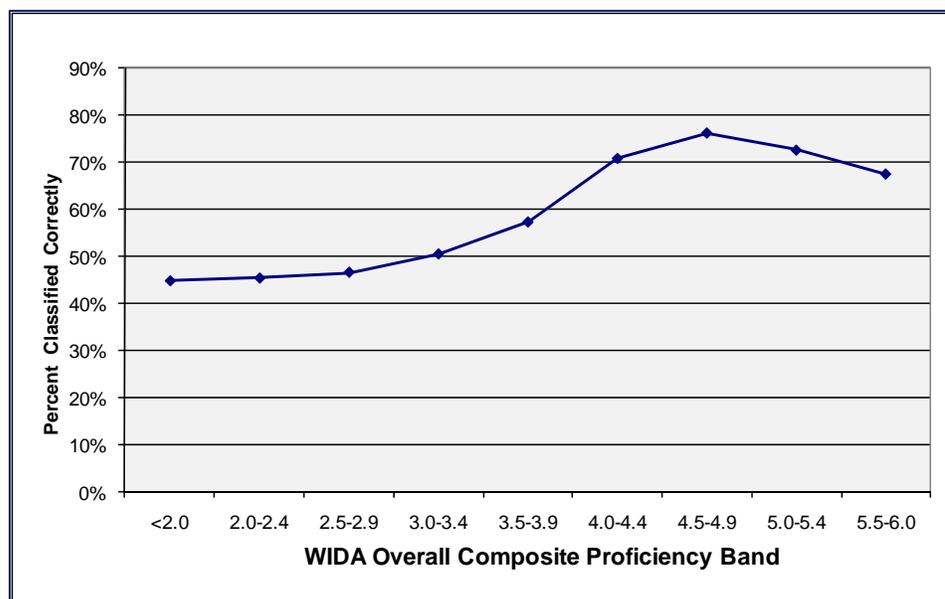


Figure 1. Language proficiency assessment and a state reading content test for grades 3-5

to establish an ELP expectation beyond this increment, we would not be making better decisions on students' proficiency classifications in reading. It is at this increment that discussions could begin regarding where an English proficiency criterion might be established.

The decision consistency method is but one approach that could be used to support decisions regarding ELs' ability to participate meaningfully on content assessments in English. An underlying assumption for any method employed to establish English proficiency should be to identify the point where scores on the language proficiency assessment are less correlated, less predictive, or less associated with content proficiency scores. Also, non-empirical approaches (e.g., expert judgment) should be used in concert

with these types of approaches in supporting where to establish English proficiency.

How long does it take to reach English proficiency?

This is an important question and one in which much more research is needed. In looking at the question of how long, timelines range anywhere between 3 to 7 years [2; 3; 4]. In examining growth on English language proficiency assessments, Cook et al. [4] introduce the principle of "lower is faster, higher is slower." That is, students in lower grades or lower proficiency levels grow in proficiency faster than students in higher grades or at higher proficiency levels. Conger [3] found this type of relationship when she examined ELL growth. Thus, in answering the question "How long does it take?," it is important to add "based on where you start."

Given this more detailed question, we might expect students at lower grades to reach proficiency earlier than students in higher grades, given the same starting proficiency level. We also might expect students at higher proficiency levels (even though their language growth is slower) to gain proficiency earlier than students at lower proficiency levels, holding grade constant.

Figure 2 shows this trend. It represents the proportion of students who have attained an overall composite proficiency level score of 5.0 in a WIDA Consortium state. The composite proficiency level of 5.0 is used by many WIDA states as an indication of English proficiency and is used here as a proxy for language proficiency. Specifically, this chart shows the proportion of students starting in an English language educational program in 2005 who annually attained proficiency. Four years of student longitudinal data are shown: the initial score (shown on the x-axis) and the proportions gaining proficiency after one, two and three years of instruction. Students at the lowest proficiency levels have the smallest proportions attaining proficiency (only 7% here).

For Expanding level (Level 4), slightly more than two thirds of students attain an overall composite of 5.0 after three years of instruction. Only one third of students at the Developing level (Level 3) attain a score of 5.0 at the end of three years of instruction. Based on these data, setting

aggressive timelines for students to attain ELP seems justified for only the highest proficiency level. Analyses provided here support previous researchers' observations on time to proficiency.

There are several caveats that should be accounted for when interpreting this bar graph. First, using an overall composite level of 5.0 as a proxy for language proficiency oversimplifies the issue. Attaining a specific score on a language proficiency test should not be the sole determiner of proficiency. Many other factors affect language proficiency, not just test scores. The data used for this analysis started in 2005. That was the first year this state participated in the WIDA Consortium's assessment. There may be issues associated with a new assessment system that affected students' attainment of proficiency. This is only one state's data following one specific cohort of students. There may be differences across states and differences across cohorts of students, even within this state. Most critically, this graph is what we observe. It should not be what we ultimately expect. It is very likely that the observed proportions are an upper limit of what might be expected. With these caveats in mind, the graph is informative regarding how long it might take to gain English proficiency.

Taken together, these two research questions provide insight into how students are acquiring academic language. First, we see that academic ELP and performance on content assessments

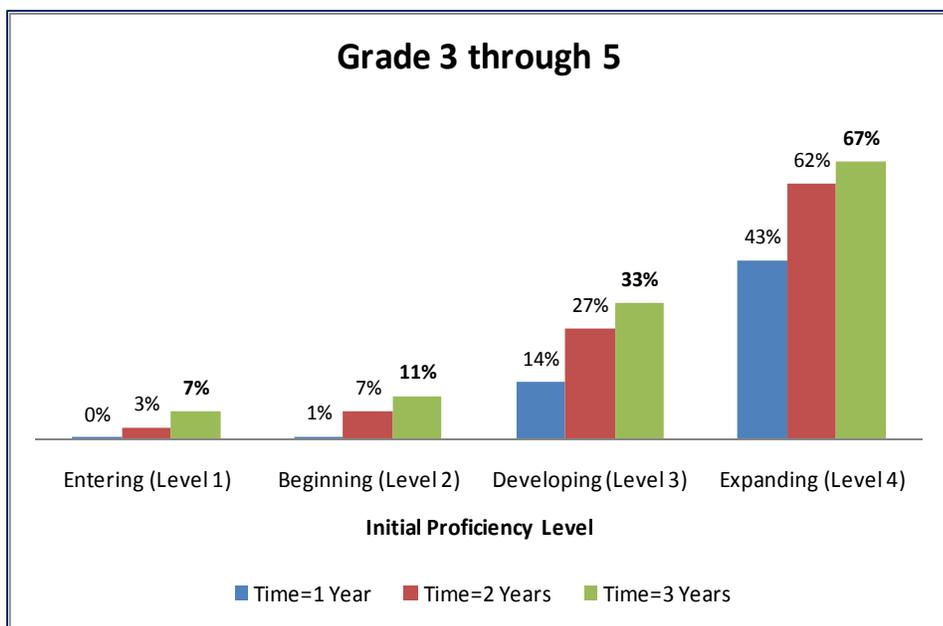


Figure 2. English Language Proficiency Scores from grade 3 to 5

seem to be related. Given the definition of an EL in federal law, this observation should be an expected outcome. Second, determining how long it takes to gain English proficiency should be based, at least in part, on students' initial ELP. Setting one timeline for all students does not seem to be justified by available data. The data suggests that establishing short timelines for students to gain English proficiency may be unwarranted. Further research is desperately needed in this area. Hopefully, the analyses presented here offer some insight to states on how to establish language proficiency and the time it takes to attain English proficiency.

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Building on What We Know—Some Next Steps in Assessing ELP

Phoebe C. Winter

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized in 2001, required the assessment of ELP and provided a strong impetus for improving how we developed large-scale assessments of ELP. Experts in teaching ELs, researchers in linguistics and education, and measurement practitioners worked together to develop ELP standards and assessments focused on academic language. Tests were developed with the goal of measuring individual growth as well as growth of subgroups, and standards and assessments were based explicitly on aspects of language proficiency thought to influence student attainment of academic content knowledge and skills. The USDE funded the development of such standards and assessments through its enhanced assessment grants program, and two of the

resulting tests, WIDA's ACCESS for ELLs®¹ and CCSSO's English Language Development Assessment (ELDA)² are used by consortia of 24 and 7 states, respectively (see [1] for more information about these assessments).

As we moved ahead in changing how we defined and assessed language acquisition by ELs, we learned a number of important lessons. We can apply these lessons to structuring the reauthorization of the ESEA and to developing the next generation of assessments so that we improve our ability to support students who are learning English in both the development of ELP and proficiency in academic content.

Although the new breed of ELP assessments developed in response to the ESEA requirements

were meant to assess proficiency in academic language, most researchers and test users realized that we did not have a clear, agreed-upon definition of academic language [2]. One particularly vexing factor was how to separate measuring fluency in academic language from measuring academic content knowledge and skills as we defined the foundation for our tests [3]. The current ELP assessments are built on our initial understanding of academic language, based on the research available at the time. We need to go further in separating academic language from content knowledge. To do that, we need to know more about what we mean by "academic language."

There is a growing body of research and theory on the development of academic language,



askNCELA's Inbox

in which we highlight the answers to commonly asked questions that appear in our e-mail inbox.

Q: What are cognitive benefits of being bilingual?

A: Bilingualism (and multilingualism) is not only common but probably characterizes a majority of the population (e.g., Romaine, 2004). Research from the last three decades has suggested that bilingualism can enhance cognition, especially the executive control system: bilinguals' ability to attend selectively to relevant information, inhibit distraction, and shift between tasks generally is better than in monolinguals. They have higher metalinguistic awareness i.e., sensitivity to language as a symbolic system, perform better than monolinguals on some aspects of literacy, and often are better second language learners at a later age. Furthermore, it has been suggested that some of these cognitive advantages are maintained in old age and may provide a defense against the decline of general processing functions (a feature of normal cognitive aging) (see Bialystock, 2010, for review of the issues).

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which can help us design our next set of assessments so that they hone in on the academic language skills needed to succeed in the classroom. In particular, we should support a program of research concentrating on the relationship between ELP and learning content. It is critical that we identify the conditions that support learning content while learning English and the various student factors that affect how instruction should be structured. Current research focuses on the analysis of test scores from ELP assessments and academic content assessments [4]. While the analysis of test scores can provide a start in understanding these relationships, there are serious limitations in the interpretations of the results (as [4] is careful to point out). For example, test scores on content assessments are affected by both ELP and content knowledge and therefore may underestimate ELs' actual content achievement.

We also have learned that while the idea of growth as the basis of accountability is an appealing and, on the surface, a simple concept, growth in acquiring English as a second language is complicated and multi-dimensional. We need to define growth better, what our expectations are, and what individual factors affect rates of language acquisition (e.g., native language, level of literacy in native language) and define our expectations for growth in language proficiency—for both students and educational programs—around these factors.

In reauthorizing ESEA, we will need to attend to the types of in-

ferences we expect to make from ELP assessment scores and ensure that the law's requirements and funding provisions encourage the development of assessments that can support valid inferences. ELP assessment scores are used to meet the accountability provisions of the currently authorized ESEA, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, but states and localities also use the scores for other purposes, such as to determine readiness for exiting Title III services, and to determine what types and levels of services a student should receive. It is highly unlikely that a single ELP assessment can be devised to serve all the purposes we would like it to serve, and even making valid inferences for a single function, for example, measuring growth, requires careful attention to assessment content, cross-grade structure, and psychometric factors. Current assessments are scaled to report scores that represent growth, but at best, they are gross measures: we can and do need to do better.

Finally, we can transfer lessons learned from academic standards-based assessment. Standards-based assessment systems separate the *what* of assessment (content standards) from the *how well* (proficiency or achievement standards). Although these two concepts may be related more clearly in the field of English language acquisition, the separation of the two is useful in designing systems of support for ELs, including measures of proficiency. Another area in which we can learn from the standards-based education and assessment movement is

the growing recognition that summative assessments are insufficient for supporting student learning. We need ongoing assessment that is based on the same ELP standards as the summative assessment—a comprehensive system of assessments—to support instruction and learning [e.g., 6].

Comprehensive, coherent assessment systems to support English learners should be based on short- and long-term learning goals, should recognize different developmental progressions depending on students' starting points and other factors such as native language, and should include formative assessment tools and interim/benchmark assessments. The learning goals must be based on research and be consonant with how academic language progresses, and academic language should be explicitly defined and a stated focus of the assessments. One project that is developing such a system is the FLARE project, which includes formative assessments tied to the English language proficiency standards.³ Another project proposed by the Arkansas Department of Education in conjunction with a consortium of states and other research partners incorporates the ongoing assessment of academic language acquisition in content-based formative assessment [5]. This type of research should be encouraged and supported by the reauthorized ESEA.

The ELP assessments developed in response to NCLB represented an improvement over the tests then in place. With the upcoming

reauthorization of the ESEA, we have the opportunity to move the field forward with a research-based system of ELP assessments designed to support, not just measure, language acquisition and academic content achievement.

Notes

¹ For more information see <http://wida.us/>.

² For more information see [http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/English_Language_Development_Assessment_\(ELDA\).html/](http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/English_Language_Development_Assessment_(ELDA).html/).

³ For more information see <http://flareassessment.org/index.aspx>.

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Formative Assessment Practices. Project Partners: Arkansas Department of Education; The States of Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Nebraska, South Carolina, and West Virginia; The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and its Collaborative Projects: Assessing Special Education Students (ASES), English Language Development Assessment (ELDA), English Language Learners (ELL), Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (FAST); The Center for Research on Standards and Student Tests (CRESST); WestEd; Michigan State University (MSU); Edvantia, Inc.

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Vinh's Awakening

Vinh was an 18 year-old student who came to the United States one year prior to his scheduled graduation in his home country of Vietnam, and entered a math class that I team taught. He repeatedly failed quizzes and tests and had difficulty completing class work and homework. Understandably, Vinh was quite discouraged. It was obvious he recognized the math concepts, having completed a higher level in Vietnam than his peers here in the United States. However, he was having difficulty demonstrating his knowledge and skills.

The team teacher and I worked together and began using multiple means of assessment and techniques. Students used manipulatives, played games, created math-related artwork, and made oral presentations—all of which provided opportunities to assess their learning. With time we were able to see more of Vinh's strengths and even observed, particularly when working in pair or group situations, that he often helped the American-born students with math while they in turn helped him with the language challenges. We provided Vinh (and other ELs) with frequently used math terminology (multiple examples including words with similar or opposite meanings) which he kept in the front of his notebook. He also participated regularly in after-school *clinics* where both content and ESL teachers, as well as native English-speaking peers were available to help (with homework, reviewing tests and quizzes completed to determine trouble spots, etc.). In class, Vinh was allowed to use his vocabulary sheet along with a language translator while working on quizzes and tests, and we also read questions aloud and rephrased them for clarification as needed.

The ultimate payoff came the day Vinh scored a 98% on a test, receiving the highest grade in the class. He was ecstatic, as were we all, and from that day on, Vinh's classmates sought him out for help. He could see clearly the results of the strategies that accessed his prior learning in math and the accommodations used to assist him. Vinh received an "A" for the succeeding quarter and performed consistently well the remainder of the year. It was amazing to see such turnaround in a matter of weeks. Other ELs in the course began improving as they noted his progress (they also were benefiting from the same techniques and resources). The excitement and the confidence boost these students gained (which carried over into their other content classes) was palpable, and it truly was fulfilling to see the research and theories we read about in action with successful outcomes.

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Are EL Needs Being Defined Appropriately for the Next Generation of Computer-Based Tests?

Lynn Shafer Willner and Charlene Rivera

EL assessment is at a key transition point in the design of large-scale tests. Thus, we intend to initiate an exchange among members of the EL community and computer-based test (CBT) developers as to how EL needs might be appropriately defined when Universal Design (UD) principles are applied in the CBT format.

Test developers gradually are replacing paper-based, large-scale national and state content assessments with CBT formats in the hopes of not only increasing efficiency of assessment delivery, scoring, and reporting, but also significantly decreasing costs through economies of scale and improved interoperability across multiple formats [1]. Consequently, the transition from paper-based to CBT formats provides a window of opportunity to rethink how assessments are designed, particularly with regard to the needs of diverse learners.

The properties inherent in computer technology allow for increased flexibility and individualization so that test developers can build “multiple, flexible supports into tests at the item level” [2, p. 8] of the main version of the test. Thus, one benefit of offering a CBT is that support for students with specialized needs, such as students with disabilities and ELs, can be built into its initial design rather than added after the main test has

been developed, as is the case with most paper-based tests. Use of a CBT format has the potential for eliminating the development and provision of resources above and beyond the initial version of the assessment. Inclusion of accommodations in a CBT format also can reduce demands on educators to develop and implement accommodations during test administration [3]. According to one group involved in CBT development, this includes eliminating the need for “multiple versions of test materials” and the “provision of additional test proctors with specialized skills ... such as the ability to speak the student’s first language” [1, pp. 2-3].

Consequently, use of a CBT interface in the provision of testing accommodations has the potential for (a) ensuring that more ELs who need linguistic accommodation support during testing actually receive it, and (b) increasing the validity and reliability of accommodation implementation, thereby improving validity and reliability of EL test scores.

Conceptualization of EL needs in recent UD-CBT guidelines

Last year, one group of CBT developers published a framework, the 2009 *Universal Design-Computer Based Testing (UD-CBT) Guidelines* [4], to provide guidance on test item development and the analysis of item designs. The goal of this

framework is to support the development of different types of test resources and accommodations to address the needs of a wide range of students, including ELs. Yet, as shown in Table 1, the support needed by ELs to reduce barriers related to construct irrelevant variance is conceptualized in the *UD-CBT Guidelines* as a *processing* issue (p. 9). Much later in the *UD-CBT Guidelines*, types of test item support to be offered on ELs were bundled with other processing support features offered to students with hearing disabilities and linguistic processing disabilities (pp. 100-101).

Discussion

While both ELs and students with disabilities have special needs, their needs are different and must be addressed separately. Research has demonstrated that to access test content, ELs need linguistic support; students with disabilities require attention to their specific disability which can be a learning and/or a physical disability [5]. Due to the history of misidentification of ELs as having a learning disability [6], it is important to avoid framing the natural process of learning to speak, read, and write English as a learning disability or disorder. Learning English as an additional language is a developmental process and the types of support or accommodations provided to ELs tested in English in state content assessments should be linguistically based. In short, accommodation

Table 1. Disability Categories and Primary Processing Categories

Disability Category	Primary Processing Category(ies)
Blind	Perceptual, Visual
Low Vision	Perceptual, Visual
Deaf, Hard of Hearing	Perceptual, Auditory
Learning Disability: Reading/Language	Linguistic
English Language Learners	Linguistic
Mild Mental Retardation	Cognitive
Physical Disability	Motoric
Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia	Motoric
Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder	Executive
Learning Disability: Math	Executive
Autism Spectrum Disorders	Affective
Emotional Disturbance	Affective

support offered to ELs should be framed in relationship to English language *development*, not language disorder.

Research has shown that there is a great deal of confusion and inconsistency among school-based educators regarding whether ELs are eligible to receive accommodations during large-scale testing of academic content [7]. Educators often are not sure (a) whether testing accommodations are only for students with Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) or for ELs as well, (b) if available to ELs, whether all ELs should be assigned the same accommodations, and/or (c) how accommodations might be best matched to the student's level of ELP and other background variables such as literacy in the native language. Therefore, designing a test so that

EL and disabilities accommodations are grouped together within a single, special needs framework, such as is found in Table 1, adds to the existing confusion among test administrators who are not sure whether ELs are eligible to be accommodated.

Without clear guidance, EL accommodation decision-making results in variability in how accommodations are assigned both within districts and even at times within the same school. Inconsistent assignment of accommodations can have an impact on the ability of a test to represent accurately what ELs know and can do on a content area assessment. Research has found that ELs with assigned accommodations matched to their linguistic and cultural needs during testing score higher (i.e., more accurately) than

(a) ELs with 'incomplete' accommodations (i.e., assignment done without matching accommodations to EL-responsive criteria), and (b) ELs who are not assigned any accommodations at all [8].

When EL status is acknowledged and clearly defined, individualized support is more likely to be provided to each student. Accommodations offered to ELs need to acknowledge ELs' different levels of ELP, academic literacy in English and the native language, prior schooling, and content instruction in the native language [8; 9]. Moreover, since EL status is transitional in nature, as ELs progress from beginning to more advanced levels of English language proficiency, the linguistic accommodations needed in English change and the type of accommodations offered need to be explicitly addressed in a UD-CBT framework.

Summary

When appropriately applied, UD is more than an approach to create a single, one-size-fits-all user interface for broader access by all students; it is a process for creating different types of access resources to meet differentiated student needs, some of which may or may not be used by all students [10]. Thus, the challenge in applying UD principles to CBT is to ensure tests appropriately and precisely address a wide range of diverse learners' access needs during testing. This means that CBTs should not only differentiate the needs of ELs and students with disabilities, but also recognize other student characteristics that impact EL

achievement. We look forward to continued dialogue on this issue.

In December 2010, NCELA received a note from the authors: In response to this newsletter article, the authors of the UID-CBT Guidelines modified the chart to signal FL is not a disability; however, the Guidelines were not revised to reflect the change.

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Upcoming Conferences and Workshops

- Modern Language Association (MLA) 126th Annual Convention
J. W. Marriott, Los Angeles CA
January 06, 2011 - January 09, 2011
<http://www.mla.org/convention>
- Illinois Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages—Bilingual Education (ITBE) 37th Annual Convention
Holiday Inn Select, Naperville IL
February 11, 2011 - February 12, 2011
<http://www.itbe.org/convention.php>
- National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE) 40th Annual Conference
New Orleans Morial Convention Center, New Orleans LA
February 16, 2011 - February 19, 2011
<http://www.nabe.org/conference.html>
- California Association of Bilingual Education (CABE) 36th Annual Conference
Long Beach Convention Center, Long Beach CA



Principles that Guide EL-Focused PD: Examples from Four Technical Assistance Centers

Patricia DiCerbo

In recent years, federal requirements and state accountability measures have led to an increased emphasis on teaching the growing EL population. Instrumental to EL success is the provision of school- and district-level PD that strengthens teacher capacity to influence student achievement. Critical PD for teachers of ELs should cover those knowledge areas, skills, and practical applications necessary for improving instruction in the multiple academic settings in which language is used. These settings range from general education classrooms to ESL, bilingual, or sheltered, courses in mathematics and science, social studies and language arts.

A sometimes-overlooked source of EL-focused PD is the 80-plus technical assistance and dissemination network (TA network) of projects funded by the USDE. Our article in the previous issue of *AccELLerate!* identified PD resources available through these projects [1]. This article illustrates four research-based principles that guide effective PD for teachers of ELs, using examples from PD offered through the TA network. These principles suggest that meaningful PD for teachers is focused on enhancing: (1) content knowledge and pedagogy, (2) responsiveness to student differences, (3) focused and collaborative effort, and (4) practical applications embedded in the curriculum.

Principle 1: Effective PD for teachers of ELs addresses teachers' content knowledge and pedagogy

One of the guiding principles from PD research is that "student achievement comes from consistently applied, research-based instructional practices delivered by teachers who have in-depth understanding of content and content-specific instructional practices" [2, p. 57]. Researchers and teachers alike perceive the usefulness of PD that addresses conceptual understanding and application to instruction. What this means for teachers of ELs is that PD focused on integrating "deep knowledge" of EL-specific pedagogy [3, p. 11] and the language demands of different content areas is essential.

Illustration of Principle 1

- Center: Texas Comprehensive Center (TXCC) at SEDL
- PD Type: Web-based PD resource
- Citation: "What can a Mathematics Teacher do for the English Language Learner?" http://txcc.sedl.org/resources/ell_materials/mell/index.html.
- Description: Over the course of two days in September 2006, the TXCC worked with ESL and mathematics specialists to develop mathematics-specific, EL-responsive PD resources (<http://txcc.sedl.org/events/previous/092806>). A result of this collaboration was a web-based resource that describes typical linguistic characteristics of students at four levels of ELP (beginner, intermediate, advanced,

advanced high), instructional strategies for teachers working with students at each level, and examples of four lesson components that help ELs develop English language and mathematics proficiency:

- (1) Language objectives that describe how the student will acquire knowledge of mathematics using the four modalities of language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing);
- (2) Five "E"s of lesson planning (engage, explore, explain, elaborate, evaluate);
- (3) The academic language of mathematics; and
- (4) Formative and summative assessment practices.

Principle 2: Effective PD for teachers of ELs is responsive to student differences

A second principle of effective PD is to help teachers understand linkages between particular teaching activities and the ways in which students respond and learn. The collection and use of EL data by teachers for instruction is one of the factors attributed to student success. Evidence indicates, for example, that those teachers who observe student participation, classroom interaction, and learning develop higher expectations for student performance.

Illustration of Principle 2

- Center: National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCREST) in partnership with the Council for Exceptional Children

- PD Type: PD Framework
- Citation: "A Cultural, Linguistic, and Ecological Framework for Response to Intervention with English Language Learners." http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/Framework_for_RTI.pdf.
- Description: Differentiated instruction based on student data "lies at the very heart" [4, p. 5] of the RTI approach. This three-tiered, RTI-based framework includes modifications designed to address teacher responsiveness to the learning needs of ELs from different backgrounds. Each tier contains guiding questions that support EL data collection and monitoring. At Tier I, for example, teachers are asked to consider whether instructional interventions are appropriate to the student's culture, language, and experience.

Principle 3: Effective PD for teachers of ELs encourages teacher collaboration

Another principle featured in the PD literature is that teachers need opportunities to process their learning with others, including experts who can challenge existing assumptions and develop the kinds of new knowledge and skills needed. Effective PD for teachers of ELs teaches how to access EL expertise, whether from external experts or colleagues, and leverage such resources in their professional practice. As one example, PD may focus on the "development of norms for collaboration and the use of conversation protocols" [5, p. 9]; as another, PD may implement teacher partnerships within and across schools.

Illustration of Principle 3

- Center: Disseminated by the Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center

- PD Type: PD Research
- Citation: "Succeeding with English Language Learners: Lessons from the Council of Great City Schools." http://www.cgcs.org/publications/ELL_Report09.pdf.
- Description: Research conducted in four successful school districts (high numbers of ELs making academic gains) found high-quality, relevant, and collaborative PD to be one of the striking factors in comparison with lower-achieving districts. Successful districts made systematic efforts to provide EL-focused PD regardless of content area. Teachers "were directed, trained, encouraged, and sometimes required to work with their colleagues" to improve EL achievement across the curriculum [6, pp. 20-21]. Most promising was the expansion of PD to include not only teaching staff but also school administration and leadership. This practice helped develop school-level support for teachers and ensure classroom application of EL-responsive instruction.

Principle 4: Effective PD for teachers of ELs is embedded in the curriculum

A fourth PD principle indicates that quality PD is context-specific, systematically assisting teachers in translating principles of effective teaching into local practice. Related to this principle is the idea that learning is a cyclical rather than linear process that provides teachers with the opportunity to "revisit partially understood ideas as they try them out in their everyday context" [7, p. 15]. Through multiple opportunities for PD and practice in instructional settings, teachers can deepen their knowledge, skills, and dispositions for teaching academic content to ELs.

Illustration of Principle 4

- Project: New England Equity Assistance Center (NEEAC)
- PD Type: Onsite PD
- Citation: "Massachusetts Category Trainings: Building Knowledge and Skills for Content Area Teachers of English Language Learners." http://neeac.alliance.brown.edu/ourwork_ex_mass_category.php
- Description: Few examples of long-term, embedded PD provided or disseminated by the TA network have been identified thus far. However, several centers offer a range of PD options that include curriculum-focused PD that goes beyond a one-day, off-site workshop.

Among the PD offered by NEEAC, for example, are their two- to four-day sessions for content-area teachers. Sessions are spaced throughout the year and include four categories of PD that are designed to develop teacher knowledge, skill, and practice in:

- (1) classroom-based analysis of second language acquisition, and instructional modifications for ELs;
- (2) planning/delivering sheltered instruction differentiated by ELP;
- (3) assessment; and
- (4) content-area literacy instruction appropriate for ELs at different levels of English proficiency.

Conclusion

The connection between student learning and teacher learning is complex. Equally complex is support for teacher learning when EL-responsive instruction is the goal. The TA network of resources and services offers a place to start for states and districts engaged in meeting this goal. To truly attain the kinds of professional learning that will make a difference to ELs, however,

also will require embedding those resources and services in the real work of classrooms and schools.

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Who's on Twitter and Facebook?		 Social Media and Your TA Network
	U.S. Department of Education  http://twitter.com/usedgov	
	REL Northeast and the Islands  http://twitter.com/REL_NEI  http://www.facebook.com/pages/Newton-Regional-Educational-Laboratory-Northeast-Islands/135668537740?ref=search	
	REL West and the Southwest Regional Comprehensive Center  http://twitter.com/WestEdTweet  http://www.facebook.com/pages/WestEd/124424937564?ref=search	
	REL Central and the North Central Regional Comprehensive Center  http://twitter.com/McRel  http://www.facebook.com/McREL.org?ref=search	
	National High School Center  http://twitter.com/NHSCatAIR  http://www.facebook.com/pages/National-High-School-Center/128903199252	
Twitter is indicated with  . Facebook is indicated with  .		
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Critical Language Assessment , Model Schools, and the Foreign Language Assistance Program

Catherine Casteel, Erin Haynes, and Lauren Williford

Under Title V of the *ESEA*, the Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) provides grants to establish, improve, or expand innovative foreign language programs for elementary and secondary school students. The program supports projects that provide foreign language instruction in elementary schools, immersion programs, curriculum development, professional development for language teachers, and distance learning. In this way, FLAP permits schools and states to choose instructional approaches that best meet local needs. The program awards grants through a competitive process, with priority given to programs that (a) show the promise of being continued beyond their project period and (b) demonstrate approaches that can be disseminated and duplicated by other LEAs.

During the last three years, 5-year funding has been awarded to 42 “LEAs to work in partnership with one or more institutions of higher education (IHEs) to establish or expand articulated programs of study in languages critical to United States’ national security in order to enable successful students, as they advance from elementary school through secondary school and college to achieve a superior level of proficiency in those languages” [1].

Schools that receive FLAP assistance are executing innovative and far-reaching programs that have the potential to increase greatly the United States’ domestic foreign language resources. However, the

creation of such programs is not without challenges. Recently, OELA hosted a roundtable in Washington, DC, to allow representatives from these 42 FLAP grant recipients (LEAs and IHEs) to discuss their challenges and successes. Of particular interest were the plenary and break-out sessions on critical language assessments as part of measuring program effectiveness. FLAP uses the following Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) measures to determine the overall effectiveness of a program:

- the number of students in critical language instruction,
- the average number of minutes of instruction in critical languages, and
- the number of students who meet ambitious project objectives for foreign language proficiency.

Over the course of the FLAP program, assessment issues related to the third GPRA measure and resulting reporting requirements have caused concern amongst grantees. A main challenge faced by grantees involves finding available assessments in critical languages that both fit the needs of the programs developed by the grantees and meet the requirements of FLAP.

For the purposes of FLAP, the following are considered to be “critical languages:” Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Russian, and languages in the Indic, Iranian, and Turkic language families. The outstanding difficulty lies in finding standardized proficiency measures

suitable for use at lower grade levels (K-8) for these languages. Most current tests of proficiency in Arabic, Indic, Iranian, and Turkic languages have been developed for use by secondary and college-age students and adults. Examples of these are:

- the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) [grades 11-12, college, adult],
- the ACTFL Writing Proficiency Tests (K-12, College, Adult),
- the Foreign Language Achievement Test (grade 12, college, adult), and
- the New York University Foreign Language Proficiency Test (college, adult).

Tests for schools that are interested in providing curricula and instruction in Chinese, Japanese, and Russian will have much more success in finding assessments appropriate for students at lower grade levels. Examples of these are:

- the CAL Student Oral Proficiency Assessment (also Arabic; K-8),
- CAL Early Language Listening and Oral Proficiency Assessment (PreK-2),
- National Online Early Language Learning Assessment (grades 3-6), and
- the CAL Oral Proficiency Exam (grades 5-7 immersion).

The plenary session on critical language assessments was led by panelists Marty Abbott of the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and Lynn Thompson, program associate at the

Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) Foreign Language Education Division. They suggested that young children's proficiency levels in a FLAP-administered program be assessed in terms of the curricula. They stated that the program outcomes should be the main arbiter of a student's proficiency. Therefore, it is essential that a true standards-based program be established, in which it is possible for students to achieve ultimately an advanced level of proficiency.

Further, Abbot and Thompson encouraged that each proficiency range contain several incremental levels so that students could see actual progress in their language development and understand how to move up to the next level. Each level should contain precise descriptors of what students can do at a particular level, and eliminate focus on what a student cannot do. Programs such as Advanced Placement and the International Baccalaureate tend to focus more on what students cannot do and remove the communication element from the curricula in order to focus on grammar and vocabulary. In these programs and others, the shift in instructional methodology from communication to grammar—as well as a negative message of what a student is unable to do in a language—causes students to drop language programs in secondary schools. Emphasis of the positive traits demonstrated at a particular proficiency must be reinforced by teachers at these levels to keep momentum moving forward to allow for a continued growth and interest in language proficiency.

In order to facilitate strong program outcomes, the panelists provided a

model for selecting or creating a standards-based assessment program. This model contains three aspects to consider when examining an assessment:

- Task—a statement of what is done, or accomplished;
- Conditions—a description of the conditions or context in which the task is to be performed; for language testing the topics also should be included; and
- Accuracy—a definition of how well the task must be performed under the conditions stated.

Following this model in selecting an assessment tool will assist in overcoming several challenges. By comparing the three aspects to the project curriculum and methods of instruction, alignment can be determined. For projects that serve multiple languages and grades, curriculum and instruction is often kept consistent throughout the sequence, again allowing for comparison of alignment between the assessment and the curriculum amongst these three aspects.

During another FLAP Roundtable plenary session, Christine Brown, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction for Glastonbury Public Schools, and Rita Oleksak, director of foreign languages/ELL for Glastonbury Public Schools, offered a presentation on the structures a school system requires in order for students to achieve advanced proficiency in foreign languages. Many of Abbot and Thompson's suggestions could be seen functioning in the model provided by Glastonbury Public Schools (Connecticut) that implement three pillars of structure:

1. A long-sequenced program with K-12 foreign language instruction,

- and critical languages added at strategic stages and grades;
2. Well prepared staff; and
3. Articulated curriculum assessment and instruction.

In regards to this last pillar, Glastonbury uses standards-based curriculum design, and content is mirrored across disciplines; cross-disciplinary teacher teams are used for design implementation, and a commonly assessed curriculum is locally devised and standards-based. Glastonbury Public Schools regularly schedules formative, summative, and normative assessments (locally).

While meeting the challenge of conducting effective, standardized assessment in many of the critical language programs supported by FLAP grants may appear to be overwhelming, Abbott and Thompson were able to show that it is in fact achievable in their plenary session. Indeed, it is an essential component of a successful, on-going foreign language program, and Glastonbury Public Schools provides additional real-world proof of this in their model program.

More information about Title V FLAP Roundtable is available at: <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/meetings/flap2010>.

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Language Assessment Resources Online

Center for Applied Linguistics

There is a variety of language assessment resources online. A free, searchable database with information on more than 200 assessments in over 90 languages other than English, the Foreign Language Assessment Directory (FLAD), has been compiled by staff at the Center for Applied Linguistics. It contains information about assessments currently used in elementary, middle, secondary, and post-secondary school programs around the United States (<http://www.cal.org/CALWebDB/FLAD/>). Table 1 below lists language assessment resources available online.

Table 1. Online language assessment resources. Adapted from [1]

Resource	Description
<i>Center for Applied Linguistics</i> Digests on Assessment http://www.cal.org/resources/digests/subject.html	Collection of brief, accessible digests on assessment and other relevant topics.
<i>Dr. Glen Fulcher, University of Leicester</i> Language Testing Resources Website http://language-testing.info/	Resources on language testing, such as articles, features, videos and audio, made freely available for language teachers, language testers, and students of language testing, applied linguistics, and languages.
<i>International Language Testing Association</i> ILTA Guidelines for Practice http://www.itaonline.com/images/pdfs/ILTA_Guidelines.pdf	Basic considerations for test design and rights and responsibilities of testing stakeholders.
<i>STARTALK</i> Assessment for Language Instructors: The Basics http://startalkumd.edu/teacher-development/workshops/2009/CAL	Downloadable, three-hour "workshop" on the basics of language assessment for instructors of critical languages.
<i>Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition</i> Virtual Assessment Center http://www.calla.umn.edu/assessment/VAC/index.html	Introduction to language assessment for instructors, virtual item bank, and other assessment resources.
<i>Center for Applied Linguistics</i> Foreign Language Assessment Directory and Tutorial http://www.cal.org/flad/	Searchable directory of standardized foreign language tests and online tutorial for instructors and administrators to guide the test selection process and provide basic background on assessment.
<i>Center for Applied Linguistics</i> Early Language Assessment Web Site http://www.cal.org/ela	Web site for Early Language Assessment. Includes detailed descriptions of oral language proficiency assessments, professional development opportunities (face-to-face and online options), links to assessment resources and online demos of our training courses.
<i>Languages Other Than English (LOTE) Center for Educator Development</i> http://www.secl.org/loteced/lotelinks/general.html	Resources for rubrics ranging from sample rubrics to tools for creating/generating rubrics.

References

1. Thompson, L. (2010, October). *Assessment of Proficiency in Critical Languages* (Handout presented at OELA Title V FLAP Roundtable). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

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