

Assessing English Language Learners' Content Knowledge in Middle School Classrooms

This We Believe Characteristics

- *Assessment and evaluation programs that promote quality learning*
- *High expectations for every member of the learning community*
- *Multiple learning and teaching approaches that respond to their diversity*

By N. Eleni Pappamihel & Florin Mihai

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In the following pages, five questions are posed to guide middle school content teachers in making adaptations and accommodations when using traditional classroom tests. The objective of these adaptations is to create a more valid and reliable assessment picture. We hope to show that teachers do not need to create completely different tests for ELLs in all instances, but rather, they can adapt current classroom assessment instruments to accommodate the linguistic and cultural needs of ELLs until they are able to fully participate in classroom assessment without adaptation. While we acknowledge that there are many types of alternative assessments, such as performance and portfolio assessments, that

are effective with ELLs, this article is designed to assist regular middle school classroom teachers when these other types of assessment are not feasible or available. Our hope is that middle school teachers will use a combination of adapted traditional assessments and effective alternative assessments with ELLs.

Assessing English Language Learners

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Teachers can use a variety of strategies to assess English Language Learners at different skill levels.

PHOTO BY GREG BECKEL

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In the following pages, five questions are posed to guide middle school content teachers in making adaptations and accommodations when using traditional classroom tests. The objective of these adaptations is to create a more valid and reliable assessment picture. We hope to show that teachers do not need to create completely different tests for ELLs in all instances, but rather, they can adapt current classroom assessment instruments to accommodate the linguistic and cultural needs of ELLs until they are able to fully participate in classroom assessment without adaptation. While we acknowledge that there are many types of alternative assessments, such as performance and portfolio assessments, that

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1999, p. 73). Moreover, we know that bilingual individuals vary greatly in their academic use of language, making language background an important consideration in any testing situation (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, 2000). Yet, some teachers do not consider testing adaptations and accommodations "fair" to their native speakers of English, emphasizing that any testing changes would alter the testing environment. However, for linguistically diverse students, any test given in English automatically constitutes an unequal testing environment when compared to that of a native speaker of English. When teachers acknowledge the need for testing adaptations and accommodations, it is often difficult to find information to guide them.

Much of the current literature concerning the assessment of ELLs is focused on the assessment of language proficiency. So, when middle school teachers look for resources about the assessment of ELLs, they may find a vast amount of information on how to effectively assess how well an ELL speaks, reads, or writes in English, but it is more difficult to find effective strategies to use when assessing ELLs' content knowledge. While it is critical to understand ELLs' English language proficiency to assess their content proficiency, this type of proficiency assessment is not the central evaluation task that concerns most content area teachers. In other words, a science teacher would certainly care to know the ELL's language proficiency but would be more concerned about assessing the specific science content that student had mastered.

Information available for application to content area classrooms most often relates to various instructional strategies rather than testing strategies. To help make the determination about mastery of content objectives more valid, we suggest that teachers answer five questions. These questions do not constitute an exhaustive inventory but rather are intended to provide a starting point for content area teachers who are seeking to make their classroom tests and quizzes more valid. The five questions are listed below:

1. Do I know my students' English language proficiencies?
2. Have I designed a test that mirrors classroom objectives, strategies, and activities?
3. Have I made use of all relevant and available visuals and graphics?

4. Have I incorporated true accommodations to level the playing field for my ELLs?
5. Have I created a clear scoring rubric that will allow me to provide culturally sensitive and useful feedback?

These five questions reflect major aspects of assessment and help provide a clearer, more holistic picture of an ELL's abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. They account for English proficiency, the reduction of language requirements, the use of non-linguistic cues as adaptations, appropriate accommodations, and appropriate feedback. In the following paragraphs, each will be outlined with links to research, classroom practice, and examples.

Do I Know My Students' English Proficiency Levels?

Embedded within this question are a variety of characteristics that go beyond an ELL's ability to form grammatically correct sentences in English. Acknowledging the fact that English proficiency is a complex concept can help many teachers adapt their tests to meet that proficiency. According to Canale and Swain (1979), among others, English proficiency can be viewed within the concept of communicative competence. This type of competence posits that English proficiency is not limited to grammatical competence, but also includes sociolinguistic, strategic, and discourse competence. Hence, when making adaptations for ELLs' competence in English, it is important to look at their ability to understand the culture embedded in the language, repair breakdowns in communication, and engage in appropriate conversations in addition to forming grammatically correct sentences.

Moreover, understanding where an ELL falls in terms of English language proficiency means making not only curricular adaptations and accommodations for them but also designing such adaptations for assessment purposes. Perhaps Ernst-Slavin, Moore, and Maloney (2002) provided the most comprehensive information to help teachers match English language proficiency with strategies and adaptations (see Figure 1). Ernst-Slavin and associates have provided specific strategies that are intended to enhance students' emerging abilities and help them overcome linguistics deficits. For example, at the *early production* level Ernst-Slavin has recommended that questions only require a yes/no or either/or response. Furthermore, they write that effective

Figure 1
Stages of Language Development and Cultural Adaptation

Stage I: Preproduction				
LINGUISTIC CONSIDERATIONS: STUDENT...	CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS	SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS	QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES: APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS INCLUDE...	EFFECTIVE ACTIVITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates with gestures, actions, and verbal formulas Is building receptive vocabulary Is recycling learning language practice Benefits from listening comprehension activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Silent period 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a stress-free environment Provide support and encouragement Avoid asking direct questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find the... Point to... Put the _____ next to the _____. Do you have the _____? Who did _____? What is his/her name? What is this (concrete object)? Who is he/she? Who has the _____? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Face-to-face conversation Simple demonstrated directions Participation in art/music/PE Puzzles/games, real objects/manipulatives Picture books Encouraging drawing
Stage II: Early Production				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intuitively understands that English is a system Labels and categorizes Encounters native language interference Uses one- and two-word responses and chunks of language Can say, "I don't understand." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptation fatigue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor error correction Use anticipation guides Use list of key terms for previewing Use audiotapes of readings and lectures Use graphic organizers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions that require a yes/no answer Questions that ask either/or 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-level questions Retelling a story Picture books with simple texts Simple written responses Copying words and sentences Recipes Oral reading Written practice
Stage III: Speech Emergence				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses language purposefully Produces complete sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tension between assimilation and acculturation Recovering from previous frustration and fatigue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use frequent comprehension checks Design lessons focusing on concepts Introduce expanded vocabulary Use models, charts, maps, and timelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open ended questions; why or how questions Specific questions How is it that _____? Tell me about _____? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrations Simple oral presentations Answering higher level questions Hands-on activities Small group work Word sound symbol production Simple writing Computer lessons play and role-playing Choral reading
Stage IV: Intermediate Fluency				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can produce connected narrative Can use reading and writing incorporated into lesson Can write answers to higher level questions Can resolve conflicts verbally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural adjustment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Validate students' languages and cultures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What would you recommend or suggest? How do you think this story will end? What is the story about? What is your opinion on this? Describe/compare and contrast How are these the same or different? What would happen if _____? Which do you prefer? Why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content/subject explanations Paragraph writing Reading for information in content areas Summaries, outlines, book reports Explanations of new ideas/concepts Workbooks, worksheets, and tests Lecture discussions Literary analysis of plot, character, setting Simple report writing

Source: Ernst-Slavin, Moore, & Maloney, 2002

strategies would include retellings, oral readings, and some written practice. Whereas, at the *speech emergence* level, ELLs have relatively good social English skills and are becoming more familiar with academic English structures. An ELL at this level would be relatively comfortable with open-ended questions and descriptions. Knowing these characteristics of a student's English language proficiency, a ninth grade science teacher could adapt test questions so that more open-ended questions are posed. In addition, this same teacher could accommodate an ELL at this level by providing a glossary of useful terms and fill-in-the-blank paragraphs that would allow the student to focus on expressing content mastery rather than linguistic advances. An example of an extreme linguistic burden can be seen in the following ninth grade word problem taken from the practice items for the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT, n.d.) mathematics section. Students were asked to calculate volume.

An engineer is designing a metal gasket for a spacecraft. The gasket has the shape of a cylinder with a cylindrical hole through the center. The diameter of the gasket is 9 centimeters, and its height is 4 centimeters. The diameter of the hole is 3 centimeters. What is the volume of metal, in cubic centimeters, that is required to make the gasket?

While an unlabeled diagram of the cylinder with the hole is provided, the vocabulary of the problem itself, (gasket, spacecraft, cylindrical, etc.) can make this problem impossible for an ELL to solve. To an ELL at the early production level (assuming that he/she has mastered such vocabulary as "shape," "diameter," "volume," and "cylinder"), this problem may very well have read like this:

An _____ is designing a metal _____ for a _____. The _____ has the shape of a cylinder with a _____ hole through the center. The diameter of the _____ is 9 centimeters, and its height is 4 centimeters. The diameter of the hole is 3 centimeters. What is the volume of _____, in _____ centimeters, that is required to make the _____?

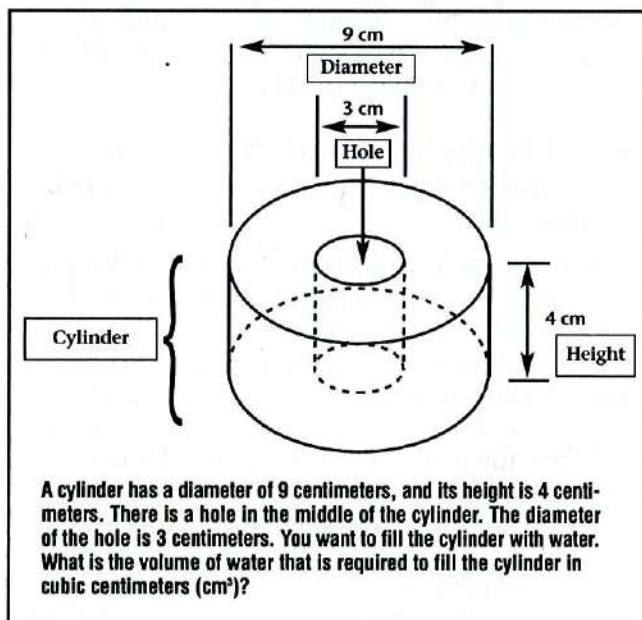
Even though the necessary information to solve the problem still exists in the item, it is inaccessible for this ELL. By simplifying the word problem and labeling the diagram (Figure 2) with the appropriate vocabulary that has been learned and reinforced in class, the teacher could assess this student's mastery of the concept of volume by reducing the linguistic burden of the math assessment. It is important to note that, although the language of the problem has

been changed, the concept being assessed has not been altered. With some word simplification, this word problem may change to read as illustrated in Figure 2.

Language simplification, repetition of frequently used phrases, and peer/teacher-aid can help ELLs respond to content questions within their linguistic boundaries.

By knowing and working within ELLs' English language proficiencies, a teacher is able to more validly and reliably determine their mastery of content rather than making this expression of knowledge dependent upon their limited mastery of the English language. Language simplification, repetition of frequently used phrases, and a peer/teacher-aid can help ELLs respond to content questions within their linguistic boundaries. Trusted peers and teachers can provide scaffolded language support, especially at the beginning stages of language acquisition and in instances where classroom concepts are text driven, as in a social studies classroom (Egbert & Simich-Dudgeon, 2001). It is essential that a content area teacher know not

Figure 2
Example of labeling with language simplification



only what ELLs can do on their own, but also what they are capable of with appropriate linguistic aid (e.g., graphic organizers, tables, glossaries). This type of assessment can also help content area teachers determine what other types of adaptations and accommodations are necessary as ELLs progress through the stages of language development.

Modified objectives reduce the linguistic burden on the ELL without reducing the cognitive demand of the objective.

An example of such an assessment may include a short answer response item on a social studies test that would normally be answered with a short essay written by the student. More specifically, when a social studies teacher is focusing on consumerism and wants to assess students' ability to comparison shop, he may ask students to answer the following question.

You want to buy a new jacket. The Pistons jacket is almost twice the price of a similar jacket sold by Macy's. Do you buy the expensive Pistons jacket or the Macy's brand? Why?

This short answer question can be broken down into a series of simplified questions that scaffold the ELL's response in a manner that allows the teacher to determine exactly where the student's comprehension may be compromised. Another method of scaffolding the item would be to have students complete a graphic organizer. Examples of each of these methods are given in Figure 3.

Have I Designed a Test That Mirrors Classroom Objectives, Strategies, and Activities?

A clear statement of objectives is necessary for any assessment of student achievement (Genessee & Upshur, 1996). Ideally, before any testing takes place, content area teachers have already adapted classroom objectives and activities according to their ELLs' language proficiency. For example, a science teacher may have the following class objective for her middle school earth science class, "Students will be able to accurately define the words 'gravity,' 'erosion,' and 'deposition' and give examples of each." For an ELL at an early production level, she may have adapted this objective to, "Student is able

to accurately identify pictorial examples of *gravity*, *erosion*, and *deposition* and provide two- to three-word descriptions." The test designed to assess the ELL student's mastery of this information should reflect the adapted objective. While it is not recommended that teachers consistently create completely different learning objectives for their ELLs, all instructional objectives should fit each ELL's level of English language proficiency. As tests should be direct reflections of classroom objectives, so should adapted classroom objectives be assessed using adapted tests. In the example, the science teacher would not ask her early production ELL to write a complete definition as she might her native English speakers, but rather, the ELL would engage in an application activity similar to classroom activities that make use of visuals and short two- to three-word phrases. Modified objectives reduce the linguistic burden on the ELL without reducing the cognitive demand of the objective.

Figure 3
Comparison Shopping

SPEECH EMERGENCE

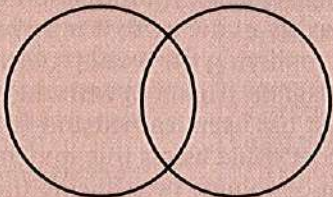
You want to buy a jacket. There is one jacket that costs \$200. It is expensive because it has the name of a famous sports team on it. There is another jacket that is made by the store that costs \$50. This jacket does not have the name of the sports team on it. Both jackets are made of wool and have a silk liner.

1. What is the cost of each jacket?
Sports Jacket _____ Store Jacket _____
2. Are the two jackets of the same quality?
Yes _____ No _____
3. Which one would you buy?
4. Why?

EARLY PRODUCTION

You want to buy a jacket. There is one jacket that costs \$200. It is expensive because it has the name of a famous sports team on it. There is another jacket that is made by the store that costs \$50. This jacket does not have the name of the sports team on it. Both jackets are made of wool and have a silk liner.

1. Compare the two jackets.
Sports Jacket _____ Store Jacket _____



2. I would buy the _____ jacket because _____.

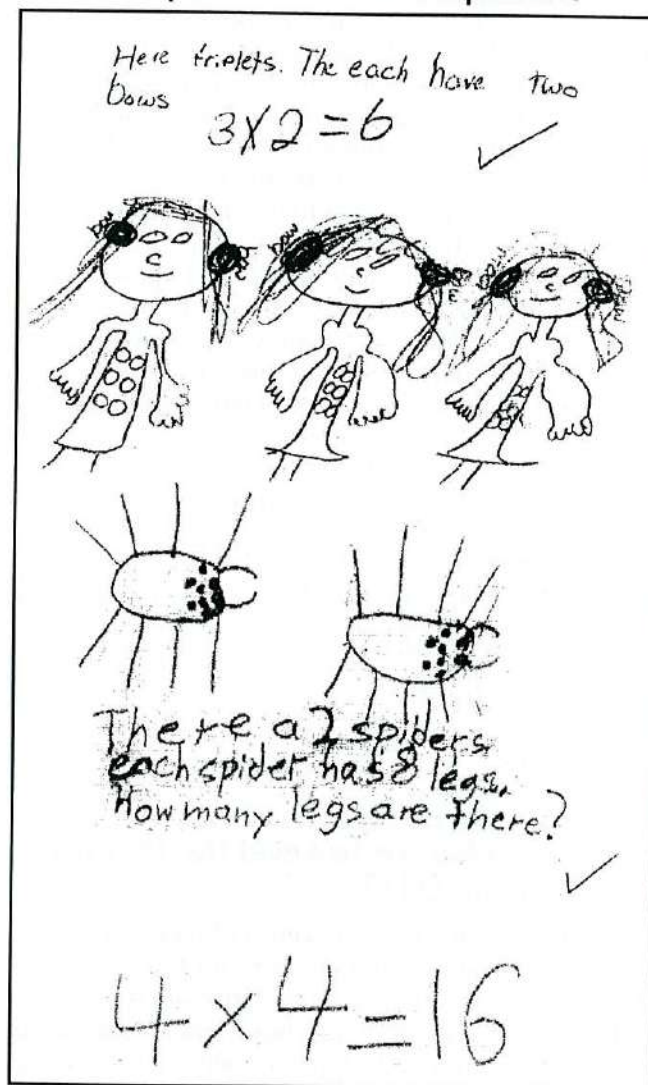
In classrooms this understanding of criteria also indicates an equally clear understanding of test task. In other words, teachers should not introduce a new task to ELLs on test day; all test tasks should reflect activities that have already been introduced in an instructional setting multiple times. This type of transparency and established routine is critical so that ELLs are assessed on their knowledge of content not their knowledge of how to do the activity. For example, some ELLs may consider a short answer response to be as brief as three to four words, whereas many American teachers might consider a short answer task to be the equivalent of at least one paragraph. If ELLs are only asked to produce short answer responses on tests, they may not demonstrate full mastery of content because their understanding of the task is different from that of the teacher.

Have I Made Use of All Relevant and Available Visuals and Graphics?

When working with most ELLs at any level of English language proficiency, visuals and graphic organizers are essential tools. However, many teachers do not use many visuals or graphics on their tests, relying on students' prior knowledge and memory to aid them in responding to questions. Teachers should use the same visuals and graphic organizers on tests that were used in classroom instruction to help reduce the language requirements of content tests. Moreover, visuals and graphics should appear in similar positions on tests as they have in classroom activities. For example, if pictures are placed immediately beside a complex passage to aid understanding, then that same picture should be placed in a similar position on the test relating to that passage. Also, if a Venn diagram is used in a classroom activity, the teacher should not switch to a T-diagram on a test to compare two objects or concepts.

ELLs who are more advanced in their English proficiency can help teachers with visuals. Case (2002) wrote that in science classes, ELLs themselves can create pictures and visuals to supplement their answers on classroom tests that require higher order thinking skills. This type of response enables the ELL student to provide another avenue of communication that is not linguistically dependent. Additionally, Case found that ELLs were more successful when allowed to supplement their test responses with quotes from their own past journals, allowing them

Figure 4
Pictorial responses to mathematics problems



to demonstrate mastery of a concept by finding exactly the right quote without having the burden of reproducing English sentences under test conditions that may have taken them a long time to create originally.

In math classes, word problems are especially difficult for ELLs due to the extreme linguistic demands of these types of problems. Celedon-Pattichis (2004) found that middle school ELLs had extreme difficulty distinguishing "natural language" from mathematical language, resulting in students confusing numbers that appeared as natural language (e.g., size 7 dress or number 2 can of peas) in the word problem with mathematical language that related to the actual calculation needed. She

emphasized that teachers spend time initially reading for understanding, which is often not done at test time. Therefore, word problems should be written in such a way that the ELL student can process the language and mathematics aspects of the problem in a reasonable amount of time. Lee, Silverman, & Montoya (2002) recommended that young ELLs be encouraged to create diagrams and other types of drawings when responding to word problems on tests (Figure 4). In these problems, students have been asked to "draw" math problems to provide a visual check of their comprehension. By having ELLs create their own visuals, teachers can be sure that they are understanding the problem itself as well as applying the appropriate mathematical process.

Accommodations are not meant to give ELLs an edge over native English speaking students but rather to help eliminate the linguistic burden placed on non-native speakers of English.

Have I Incorporated True Accommodations to Level the Playing Field for My ELLs?

According to Butler and Stevens (1997) the most commonly used accommodations for ELLs include bilingual dictionaries, extended time, alternative setting, simplification of directions, test modifications (e.g., translation, visual supports, additional examples), and procedural modifications (e.g., breaks during testing, reading aloud of questions, oral directions in the native language). In most cases, these accommodations are used on large-scale assessments, but results from studies of their use can inform classroom testing by providing classroom teachers with a more realistic picture of what constitutes a true testing accommodation. Some of these accommodations are more feasible than others, and some, such as direct translation, should be avoided altogether under most conditions.

Abedi, Hofstetter, and Lord (2004) wrote that a true accommodation can, "level the playing field for English learners, without giving them an advantage over students who are not receiving accommodated assessments. ... Ideally, an assessment accommodation

should yield an interaction effect, where the accommodation improves the performance of English language learners but not the performance of native English speakers." (p. 6) In other words, accommodations are not meant to give ELLs an edge over native English speaking students but rather to help eliminate the linguistic burden placed on non-native speakers of English.

For classroom tests, we can recommend the following accommodations that reduce the linguistic burden for ELLs while still retaining the responsibility of content mastery. Teachers can reduce idiomatic and slang expressions as well as phrasal verbs (e.g., to run over to, to run into, to run out of) that may be confusing. While many teachers allow ELLs to use bilingual dictionaries on tests, glossaries and customized dictionaries have been shown to be more effective (Abedi & Hejri, 2004). Since a bilingual dictionary is not content or context specific, it will provide all possible translations of a word. The common English word "go" has 20 definitions just in its intransitive sense. Adding the transitive sense leaves a student with nine more possibilities. However, a glossed text would define "go" within the boundaries of the particular context of that text. For example, in the sentence "This shirt goes with this tie," the word "go" would be glossed at the margin as "to be compatible with."

A popular large-scale test accommodation is extended time. Often ELLs are given as much time as needed, provided that they can complete a particular section or portion of the test within one school day. However, classroom teachers who are limited by bell schedules and physical constraints within the classroom cannot easily make use of this popular accommodation. So, instead of giving ELLs extra time in class, take-home tests can be given or ELLs can be given a test with a reduced number of items that correspond to the same constructs and objectives on the full version.

With the increasing popularity of the Internet, translations of text have become easier; however, research has found at least three major problems. First, rarely are identical translations possible. Word difficulty and procedures do not have a one-to-one correspondence in all languages (Figueroa, 1990). Secondly, if the language of instruction has been English, it is unlikely that the ELL student will be familiar with the content in his or her native language. For example, if our intrepid math teacher wants to translate the previously cited word problem

Figure 5

Rubric Element for Assessing Understanding of Immigration Patterns

INDICATOR	APPROACHES EXPECTATIONS	MEETS EXPECTATIONS	EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS
Identification of specific problems	Student identifies immigration patterns in both countries but does not provide comparison or contrast information	Student identifies immigration patterns in both countries providing at least one point of similarity and difference for each pattern	Student identifies immigration patterns in both countries, provides more than one point of similarity and differences, citing possible reasons for each

to Spanish, she may use the term "junta de culata" for the English term "gasket," but if the ELL student from Mexico has only studied that concept in English it is unlikely he or she will know the word in Spanish since it may not be part of that student's social vernacular. Unless ELLs are taught content bilingually, they should not be expected to demonstrate knowledge learned in English in their native language. The third, and related, difficulty with translation is that ELLs may or may not be literate in their native language. Testing in Haitian-Creole will only be considered valid if Haitian students can read and write at an appropriate level in that language.

Have I Created a Clear Scoring Rubric That Will Allow Me to Provide Culturally Sensitive and Useful Feedback?

Shepard (2000) wrote, "Students must have a clear understanding of the criteria by which their work will be assessed" (p. 11). Rubrics are an essential part of the assessment process and allow teachers to be sure "a score or grade was based on actual student performance rather than some idiosyncratic or indefensible application of the scoring criteria" (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996, p. 20). In addition, and especially for ELLs, shared rubrics allow teachers to show students exactly what will be expected of them on tests and other assessments. This increased transparency can help to reduce test anxiety and act as a study guide for ELLs. For teachers of ELLs, rubrics give them a further opportunity to critically examine the English demands of a given test. Finally, specific rubrics tied to instructional objectives can help ensure consistency throughout the entire teaching-testing cycle (Brown, 2004).

Rubrics for ELLs should take into consideration their level of English proficiency in addition to teacher expectations in relation to content mastery. For example, if teachers develop rubrics of accomplishment that include "approaches standard" and

"exceeds standard" definitions as well as "meets standard," they can track student progress in content and language mastery. This feedback cycle can help teachers individualize intervention procedures that can provide positive washback on the instructional process. For example, in a middle school social studies class in which students are asked to compare and contrast immigration patterns in the U.S. and Canada, teachers can create rubrics that identify several key indicators and levels of accomplishment (Figure 5).

In this rubric indicator, the teacher can now see evidence of content mastery approaching, meeting, or exceeding standard and can view language progress.

With regard to culturally sensitive feedback, content area teachers should provide feedback that is clear, concise, and understandable as well as culturally appropriate. It does little good to spend time providing feedback that will be either misunderstood or disregarded by an ELL student who does not understand the cultural context of that feedback.

If the language of instruction has been English, it is unlikely that the ELL student will be familiar with the content in his or her native language.

Scarcella (1992) provided some situations where miscommunication regarding feedback may take place. The first of these involves the role of feedback provided by students. As many teachers are aware, it is not unusual for ELLs to feign understanding so that they do not draw unwanted attention to themselves in class. Hence, content area teachers should question culturally appropriate "signals" (e.g., nodding) that indicate that ELLs are paying

attention and understanding. In addition, teachers need to ensure that ELLs are aware of what they view as paying attention and demonstrating understanding. Some cultures consider eye contact to be very disrespectful, but it is thought to be an indicator of attention in many U.S. classrooms.

Scarcella went on to note six other areas of possible misunderstanding.

1. What constitutes criticism or compliments for that student?
2. How does that student view or value error correction? How is peer feedback treated in the classroom?
3. How does this student request clarification? How would these requests be interpreted by a teacher?
4. How does this student feel about being singled out (spotlighted) in class?
5. How does the teacher use questions to check comprehension? How would these questions be interpreted by the student?
6. How are pauses and wait time interpreted by the student and the teacher? How fast does the student need to respond to a question?

These areas of potential miscommunication are often easily circumvented by simply asking the students themselves. Because many teachers and ELLs have not consciously thought about these classroom aspects before, they do not realize misunderstanding is even possible until a conflict occurs. By establishing guidelines ahead of time, teachers can help ensure that their feedback is being processed in a useful manner. For example, if ELLs come from cultures in which display questions are not often asked (e.g., "What time is it?" asked while the teacher is looking at the clock), the ELLs may become offended thinking that the teacher is insulting them. Additionally, if ELLs come from cultures that value thoughtful consideration of a question before a response is expected, the relatively short wait time allowed in U.S. classrooms will be confusing and send conflicting signals. The ELL students may think that the teacher must not value their answers if the teacher does not allow enough time to ponder it. If the teacher does not feel comfortable talking directly to the ELL, often other students from that same cultural group can provide important insights.

Error correction is often a controversial topic. How much and how often should ELLs be corrected in class? Because ELLs are going through a variety of stages of language acquisition (Ernst-Slavin, Moore, & Maloney, 2002), it is generally considered inappropriate to constantly correct an ELL's English. Modeling correct usage and grammatical structure are thought to be more helpful in the long run. However, not all cultures view indirect correction as valuable (Scarcella, 1992). Ran (2001) found that Chinese parents were disappointed when they met with teachers because the teachers did not provide enough critical feedback concerning their children. On the other hand, the teachers felt that the parents did not appreciate their supportive tone that highlighted their children's strengths and progress despite their ongoing limitations in the language.

In sum, rubrics can provide teachers with focused, clear direction in providing culturally sensitive feedback to students who may or may not fully understand the academic culture they find themselves in. This transparency and stability can help both groups—teachers and students—move through murky waters.

Conclusions

We have outlined several questions that content area teachers can ask themselves when preparing classroom assessments and tests for ELLs. The questions themselves are designed to move teachers who have not received extensive training in teaching English as a second language through a series of stages from test development to feedback and correction. However, we do not want to further complicate the assessment process by insinuating that these questions will solve every problem and challenge that teachers face when working with ELLs.

Classroom assessment is, by far, a more complex issue than we have time and space to address. To more effectively address this complexity, in these final paragraphs we would like to encourage content area teachers to use multiple assessment points when working with ELLs. We are optimistic that teachers will use not only formal tests but also informal assessments such as running records and journals to assess the content mastery of their ELLs. Even more so, we hope that content area teachers will make extensive use of portfolios and performance types of assessments in combination with more traditional classroom tests adapted to gain a fuller, more holistic, picture of ELLs' abilities in both the English language and in content areas.

Finally, we have not touched on the topic of large-scale assessment with ELLs. This highly controversial topic has, and will continue to be, a much-debated issue in all schools as accountability at the state and federal levels becomes more dependent on the scores of special populations of students, like English Language Learners. As mentioned previously, our hope is that assessment of ELLs becomes more of a process of developing a holistic picture of students' abilities and needs based on their growth over time and the development of higher order thinking skills in another language.

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