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### Creating Quality Assessments for English Language Learners

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Creating Quality Assessments for English Language Learners

by  
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December 2019

A capstone project submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development  
of The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the United States, students are becoming more linguistically and culturally diverse. English Language Learners (ELLs) are among this population of students, and many educators find challenge in responding to their diverse needs. This perspective prepares teachers to access students' viewpoints, backgrounds, and cultures within their learning. The literature examined in this capstone identifies three central challenges that English Language Learners face, including sociocultural, linguistic, and assessment challenges. This capstone will synthesize ELLs' challenges learning a second language as well as the key characteristics of multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, true-false, constructed-response, and essay items in high quality assessments for ELLs. The professional development provided in this capstone will coach educators of all students to provide high quality assessments, accommodations, and modifications for ELLs. This capstone is limited to English Language Learners at the elementary and secondary levels. More research is needed to create quality assessments for adult ELLs.

*Keywords:* English Language Learners; culturally responsive pedagogy; assessment; linguistic challenges; sociocultural challenges

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Problem Statement

The English Language Learner (ELL) population has dramatically increased within the past few decades and is projected to continue growing throughout the next decade (Khong & Saito, 2014). English Language Learners are characterized as “students who enter schools with a first language other than English and therefore need to increase their proficiency in English in order to meet the academic demands of schools” (Roy-Campbell, 2013, p. 257). Although ELLs are categorized into one group of learners, this grouping is not homogenous. ELLs are culturally and linguistically diverse students that require an education that meets their individual social, emotional, and English language needs. Mitigating the above mentioned issues can be accomplished through culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). Gay (2002) defines CRP as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). Culturally responsive pedagogy allows for teachers to aid ELLs in their acquisition of English through authentically meaningful ways. Therefore, in this capstone, I identify the lack of culturally responsive pedagogy as the problem teachers face when creating quality assessments for ELLs in elementary and middle school mainstream classes.

Recently, educators have been reviewing and revising their policies and preparation for educating students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. According to Khong and Saito (2014), “The biggest institutional obstacle for ELL teachers is inadequate in-service and pre-service training” (p. 214). All teachers are

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teachers of ELLs. However, many of the teacher preparation programs as well as veteran teachers lack training on how to effectively educate ELLs (Roy-Campbell, 2013). The absence of training and awareness of culturally responsive pedagogy can be attributed to educators and professors who “themselves have not received this preparation” (Roy-Campbell, 2013, p. 256). Li and Peters (2016) support this argument, as they declare that teachers of ELLs “need the appropriate training to be able to meet their students’ language and learning needs and to facilitate their academic growth” (p. 6). Therefore, educators are experiencing obstacles with assessing ELLs in a reliable and valid manner.

Throughout this culminating capstone project, I will describe challenges educators face in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy to create quality assessments in mainstream elementary and middle school classrooms. The challenges include evaluation and assessment obstacles, perceptions and attitudes towards diverse populations, absence of materials and training, linguistic and sociocultural challenges, and the misidentification of ELLs as a homogenous group. I will also examine best practices for improving evaluations and assessments for English Language Learners, as well as provide a detailed professional development on the appropriate accommodations and alternative assessments for ELLs. Throughout my research, I will be investigating the following problem: How can educators create quality, or culturally responsive, assessments for Middle School English Language Learners?

### **Linguistic Challenges**

English Language Learners represent “a variety of socioeconomic, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds” (Lenski, Ehlers-Zavala, Daniel, & Sun-Irminger,



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2006, p. 24). According to Roy-Campbell (2013), there are “more than 450 languages spoken by English language learners in U.S. schools” (p. 257). Educators are faced with teaching students content material while simultaneously teaching them English literacy. Educators that have not received culturally responsive training or courses for educating ELLs may not be aware of the potential barriers for students expressing themselves in English. According to Winsler, Kim, and Richard (2014), “Anxiety, extroversion, and willingness to communicate in L2 have also been linked with L2 acquisition, with those lower in anxiety, more extroverted, and more willing to take risks, showing more progress in their L2” (p. 2243). Students that experience more anxiety from social or academic pressures or feelings of disconnect may have a raised affective filter within their classroom, which negatively impacts their English acquisition (Roy-Campbell, 2013). The affective filter represents a student’s level of comfort with the target language in whether active participation occurs. Another important consideration is for educators to acknowledge students' silent period, and lowering their affective filter can enhance their comprehensible input and output in the target language.

Code-switching is a linguistic challenge for educators who are unaware of the benefits of incorporating the student’s home language with English. Educators may misinterpret code-switching, moving between English and the native language, as a lack of understanding in English. However, code-switching is purposefully incited and is a common occurrence for ELLs (Lenski et al., 2006). There are various positive results of code-switching, including “to stress a point in communication, to express a concept for which there is no equivalent in the other language, to indicate friendship, to relate a

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conversation, or to substitute a word in another language” (Lenski et al., 2006, p. 31). In order for students to code-switch, they need to be aware of the syntax and grammar of sentences to insert phrases or words in the other language. Therefore, code-switching involves a thought process and great understanding of the complexities of grammar and syntax. In order for educators to create quality assessments for ELLs, they must be aware of the linguistic challenges that anxiety, access to L1, and cultural recognition assessment present, and the data that they will receive from assessing the students. Similarly, educators need to question the validity of assessment data that is not linguistically nor culturally reliable. As these assessments may not represent what ELLs know but their inability to express it a language they do not know or dominate.

### **Sociocultural Challenges**

Educators also must acknowledge sociocultural challenges that English Language Learners face upon entering the American school system. Educators have grouped ELLs into one category, which signifies that ELLs are a homogeneous group. However, ELLs are a diverse population that differ in culture, language, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. Lenski et al. (2006) argue, “Teachers should never assume that students who share the same language will observe the same cultural practices or understand the same types of texts” (p. 25). Harper and de Jong (2009) support the idea of heterogeneity, as they suggest, “In spite of the fact that ELLs vary tremendously in age, country of birth as well as in linguistic, cultural, economic and educational background, many inclusion efforts have resulted in a one-size-fits-all approach to instruction” (p. 138). A one-size-fits-all approach aims to be inclusive, but neglects the diverse characteristics and funds of

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knowledge that ELLs bring to their education. The educational needs of ELLs are overlooked in an effort to maintain a homogeneity within the mainstream classroom.

Therefore, many issues arise when assessments or evaluations are given to ELLs, because these evaluations are attempting to assess students in a homogeneous manner.

Furthermore, failing culturally homogeneous assessment has a large impact on graduation rates and socio-economic outcomes. For example, Khong and Saito (2014) state, “In order to receive a standard high school diploma, which is critical for college admission, students in Florida must pass high-stake tests” (p. 216). Culturally homogeneous assessment can be detrimental in ELLs’ graduation rates, which will also negatively affect their socio-economic outcomes.

### **Complexity of Assessment and Evaluation:**

In recent decades, the federal government has created several policies that have involved improving the education of English Language Learners. For instance, the goal of Titles I and III of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is to “eliminate the achievement gap for minority learners and ensure educational success for all students” (Harper & de Jong, 2009, p. 140). However, this policy neglects the needs of ELLs in assessment and evaluation procedures. NCLB mandates that educators provide standardized assessments to all students, including ELLs. However, NCLB does not require that teachers be “trained to work with adolescent ELLs” (Khong & Saito, 2014, p. 213). These standardized tests, although useful in determining a norm, emphasize English reading skills that many ELLs do not yet possess. A detrimental outcome from including ELLs in standardized tests is “higher dropout rates and a narrowing of the curriculum as teachers

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focus on preparing students for the test” (Harper & de Jong, 2009, p. 140). This legislation was created with good intentions, but does not acknowledge the diversity or assessment challenges of standardized tests.

In addition, assessments can be controversial for educators in many ways. As students become older and enter the middle school level, they begin to take classes with teachers that are certified in one content area. Rubinstein-Avila and Lee (2014) suggest, “Secondary single-subject teachers receive limited preparation for teaching content to ELLs throughout their teacher-preparation programs, and as a result are likely not to use the instructional strategies needed to teach this population effectively” (p. 86). ELLs that take assessments in content areas are not only being assessed on the content, but also in their ability to express themselves in English. Students may possess the background knowledge of the content area, but receive evaluations that relate to their English skills. Khong and Saito (2014) support this argument, as they declare, “Standardized achievement tests...tend to assess [ELLs] language proficiency rather than content area knowledge” (p. 215). Therefore, educators must create quality assessments that help them determine what students know and can do, so that they can create authentic learning activities to enhance ELLs’ English literacies.

### **Significance of the Problem**

In order for English Language Learners to receive culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, educators need to understand the sociocultural, linguistic, and evaluation challenges that occur for diverse students. Knowledge of students’ cultural practices, sequence of language acquisition, and quality assessments can help educators

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effectively link assessment to instruction. Non-English dominant students grouped together are viewed as homogeneous. Unfortunately, this misconception presents ELLs from receiving individualized instruction. Through research, educators can understand the positive effects of incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy in the curriculum, lessons, and assessment in particular. For instance, incorporating home languages with English to provide quality assessments and authentic learning experiences for ELLs. Furthermore, through quality assessments, educators can determine fair and alternative assessments that determine a student's literacy development and progress in English.

In Chapter 2, I will synthesize and evaluate literature to determine the linguistic, sociocultural, and assessment challenges that ELLs face, and how these challenges affect the achievement and assessment of ELLs. I will also discuss educators' perceptions of ELLs and their experience with culturally responsive pedagogy. In Chapter 3, I will provide a professional development on creating quality assessments for ELLs. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the implications of my research and recommendations for further exploration in quality assessments for ELLs.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Second Language Acquisition

**Conversational and academic English.** Recent literature and pedagogy suggests that English Language Learners face numerous challenges as they begin to learn English. Two challenges that ELLs face in acquiring a second language include obtaining conversational English and obtaining academic English. According to Krashen (1981), students that are immersed in a second language experience a silent period that may last for about a year. During this silent period, students may process input from peers and the teacher, but may be reluctant to orally respond. The affective filter can determine ELLs' ability in finding comfort in expressing themselves in English (Krashen, 1981). However, educators play a crucial role in lowering students' affective filters. One way to lower ELLs' affective filters is by building relationships with students through a safe and welcoming classroom environment. Moreover, educators may involve characteristics of students' cultures within writing assignments or book characters. Educators that negatively impact students' affective filters may promote anxiety in students. According to Winsler, Kim, and Richard (2014), "Anxiety, extroversion, and willingness to communicate in L2 have also been linked with L2 acquisition" (p. 2243). Students that have low anxiety, are more extroverted, and are risk-takers show more growth in their L2 than their peers.

Conversational English and academic English present difficulties for teachers of ELLs. The former, named Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), involves English that ELLs use when speaking with peers on non-academic topics. The latter,

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called Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), involves students' academic English and knowledge of vocabulary in English. According to Roy-Campbell (2013), "Teachers who do not have an awareness of second-language acquisition may assume that the students [who] do not understand English have a disability that prevents them from speaking" (p. 262). However, this is attributed to students' affective filters, silent period, and lack of CALP. ELLs do not yet possess the academic vocabulary and discourse to participate in discussions, but actively process the language that they hear. Furthermore, educators may hear their ELLs speaking with peers in English, and assume that within the classroom, they are "pretending not to understand or are being inattentive" (Roy-Campbell, 2013, p. 263). This is a common misconception, as students may possess conversational skills but not academic language in the content area. Roy-Campbell (2013) argues, "ELL students should be able to learn English in two years" (p. 263). Academic language, however, develops much later for English Language Learners. CALP may take at least seven years to develop, as students are learning English and content academic vocabulary simultaneously. While BICS may occur naturally, "Skills linked to academic reasoning...must be explicitly taught to ELL students" (Roy-Campbell, 2013, p. 263). Therefore, educators must be aware of the progression of second language acquisition to understand how ELLs are processing and developing English. Furthermore, educators must acknowledge the importance of explicit teaching in guiding ELLs to develop academic discourse in English and in the content area as well as in assessments.

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**L1 support in L2.** One aspect of language learning that presents difficulty to educators is the use of the students' first languages in supporting their learning of English. According to Khong and Saito (2014), "Many US schoolteachers are White, and they do not necessarily speak any language other than English" (p. 216). Due to this statistic, many educators are unaware of how students learn second languages. Furthermore, very few teachers could learn the first languages of all students, as there are more than 450 languages currently in United States schools (Roy-Campbell, 2013). Through culturally responsive pedagogy, educators can learn the general progression of learning a second language to aid their ELLs in receiving quality instruction and quality assessments of their academic growth.

One of the most crucial aspects of second language acquisition is the use of the home language in learning English. Students' literacy and understanding in their home languages can be important factors in developing literacy and understanding in English. ELLs can pull vocabulary from their first language to promote faster learning in English. Winsler et al. (2014) support this progression of second language acquisition, as "speed of L2 acquisition is related to learners' skill in L1 since the two languages share and build upon a common base of language skills that transfer" (p. 2243). Therefore, educators should invite ELLs to include their home languages whenever possible, such as when pre-teaching vocabulary. Furthermore, ELLs that have received former schooling in their native language may have specific writing styles that conflict or relate to the second language. According to Lin (2015), "ELL writer's primary language and culture may influence the second language student's rhetorical styles, organization, and expression of



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ideas” (p. 238). This information on second language progression teaches educators that writing should be instructed in a deliberate and explicit manner, as some students may need to purposely unlearn writing styles in their native languages.

**Differentiated instructional models.** Two instructional models that educators of diverse learners incorporate into their teaching are the Sheltered Observation Protocol (SIOP) and the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) (Roy-Campbell, 2013). The SIOP research-based instructional model is more commonly used throughout ELL education today. It allows for educators to focus on “helping general education teachers make content comprehensible to ELL students through strategies developed for teaching English to speakers of other languages” (Roy-Campbell, 2013, p. 272). The SIOP model gives special attention to “discourse, textual, task, and environmental adaptations” that make content accessible for ELLs (Baecher, Knoll, & Patti, 2016, p. 203). In order for educators to utilize the SIOP model effectively, they must plan, instruct, and evaluate their lessons to ensure the use of explicit English teaching. This explicit teaching involves the use of language objectives along with content objectives that focus on structure as well as vocabulary. Baecher et al. (2016) have organized adaptations to the SIOP model in six categories, which include discourse adaptations, participation structures, print modifications, attention to vocabulary, culturally responsive practices, and English language development. The use of SIOP as a research-based instructional model allows educators to create quality, scaffolded lessons for ELLs that make learning accessible.

### **Breaking Down Language**

**A heterogeneous population.** Educators in the United States encounter barriers when teaching students that speak different languages. The discrepancy between “the ethnically homogeneous American teaching force and the highly diverse American public school population” are at the forefront for linguistic challenges (Reece & Nodine, 2014, p. 260). Many school teachers in America are White and monolingual, but the population of students is vastly diverse in culture, language, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Culturally responsive pedagogy encourages teachers to build bridges between students’ languages and English. However, this is not a task that can be completed quickly, as incorporating language within teaching requires sustained effort.

**The deficit perspective.** One of the challenges that ELLs encounter when entering the American school system is frustration in expressing themselves in a language that will be understood and appreciated. Many students feel frustration in not being able to express their thinking or knowledge with peers and teachers (Russell, 2016). This frustration or absence of speaking may be “incorrectly perceived as being deficient in some way due to language barriers” (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011, p. 263). However, this language barrier may be the result of students’ lack of BICS or CALP. When possible, students should have the opportunity to express themselves in their native languages with peers that have greater English literacy skills so that educators can determine their background knowledge. Furthermore, educators should provide comprehensible input for students, because “if ELL students do not understand their teachers’ explanations, they cannot be expected to learn what is being taught” (Roy-Campbell, 2013, p. 263). Students

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may express anxiety because they do not yet possess a range of academic and social vocabulary or background knowledge compared to their English-speaking peers. The anxiety may persist if students are not passing or scoring well in their assessments. This anxiety could cause ELLs to drop out of school (Khong & Saito, 2014).

**Scaffolds to learning.** English Language Learners that arrive to the United States in middle school begin to take classes that focus on content rather than on teaching English literacy skills. This presents an issue, as “student proficiency standards are now organized around language demands in the content areas...rather than the previous emphasis on communicative, social language needs” (Harper & de Jong, 2009, p. 141). ELLs now are attempting to learn English simultaneously with learning content material. One of the issues students are encountering is reading texts or taking assessments in content areas. Educators must acknowledge that “a text that is not comprehensible will only measure the vocabulary that a student does not know” (Lenski et, al, 2006, p. 31).

Assessments and texts should be chosen carefully to measure what students know in the intended area, and not what they do not know. In order for educators to scaffold instruction for ELLs, there are numerous strategies that should be employed. These strategies can include activating students’ background knowledge, addressing their affective needs, using visuals, cooperative grouping, and wait time (Harper & de Jong, 2009). Addressing ELLs’ affective needs can lower students’ affective filters, increasing comprehensible input and promoting output. ELLs that have yet to obtain BICS and CALP benefit from visual information that can relate to their background knowledge. Furthermore, cooperative grouping allows for students to obtain skills through peer

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interactions, which may lower affective filters and promote a sense of belonging within the classroom.

The language of teachers can also present many difficulties for English Language Learners. Educators that use complex vocabulary or sentence structure may put ELLs at a disadvantage. One of these disadvantages includes using colloquialisms or idioms throughout speech. While mainstream, English-speaking students may understand these expressions, these expressions are unfamiliar to ELLs. Educators must consciously realize the expressions that they use, and may have to reword them throughout teaching (Roy-Campbell 2013). Helfrich and Bosh (2011) argue, “ELLs learn English primarily by listening to language in use around them, and using context to determine the meaning of the spoken words” (p. 264). Therefore, teachers must scaffold their oral production to allow for ELLs to make meaning of words. One way that educators can scaffold their speaking is through speaking slowly, as ELLs may need more time to process information (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). Roy-Campbell (2013) supports this claim, as “teachers may speak too rapidly for ELL students to understand when they are giving directions or explaining essential concepts related to lessons” (p. 263). Furthermore, educators can engage ELLs without taking away time from other students in the mainstream classroom. This can be accomplished through “explicit instruction, adapted patterns of speech, modeling, and real reading to convey meaning and increase ELLs’ comprehension” (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011, p. 263). In this manner, ELLs are supported and all students’ literacy needs are met. Baecher et al. (2016) and Khong & Saito (2014) support these instructional scaffolding practices, as well as suggest repetition to check for

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comprehension throughout instruction, process writing, inquiry activities, and feedback from teachers.

**Limitations of ‘good teaching practices’.** A common misconception of mainstream classroom teachers is that they can use ‘good teaching practices’ to scaffold instruction for English Language Learners. These good teaching practices, such as being culturally sensitive, may be effective for some ELL students, but every student learns differently. Educating culturally and linguistically diverse students requires more than celebrating and appreciating their differences (Webster & Valeo, 2011). In this manner, good teaching practices that mainstream teachers use “should not be expected to produce the same results” in ELLs (Khong & Saito, 2014, p. 219). According to Webster and Valeo (2011), using a focus of celebrating differences as key in educating ELLs will produce low levels of ELL competence. Therefore, educators must involve culturally responsive pedagogy within their teaching to scaffold learning through authentic experiences.

Culturally responsive pedagogy includes students’ motivation in learning a second language. Some students fear that learning a second language will decrease their knowledge of their first language. This is extremely important for educators to understand, as they can lower students’ affective filters by encouraging them to use their first languages. One of the ways that educators can encourage students’ use of the home language is through code-switching. When students lack words or phrases in English, they can supplement them with words in their home language. Lenski et al. (2006) warn, “Teachers should bear in mind that when code-switching compensates for lack of

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knowledge...ELLs should be helped to acquire the linguistic knowledge they lack...in a friendly manner to ensure that students do not feel they are being punished for using their native languages” (p. 31). In this manner, students will not fear the loss of their home language, but will embrace the knowledge they have to transfer their skills to English. Moreover, these experiences allow for educators to note which aspects of grammar students have yet to acquire (Webster & Valeo, 2011). In order for ELLs to receive meaningful and quality education in English, educators should provide frequent and specific feedback. Webster and Valeo (2011) argue, “Exposure without interaction, feedback, and opportunities to respond is simply not sufficient for learning a language” (p. 121). Educators must address students’ learning concerns and explicitly teach them so that they are able to correct their errors.

In order for educators to produce quality lessons and assessments, linguistic challenges must be addressed. This includes “an understanding of the processes of second language acquisition, the recognition of the role of language in completing academic tasks, and scaffolding instruction to provide access to content-area learning” (Baecher et al., 2016, p. 203). Educators must go beyond ‘good teaching practices’, such as simply providing graphic organizers that do not benefit students’ improvement of skills, and make concepts more accessible for ELLs. Educators need to set language objectives, select language functions, and provide feedback to guide students’ learning (Harper & de Jong, 2009). All teachers are teachers of English Language Learners, and they must seek opportunities to improve and increase their language development and skills.

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### **One-Size-Fits-All Does not Fit ELLs**

English Language Learners are students that come from a variety of cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all instructional plan does not cater to the needs of this diverse student population. When educating ELLs, Lenski et al. (2006) argue, “Teachers should never assume that students who share the same language will observe the same cultural practices or understand the same types of texts” (p. 25). ELLs have specific learning needs and come from different background levels of education. In this manner, English Language Learners are part of a heterogeneous grouping of students with diverse backgrounds. However, Lenski et al. (2006) claim, “The use of acronyms such as ‘ELLs,’ which, on the surface, seem to point at group homogeneity rather than heterogeneity” (p. 26). This grouping causes educators who are unaware of culturally responsive pedagogy to believe that good teaching practices will suffice instead of practices specifically for English Language Learners.

**Funds of knowledge.** ELLs and diverse student populations experience sociocultural and socioeconomic challenges upon entering the American school system. Students have funds of knowledge which incorporate their family traditions, culture, and daily practices (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Educators that neglect to incorporate students’ funds of knowledge within their teaching neglect to address language and culture specific knowledge and skills. One of the ways that educators can include students’ funds of knowledge within their teaching is to “invite families and community members to participate in literacy projects” (Harper & de Jong, 2009, p. 31). Parents are resources that can aid in helping teachers with assessments as well as with providing

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tutoring and teaching to their children at home. In addition, adjusting to America adds a tremendous obstacle to ELLs while they are attending a new school. According to Lin (2015), there are multiple dimensions of writing, with the sociocultural dimension at the forefront. Lin (2015) declares, “The psychological/emotional dimension of writing difficulties consisted of anxiety, and adjusting to American thought patterns represented the sociocultural dimension of writing difficulties” (p. 244). Educators that lower students’ anxieties while boosting their confidence help to undo the burden of sociocultural challenges. This involves understanding students’ affective needs in order to provide ELLs with an encouraging, comfortable, and supportive environment.

**Acknowledgement of individual bias.** An integral aspect of recognizing sociocultural challenges is that educators must acknowledge their own cultural biases towards diverse student populations. According to Khong and Saito (2014), “Teachers need to reflect on their own ethnocentricity or negative biases regarding ELLs” (p. 221). Reflection helps teachers grow and revise their teaching to help ELLs feel accepted and welcome in their classroom. Merely acknowledging students’ cultures without incorporating them into their learning is not a culturally responsive practice. Students from diverse backgrounds experience many barriers that educators may not understand or know. For instance, historical events, geography, and oppression may constantly be on the minds’ of ELLs. Culture does not only involve students’ food or ethnic dress. Therefore, “Teachers should take every opportunity to build connections between what is already familiar to students” (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011, p. 263). Although educators may be taught to celebrate and appreciate differences, their own biases may lead to “assumptions



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and blinders with respect to the assets that ELLs bring” (Webster & Valeo, 2011, p. 106). In order to dismantle these misconceptions, educators need to reflect on their teaching consistently. Webster and Valeo (2011) also argue that simply recognizing ELLs’ multiculturalism can lead to a misuse of accommodations. In order for educators to be prepared to teach students from diverse backgrounds, “More work with issues related to whiteness and hesitancy in exploring one’s position of privilege” is necessary (Reece & Nodine, 2014, p. 264). Sociocultural and socioemotional skills have immense positive effects on learning a second language, and they are important for teachers to recognize.

Understanding that a one-size-fits-all approach does not benefit ELLs can improve students’ English attainment. According to Winsler et al. (2014), sociocultural and socioemotional skills “promote competent interactions with classmates, teachers, and other adults, potentially contributing positively to the attainment of English language proficiency” (p. 2244). These interactions are crucial, as the role between language and culture are intertwined. The cultures that students come from can impact how they receive instruction in English. Therefore, educators need to draw upon students’ funds of knowledge and prior literacy abilities (Roy-Campbell, 2013). When educators utilize students’ funds of knowledge and culture within their classroom, they can produce high levels of ELL competence. Creating quality assessments for English Language Learners requires that educators examine the implications and goals of assessments in producing high levels of competency.

## CREATING QUALITY ASSESSMENTS

### **Creating Quality Assessments**

In order to provide quality assessments and evaluations for English Language Learners, it is crucial to analyze and synthesize current forms of assessments and their impacts on students. Rubinstein-Avila and Lee (2014) argue, “The absence of appropriate assessments and curricula tailored for this population account for ELLs’ continue low academic achievement rates” (p. 187). According to much research, these low achievement rates stem from educators’ hesitancy to use assessment and progress-monitoring tools with ELLs (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). State assessments cause many of these feelings in educators. State assessments are mandatory for all students, including English Language Learners. However, there are many negative consequences of subjecting ELLs to these assessments. The rubrics that scorers use on the written assessments require a high-level of diction and language proficiency, which “automatically...puts English learner kids at a huge disadvantage” (Russell, 2016, p. 27). Lin (2015) supports this argument, in that “second language writers’ writing samples may be misunderstood, undervalued, or poorly evaluated by writing teachers who are unfamiliar with ELL students’ different styles of rhetorical expression” (p. 238). The results from these tests provide results of students’ writing abilities in English, and not their understanding of content.

**Limitations of legislation.** One specific legislation that has caused numerous issues for educators that teach ELLs is No Child Left Behind. The aspiration of NCLB is “to eliminate the achievement gap for minority leaders and ensure educational success for all students” (Harper & de Jong, 2009, p. 140). However, this intended goal lacks several

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aspects crucial to providing accommodations for ELLs. To begin, NCLB mandates that all students take standardized tests that rely heavily on students' English literacies. As ELLs do not obtain CALP skills for about seven years, they are put at a disadvantage. The standardized tests, used to measure students skills in several ways, only measure what the students do not know in English. Other consequences of this legislation for ELLs are "higher dropout rates and a narrowing of the curriculum" (Harper & de Jong, 2009, p. 140). Legislators have attempted to make accommodations for ELLs, such as bilingual dictionaries and additional time, but have neglected to address the linguistic challenges of the test itself. Therefore, the assessments are not of quality, as educators cannot accurately assess students' actual knowledge or what they have learned. Other unintended issues that have resulted from NCLB are that teachers are not required to be trained to work with adolescent ELLs and guidelines are not concrete (Khong & Saito, 2014). In order for educators to incorporate quality assessments, they must be trained on culturally responsive pedagogy and guidelines for assessments.

**Assessment validity and reliability.** Two key characteristics of assessments are validity and reliability. When educators select assessments for their students, they must consider if they are reliable or valid measures. Validity can be defined as "accumulating evidence to provide a scientifically sound argument to justify the intended interpretation of test scores" (Wolf, Farnsworth, & Herman, 2008, p. 83). When creating and administering an assessment, educators must consider its purpose, the construct measured, and interpretations that will be drawn. For instance, Helfrich and Bosh (2011) warn of assessments that may be "linguistically or culturally biased" (p. 266).

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Assessments that are invalid can negatively affect the results, and inaccurately describe ELLs' knowledge. Moreover, frequent and explicit assessments can increase validity because "the extent to which scores on one test are related to scores on other measures of the same or similar constructs" can provide evidence (Wolf et al., 2008, p. 84). Furthermore, educators can increase an assessment's validity by looking within its structure. Identifying an assessment's internal structure will be the basis for the professional development in chapter 3.

The reliability and fairness of an assessment are critical to its quality. Wolf et al. (2008) define reliability as "the extent to which a test consistently measures what it is supposed to measure" (p. 87). Reliability is crucial for ELLs because of the heterogeneous characteristics of the population. Due to the vastly diverse students, test items may measure levels that relate to one group of ELLs over another. Fairness relates to a lack of bias and equal opportunity to learn (Wolf et al., 2008). Fairness is extremely crucial to consider when administering accommodations to ELLs, as linguistic demands may hinder their ability to express content knowledge. Distinguishing an ELL's content knowledge from academic English ability is a critical aspect of creating a quality assessment.

**Bridging the assessment gap.** There are many opportunities for educators to bridge the assessment gap for English Language Learners that will be discussed through the professional development. Some of these opportunities include using oral questioning, discussion, and adapted assessments. Furthermore, educators can paraphrase, repeat words, use hand gestures or visuals, and provide directions in multiple

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ways (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). One way that educators can aid ELLs in oral discussion and lower the affective filters for ELLs is to give them the opportunity to practice and prepare statements before being asked to share verbally (Russell, 2016). Much research argues that educators should encourage students to work in partners or with students in higher English progression levels as a form of assessment. Helfrich and Bosh (2011) argue, “What students learn from their peers is as much, if not more, than what they learn from their teachers” (p. 265). The role of peer-focused activities is for inclusion and education of ELLs as well as holding students accountable for their own learning.

One crucial way that educators can provide multiple opportunities to show understanding is through the verbalization of answers. Through research, Middle School ELLs find many difficulties with writing. Although students may be able to verbalize their answers or discuss them in their home language first, writing in English is much more of a challenge for them. Helfrich and Bosh (2011) support this observation, as “a written answer may place undue attention on the student’s writing skills and not accurately reflect what has been learned” (p. 267). Furthermore, students that are learning content are simultaneously learning English. Therefore, educators must be aware of what the assessments are intended to measure as well as the possible obstacles that hinder their expression of content knowledge. One example of verbalization instead of written assessments includes one-on-one conversations with educators, so students receive individualized attention. This alternative assessment may also lower students’ affective filters, as the one-on-one discussion “does not present competition from classmates that may be more proficient speakers of English” (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011, p. 267). Students

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may feel more confident and comfortable in their English expression when extraneous factors are reduced.

Assessments are tools only if educators use them to drive instruction. Frequent and focused assessments provide a more accurate viewpoint of a students' individual needs as well as describe the knowledge and skills that students already possess. It is crucial that educators administer needs assessments to “integrate their immediate needs with institutional values, disciplinary goals, and professional expectation” (Lin, 2015, p. 237). Lenski et al. (2006) provide multiple ways for educators to create quality assessments, such as “assessment strategies should help teachers find out what students know and can do...not what they cannot do,” (p. 25). In addition, Lenski et al. argue that “assessment activities should grow out of authentic learning activities” (p. 25). Furthermore, in order for assessment to drive instruction, multiple forms of evaluation should be administered, such as informal records, checklists, and portfolios. Authentic learning activities provide educators with the perspective of the whole-child, and not one standardized test that neglects to demonstrate students' knowledge.

Throughout this next chapter, I will provide ways for educators to create and improve quality assessments for ELLs while recognizing the challenges that language and culture may present for ELLs. I will provide an agenda that educators can use to implement culturally responsive pedagogy in creating quality assessments.

### Chapter 3: Professional Development

#### Creating Quality Assessments for ELLs

This professional development will guide educators in providing quality assessments for English Language Learners in elementary and middle school mainstream classrooms. Educators will examine items to determine if they are high-quality assessment items that involve culturally responsive pedagogy. Educators will learn ways to implement and create quality assessments for ELLs that take into account students' linguistic, sociocultural, socioeconomic, and assessment challenges. The assessments that educators will create will include unbiased language, high-quality multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true-false and essay questions, and accommodations and modifications in assessment administration.

**Rationale.** According to Rubinstein-Avila and Lee (2014), "The absence of appropriate assessments and curricula tailored for this population account for ELLs' continued low academic achievement rates" (p. 187). Assessments that are not of high-quality perpetuate anxiety in ELLs. Students that experience anxiety from assessments or academic pressures may feel disconnected in their classrooms, and raise their affective filters (Roy-Campbell, 2013). Anxiety can persist if students do not pass or score well on their assessments. This contributes to low graduation rates and socioeconomic outcomes (Khong & Saito, 2014). Furthermore, this anxiety can contribute to students' affective filters. According to the point I am making, not promoting acts of welcoming and appreciation in the classroom can contribute to students' silent periods. In order to reduce ELLs' dropout rate, assessments need to be of quality, so educators can accurately assess

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students' actual knowledge. Educators will be trained through this professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy and guidelines for assessments.

Educators will be able to examine assessments to determine the trustworthiness and usefulness of elementary and middle school assessments. They will do this by reviewing current assessments to see if they include Frey's (2014) criteria for key characteristics of quality assessments. They will determine if assessments have linguistic or cultural biases and measure what they are intended to measure. Written response questions will be analyzed to reflect biases or linguistic challenges for ELLs. According to Helfrich and Bosh (2011), "A written answer may place undue attention on the student's writing skills and not accurately reflect what has been learned" (p. 267). Furthermore, Russell (2016) argues that a high-level of diction and language proficiency "automatically...puts English learner kids at a huge disadvantage" ( p. 27). Therefore, clear and concise writing prompts without complex vocabulary, sentence structure, or colloquialisms will provide high-quality assessments for ELLs.

Moreover, educators will be able to identify accommodations and modifications to assessments, which will enhance the usefulness and trustworthiness of data collection. The use of accommodations and modifications, such as portfolios, oral questioning, bilingual dictionaries, and graphic organizers, help to bridge the assessment gap that ELLs face. Lenski et al. (2006) support this argument, as "assessment strategies should help teachers find out what students know and can do...not what they cannot do" (p. 25). Authentic activities provide ways for students to gain knowledge through real-world contexts, as well as foster meaningful learning opportunities.



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### **Agenda**

The professional development will occur in one day. The professional development will be an hour and a half in duration. The educators in this professional development will include staff from elementary and middle schools. The staff includes mainstream classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, ENL teachers, content teachers, and language teachers. Educators who attend this professional development will be asked in advance to bring a current assessment, either teacher-made or supplied from curriculum. The assessments can include tests, performance-based assessments, quizzes, or other collections of data that teachers have gathered. Educators will be given time during the professional development to analyze the assessments to identify if they contain Frey's (2014) key criteria for high quality assessments.

I will begin the professional development by explaining the agenda. After explaining the agenda, I will incorporate a strength opener to promote a welcoming and positive learning environment. The strength opener will ask educators to provide a positive experience or interaction with an ELL student. This will encourage educators to view ELLs as students with strengths instead of students with deficits. This activity will be a think-pair-share, in which educators first think of the positive experience, then share with a partner, and then share with the whole class. Then, I will introduce the learning target goals. The goals for this professional development include describing key characteristics of quality assessments, creating and revising quality assessments, and positively collaborating with peers. These goals will shape educators' learning and

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provide a focus. The strength opener and learning targets will take approximately 10 minutes.

After analyzing the learning targets, I will pose a question for educators, which will provide me with a check for understanding on their prior knowledge of quality assessments. This check for understanding will take place as a Word Splash. Educators will choose whiteboard markers and write phrases or words that are related to the key characteristics of quality assessments on the whiteboard. The Word Splash will take approximately 10 minutes. We will discuss the answers as a whole group. I will then pass out a note catcher (see Appendix A, Figure 6) for educators to write down important information throughout the professional development.

Next, I will present information regarding the key characteristics of quality assessments through a handout (see Appendix A, Figures 1 and 2). This information is related to multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and true-false items. Next, I will explain how to determine quality assessments through examples of multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and true-false items (see Appendix A, Figures 1 and 2). I will read each example for educators, and have them work in table groups to determine which example is of high quality. Then, I will ask educators to explain their thinking. I will reveal the item that is of high quality and explain its characteristics. I will have educators pause for a brief moment to discuss how to improve their assessments to make them of high quality as well as to answer any questions they may have. I will repeat this procedure for the key characteristics and examples of quality assessments for constructed-response and essay

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items, as well as language (see Appendix A, Figures 3 and 4). This will take approximately 30 minutes.

After educators have discussed the key characteristics of different items that could occur on assessments, I will ask them to reflect back on the Word Splash that they created in the beginning of the professional development. I will encourage them to choose whiteboard markers and add more words or phrases that describe the key characteristics of high quality assessments for ELLs. We will discuss the additions to the Word Splash as a whole group. This will take approximately 10 minutes.

Educators will have the opportunity to learn various accommodations and modifications to assessments for ELLs (see Appendix A, Figure 5). I will go in-depth to explain these to educators, as well as the benefits for ELLs in using these accommodations and modifications. This will take approximately 15 minutes.

The final 10 minutes before the closing of the professional development educators will have the opportunity to either create a quality question, or to revise a current assessment to make it high-quality for ELLs. Then I will pass out the professional development handout, as educators can use the key characteristics to improve their assessments (see Appendix A, p. 42). Educators will use the teacher-made or curriculum assessments that they brought with them to assist with this portion of the professional development. I will assist educators as they work in small groups. During the last 5 minutes of the professional development, educators will then complete an exit ticket (see Appendix A, Figure 7) to demonstrate their learning and understanding with regards to the learning targets. Information on the exit ticket includes defining ways to improve

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assessments to make them high quality, as well as accommodations and modifications educators can use to increase the usefulness of data collected.

## Chapter 4: Implications for Teaching

### Discussion

Throughout this capstone project I have identified research which supports the use of quality assessments in evaluating English Language Learners. Quality assessments allow educators to involve students' linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds to enhance their learning and growth. Gay (2002) supports this argument, as culturally responsive curriculum meets students' individual social, emotional, and English language needs. The literature review identified four areas of thought involved in executing culturally responsive curriculum, which include second language acquisition, breaking down language, a one-size fits-all approach that does not fit ELLs, and creating quality assessments. Through knowledge learned from the literature review as well as the professional development, educators can create and revise quality assessments for ELLs.

It is crucial to note the manner in which ELLs acquire a second language. Conversational English is acquired at a faster rate than academic English. During the beginning months of second language acquisition, ELLs may experience a silent period, in which students may be reluctant to respond (Krashen, 1981). Students may also raise their affective filters, which could inhibit their English expression. It is important that educators strive to lower these affective filters through a welcoming and supporting learning environment. As ELLs acquire a second language, they require support from their first language. Students' literacy, vocabulary knowledge, grammar, and understanding in their native languages can positively impact their development of English literacy. Knowledge and understanding of second language acquisition is

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necessary in order to provide quality assessments for ELLs within a culturally responsive curriculum.

When educators assess ELLs, they must be aware of the language that they are using within their assessments. Many ELLs face linguistic barriers, which hinder their performance on assessments. Culturally responsive pedagogy aims to remove gaps in students' languages and English, which will support efforts in removing the deficit perspective. Students should have the opportunity to express themselves in both their native language and English. Students may not have the cultural backgrounds that other students in the class possess. Therefore, background information must be addressed with supporting scaffolds to remove linguistic barriers. Quality assessments with removed linguistic barriers assess students on what they do know, not what they do not know in English.

Educators who create and revise quality assessments throughout their curriculum recognize that assessments should not be a one-size-fits-all approach. Due to the diversity of students' backgrounds, cultural, socioeconomic statuses, ethnicities, and languages, general assessments cannot be made. These types of assessments will not meet the needs of a diverse population, but only negate the results of student achievement. Educators must draw upon students' funds of knowledge to aid in providing quality assessments (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Utilizing students' cultures, backgrounds, families, and languages can increase ELLs' competency as well as provide valid and reliable assessment results.

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Analyzing current forms of assessments for ELLs is a way to acknowledge biases in the curriculum and format. Requiring ELLs to complete assessments that would not accurately reflect their understanding of content materials are not of high quality. Including broken down language, a bilingual dictionary, and specific guidelines can increase quality on assessments. It is crucial to provide frequent and multiple forms of assessments to provide educators with ELLs' knowledge, instead of using one assessment. Quality assessments should provide ELLs with the tools that they need to show their understanding of content.

### **Implications for ELL Teachers**

Every teacher is a teacher of English Language Learners, regardless of the content taught. Educators must acknowledge the linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers that ELLs face when entering their classroom, as well as when taking an assessment. They need to understand that ELLs may not speak for the first year of learning English, as they are in a silent period (Krashen, 1981). They must also be aware that students acquire conversational English years before mastering academic language in English. Therefore, just because students are speaking to their peers in English does not mean that they understand content vocabulary and reading material. Furthermore, educators need to create a safe and welcoming learning environment to lower ELLs' affective filters. This can be accomplished through building relationships, encouraging students to use their home languages, and involving their cultures within the curriculum.

It is vital that educators of ELLs recognize the positivity of having diverse students within their classroom. In order to celebrate diversity, educators must recognize

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their own biases towards other cultures as well as the frustration ELLs may face when trying to express their knowledge and understanding in English. ELLs' frustration can lead to anxiety, which has shown to cause ELLs to drop out of school (Khong & Saito, 2014). By acknowledging these frustrations and biases, educators can strive to support students with scaffolds and incorporating aspects of their culture and language within the curriculum. The scaffolds that educators can implement within their classrooms include activating students' background knowledge, addressing their affective needs, using visuals and manipulatives, cooperative learning, and wait time (Harper & de Jong, 2009). Furthermore, educators must be cognizant of the language and high vocabulary used within lessons, as colloquialisms or idioms can confuse ELLs. Teachers should provide broken-down language, visual vocabulary, or bilingual dictionaries for students. Educators must seek opportunities to enhance ELLs' language development and skills while decreasing limitations and barriers to learning.

This research also provides implications for creating diverse classrooms that cater to the needs of all students. ELLs have specific learning needs that cannot be served in a one-size-fits-all approach. Educators must utilize ELLs' funds of knowledge to incorporate their traditions, languages, and practices within the curriculum (Gonzalez, Moli, & Amanti, 2005). Educators can achieve this by inviting families to share their cultures within the classroom, to participate in literacy projects, or to share knowledge about the ways in which their children learn best. Showing ELLs that educators care about them and their backgrounds can reduce their anxiety and increase their learning in English.



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Furthermore, teachers of ELLs must understand how to create and revise assessments for ELLs to make them of high quality. This involves increased time and effort to evaluate and synthesize assessment questions to determine if they will assess what students know, or what they do not know. Educators must identify linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers on assessments to assure that there are no disadvantages in ELLs expressing their knowledge. Written assessment questions should not assess ELLs' abilities in a high-level of diction and language proficiency, as this would automatically put them in a disadvantage. However, written questions should assess students' understanding of content. Educators can increase the validity of assessments by executing frequent and explicit assessments as well as considering the construct measured. Educators must separate content knowledge from academic English ability in order to obtain more valid results.

Moreover, the research from this capstone project has identified ways to bridge the assessment gap for ELLs. Educators can provide assessments in the form of oral questioning, visual drawings, discussions, and adaptations. Giving ELLs the opportunity to practice information and write it on notecards can lower their affective filters during oral assessments (Russell, 2016). Furthermore, ELLs may not be able to write in English, but can describe their understanding orally. Therefore, educators can provide a quality assessment through the verbalization of answers. Peer-focused discussions and activities promote inclusion and development of English-speaking vocabulary skills. Authentic learning activities can also promote valid assessment results. Educators must determine

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ways to create and revise quality assessments using these tools to provide ELLs with a supportive learning environment in which their native and second language can flourish.

### **Implications for Non-ELL Teachers**

Educators who do not have English Language Learners in their classroom will still have students from diverse backgrounds. These backgrounds may include various socioeconomic statuses, ethnicities, and cultures. The research through this capstone project explains that a one-size-fits-all approach to learning does not cater to students' needs, and good teaching practices do not work for all students. Educators must consider all students' background knowledge and barriers when creating and revising assessments to make sure that the construct measured does not limit students.

Educators must understand that all students are students from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, they should never assume that "students who share the same language will observe the same cultural practices or understand the same types of texts" (Lenski et al., 2006, p. 25). ELLs are not the only students who have funds of knowledge. All students have family traditions, cultures, and practices that can enhance students' learning and understanding. An implication for teachers of non-ELLs is to involve parents and family members within the curriculum, because parents are incredible sources of knowledge and support. Involving families shows that educators care about their students and their backgrounds, which can positively impact students within the classroom.

Educators must be aware that good teaching practices may not reach all students. For example, providing graphic organizers for a whole group of students may be

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beneficial to some, but can hold some students back. Educators must frequently assess their students to determine their literacy skills and preferences to cater to their individual needs. Although good teaching practices can support students, educators should identify specific practices to increase students' literacy and comprehension skills within their content areas.

Some suggestions for ELLs can function within a classroom that does not have ELLs. For example, students have many learning style preferences, such as multiple intelligences. Students may learn best through manipulatives, interpersonal activities, or through visuals. Therefore, educators should provide opportunities, such as discussions or cooperative learning, to support students who are interpersonal learners. Moreover, educators should provide visuals for students who may not have prior background knowledge and topics, and would therefore be disadvantaged without them. Just because a student does not speak more than one language does not mean that they do not require support. All students are diverse, and educators must determine ways to access their knowledge through various and frequent assessments.

### **Implications for Student Learning**

English Language Learners can express their development of English literacy skills through valid, reliable, frequent, high-quality assessments. However, educators need to provide opportunities to bridge the gaps between ELLs' linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic, and assessment barriers to help them succeed. Student learning can be evident through oral discussions, visual representations, written expression, non-verbal cues, and anecdotal records. Student learning can also be documented as students

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progress through the second acquisition stages, such as development conversational and academic English. Quality assessments must document students learning in valid and reliable ways. Therefore, educators must create quality assessments that determine what students know and can do, and not on the English skills they lack.

### **Further Research**

The research for this capstone project focuses on the linguistic, cultural, sociocultural, and assessment issues that elementary and middle school English Language Learners face. More research is required for ELLs in high school and adult settings to identify and examine more barriers in expressing knowledge and understanding of English on assessments. One direction for this further research is comparing and contrasting the challenges faced by elementary ELLs with adult ELLs in similar contexts of language acquisition stages. Through this research, educators can better provide scaffolds to learning English as well as limit the obstacles that ELLs face when learning a second language.

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**Appendix A: Professional Development Handout**

**Quality Assessments for ELLs**

**Learning Goals**

1. I can describe the characteristics of quality assessments.
2. I can create and revise quality assessments for ELLs.
3. I can positively collaborate with my peers.

**Key Characteristics of Quality Assessments for ELLs**

ELLs are students who come from various linguistic, socio-cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. They experience numerous barriers to demonstrating their knowledge and understanding, as the gap between their language and assessments can cause challenges. In this professional development, characteristics of quality assessments for ELLs are examined, and educators are encouraged to create and revise assessments to reduce barriers that students face.

**General Characteristics of Quality Assessments**

There are key characteristics for traditional pencil and paper tests, such as those that include multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blanks, and true-false items. Frey (2014) offers general rules to adhere to that ensure validity and data collection.

1. Test copies should be clear, readable, and not handwritten.
2. All items should be numbered.
3. Directions should be included.
4. Point values of items should be presented.
5. Questions using the same format should be together.
6. All parts of an item or exercise should appear on the same page.
7. Options are grammatically consistent with stem (gender, plural, vowel).
8. Vague frequency terms (e.g., often, usually) should not be used.
9. Specific determiners (e.g., always, never) should not be used.



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### Figure 1: Multiple-Choice Items

Frey (2014) suggests a set of criteria for educators to follow to ensure the validity of assessments as well as collect data. When examining assessments that include multiple-choice items, be sure to adhere to the following guidelines to create a quality assessment.

1. Answer options should be homogeneous.
2. All answer options should be plausible.
3. Answer options should not have repetitive wording.
4. Multiple-choice stems should be complete sentences.
5. Complex item formats (“a and b, but not c”) should not be used.
6. There should be three to five answer options.
7. “All of the Above” should not be an answer option.
8. “None of the Above” should not be an answer option.
9. Order of operations should be logical (e.g., quantity, length).
10. Negative wording should not be used.
11. Stems must be unambiguous and clearly state the problem.
12. Items should be independent of each other.
13. Answer options should not be longer than the stem.

**Example.** These are two multiple-choice items that could appear on an assessment for English Language Learners. The first box is not an example of an item on a quality assessment, because it violates one of Frey’s (2014) criteria, in that complex item formats are used. Therefore, this presents obstacles, which interfere with students’ expression and understanding. However, the second box is an example of an item on a quality assessment, as it follows Frey’s (2014) criteria.

Which shapes have at least four angles?  a) Circle b) Square c) Rhombus d) Both B and C, but not A e) Both A and B, but not C	What does “uncontested” mean as used in paragraph 2?  a) unchallenged b) unaware c) unknown d) unsuspected
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### Figure 2: Fill-in-the-Blank and True-False Items

Frey (2014) also offers criteria for creating quality assessments through fill-in-the-blank and true-false items. Fill-in-the-blank and true-false items allow educators to assess students' knowledge of basic facts. Educators must ensure that they adhere to the following guidelines.

1. In fill-in-the-blank items, one blank should be used, at the end.
2. True-false items should have simple structure.
3. True-false items should be entirely true or entirely false.
4. True-false statements should be of equal length.
5. There should be an equal number of true and false statements.

**Examples.** There are two examples of fill-in-the-blank items that could exist on assessments for ELLs. The items in the first box are not of high quality, because they violate Frey's (2014) criteria for quality assessments. First, the blank does not occur at the end of the sentence in the first prompt. Moreover, there are two blanks in the second prompt. There should be a single blank, used at the end. The second box demonstrates high quality fill-in-the-blank items, because Frey's (2014) criteria is followed. These items demonstrate true-false items that could appear on assessments.

<p>_____ is a process that happens when a baby animal transforms into an adult.</p> <p>The caterpillar _____ itself to a branch and its exoskeleton breaks to reveal the _____.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Word Bank:</p> <p>Attaches   Metamorphosis   Chrysalis</p>	<p>The name of the Pilgrims' first colony is _____.</p> <p>On November 11, 1620, the Pilgrims arrived in the land known as _____.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Word Bank:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">America   Plymouth</p>
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The first box contains a high quality true-false item, because it adheres to Frey's (2014) criteria. This item is entirely false and has a simple structure. However, the two examples under the second box are not of high quality, because they use a specific determiner (always), use complex sentence structure, and are not entirely true nor entirely false.

Jim Crow Laws allowed African Americans to attend the same school as White people.	William Shakespeare always used Proper English.  The Pilgrims arrived in America in 1620, and they made relationships with the Iroquois Indians.
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### **Figure 3: Constructed-Response and Essay Items**

Constructed-response items allow for students to create complex written answers or products to demonstrate their understanding, knowledge, skills, or abilities. These types of items often promote freedom in student expression, but provide guidelines for what is expected in their responses. Essays are the most common type of constructed-response items (Frey, 2014). They can be used to determine students' writing abilities while allowing for creative and unique responses. Frey (2014) offers criteria for ensuring quality assessments using constructed-response and essay items.

1. Provide advice about how much time to spend on each question by specifying “20 minutes” or “1 page”, or by leaving a certain amount of space for answering the question on the test form.
2. Do not allow students to select the questions they want to answer, as this may create a disadvantage for students who do not have the advanced metacognitive skill of knowing what they know well and what they don't know as well.
3. Prompt students to demonstrate understanding through writing, designing, or “doing”.
4. Provide students with guidance on what is expected in the response, such as a list of criteria to be included.

**Examples.** These examples include constructed-response and essay items that could appear on an assessment for ELLs. The first box contains an example of a constructed-response item of high quality, because it follows Frey's (2014) criteria. The prompt gives students the amount of time that should be spent on the item, along with a way for students to demonstrate their understanding in a Venn Diagram. Furthermore, it provides specific guidance on what is expected in the students' responses. The second box suggests that students use a number-line or drawings, which provides students with some guidance. However, there is no specific time given, and more criteria should be included to ensure high quality results.

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<p>Give yourself 15 minutes for this section of the test. Compare and contrast the following numbers: 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 17, 19. Place the numbers in the appropriate spots on the Venn Diagram.</p> <p>Be sure to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Title and Labels</li><li>- Numbers in the Venn Diagram</li><li>- One sentence to compare the numbers.</li><li>- One sentence to contrast the numbers.</li></ul>	<p>Compare and contrast the numbers 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 17, 19 using a number-line or drawings. Show your work.</p>
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The first box is not an example of a high quality essay item, because it does not follow the criteria completely. This essay item does include some criteria for students, but more direction is needed, such as the intended audience, a specific time, and leadership roles the students have engaged in before. The second box contains an example of a quality essay item, because it addresses Frey's (2014) criteria.

<p>You are running for class president. Write a speech explaining why you would be a good president, and how you would affect the school. Be sure to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Why you would make a good class president</li><li>- What changes you would make to the school</li></ul>	<p>Write at least 2 paragraphs (8 sentences) for this section of the test. You are running a lemonade stand to raise money for your class trip. Write a step-by-step process of running the stand. Be sure to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Transition words (First, Next)</li><li>- Which supplies you need</li><li>- How to make the lemonade</li><li>- How customers purchase the lemonade</li><li>- What you do with the money</li></ul>
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### Figure 4: Language

ELLs experience numerous linguistic and cultural barriers on assessments. Educators must be aware of the linguistic challenges that anxiety, access to their first language, and cultural recognition assessment present in order to ensure data collection. While ELLs may possess knowledge regarding content on an assessment, the assessment itself may inhibit them from expressing their knowledge. A one-size-fits-all approach for assessment will not be beneficial to ELLs, especially as this approach neglects students' diverse characteristics. Therefore, educators must create and revise assessments to make them of high quality in order to understand what students know and can do. Frey (2014) offers criteria for the language within quality assessments.

1. Language should be familiar to all students.
2. Provide situations and examples in which all students can relate to and imagine.
3. Language should not affect students' abilities to answer questions or show what they know and can do.
4. Language should include readable names and familiar and/or defined vocabulary.
5. Directions should be simplified and clear.
6. Avoid distractors in questions stems.

**Example.** This example includes two possible items that could exist on an assessment. The first box is not an example of a quality assessment, as it violates Frey's (2014) criteria for language. First, the names included in this prompt are not easily readable, which can distract from students understanding the question. Moreover, it uses situations and examples that would not be familiar to all students. For example, the use of the words 'trout' and 'bait' may be unfamiliar to students who have never gone fishing. The second box contains an example of a high quality item with regards to language. Language is simplified and familiar for students. Moreover, the language within this prompt would not affect students' abilities to answer questions.

Raegan and Kian were fishing at the lake. Raegan caught 14 trout with a net, and Kian caught 19 trout using bait. How many trout did Raegan and Kian catch all together? Who was more effective in catching trout? Show your work.	Two people went to the store. The girl bought 22 green apples. The boy bought 14 red apples. How many apples did the girl and boy buy together? Show your work.
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### **Figure 5: Accommodations and Modifications**

Traditional pencil and paper tests are not the only types of assessments that educators should provide for their students. ELLs are diverse learners with varying learning modes and styles. Therefore, more options should be used to assess students' knowledge, skills, and understanding. Some accommodations and modifications are included below.

1. Portfolios: Educators and students can document, evaluate, and showcase students' work. According to Frey (2014), there are key characteristics in high quality portfolios.
  - They are person-centered, qualitative, and holistic.
  - They accentuate the positive (though some portfolios include examples of student work that is less accomplished).
  - There is student choice over what to include.
  - They provide a rich variety of products.
  - They reflect student work over time.
  - There are opportunities for reflective self-assessment.
2. Oral Testing: Often, ELLs may not be able to express themselves by writing, but may have acquired English-speaking skills. Therefore, a written test would be ineffective in collecting data on students' knowledge and understanding. The use of an oral test would allow students to respond to answers aloud, rather than in writing.
3. Bilingual Dictionaries or Glossaries: These dictionaries or glossaries contain one-word translations into students' native languages. There are no definitions provided. This ensures that the language used on assessments does not impact students' abilities to answer the question, or show what they know and can do.
4. Tape Record Directions: Just as students may not be able to write in their second language, they may not be able to read in their second language. Therefore, tape recorded directions can support students' understanding.
5. Provide Manipulatives: Students may be unfamiliar with vocabulary within an assessment. The use of manipulatives can foster students' understanding and make learning authentic.
6. Performance-Based Assessments: According to Frey (2014), performance-based assessment items have key characteristics, which promote authentic contexts for learning.
  - Performance-based items are supply items. The students must supply the response, not select it. The response is constructed or performed.
  - They have a purpose that identifies the decision to be made.
  - The parts or steps are directly observable.

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- There are predetermined scoring criteria.
- 7. Extra Time: Educators can supply ELLs with time and a half to complete assessments. This allows for students to process the content in their first and second languages.
- 8. Graphic Organizers: Educators can supply students with graphic organizers to identify the most important aspects of content.
- 9. Visual Representations or Images: The inclusion of visual aids on assessment items can increase students' understanding of vocabulary or directions. Moreover, students should be given opportunities to demonstrate their understanding and learning through the use of illustrations, as some students may be in their silent period, or do not have their second language writing or speaking abilities yet.

### References

Frey, B.B. (2014). *Modern Classroom Assessment*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc.



# CREATING QUALITY ASSESSMENTS

**Figure 6: Professional Development Note Catcher**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Creating Quality Assessments for ELLs

Directions: Please write down notes to keep track of information that you learn from this professional development.

Characteristics of Quality Assessments	Multiple-Choice Items
Fill-in-the-Blank and True-False Items	Constructed Response and Essay Items
Language	Accommodations and Modifications
Questions?	

## CREATING QUALITY ASSESSMENTS

### Figure 7: Professional Development Exit Ticket

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Please answer the prompts below.

1. How can we create or revise multiple-choice assessments that are high-quality for English Language Learners?

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2. How can we create or revise the language we use on assessments?

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3. How can we create or revise essay prompts that are high-quality for English Language Learners?

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4. What are ways to provide assessment accommodations or modifications for ELLs?

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