

## Book Review

### *Assessment and intervention for English language learners: Translating research into practice*

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With increased multilingualism at schools, reflected in a growing number of bilingual and international school programs as a result of student mobility, job migrations and refugees, the landscape for educationalists is rapidly changing from a monolingual/monocultural/mononational pattern to a bi/multi-lingual/national/cultural context. Educational institutions at the primary and secondary level may not always be fully prepared for tackling the challenges of integrating learners of diverse backgrounds into regular classrooms, especially if they happen to have learning disabilities. In fact, as is demonstrated by the 2017 *Key data on teaching languages at schools in Europe* report (Eurydice, 2017), in some European countries newly arrived migrant students undergo the same assessment/testing regime as other students entering primary or secondary school, while in others they may be subject to the same procedures as other students changing schools. Teacher training programs might be even less prepared to do so – only a quarter of European countries have central recommendations or

requirements for teachers working with students from migrant backgrounds who do not speak the language of schooling. Mostly, specific qualifications on the teaching of the language of schooling as a foreign language are required. Only in Denmark and Austria does initial teacher education prepare all prospective teachers for their role in facilitating the integration of students from migrant backgrounds.

It is in this context that the recent Springer publication on assessment, titled *Assessment and intervention for English language learners. Translating research into practice*, authored by Susan Unruh and Nancy A. McKellar (Wichita State University, USA) has to be considered as an addition to the repertoire of abilities and attitudes of all those educationalists who deal with English language learners in diverse contexts. Those readers who expect another book on how to conceptualize, design, deliver, and analyze language proficiency assessment instruments, such as Brown (2004), Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), Ching and Fox (2017), Coombe, Davidson, O'Sullivan, and Stoyloff (2012), Gordon and Rajagopalan (2016), Gottlieb (2006), or Tsagari and Banerjee (2016), will probably not be fully satisfied with the book under review. The publication is clearly directed at psychologists and special education needs (SEN) specialists rather than foreign/second language teachers, though the latter would also benefit, for instance, from detailed descriptions of psycholinguistic and physiological mechanisms involved in one's brain and muscles while dealing with particular areas of learning or clinical signs of learning disorders. This is evidenced, for instance, in the way language acquisition concepts, processes and theories get relatively little attention both in the amount of space devoted and the use of sources. This stands in contrast to the way in which such concepts as learning disorders, learner-based clinical evidence gathering, or psychoeducational school-based interventions are dealt with in the book. Thus, as the authors rightly claim in the introduction, since many school psychologists lack adequate training to work with the multilingual population amounting to as much as one-fifth of all children in the US and Canadian schools speaking a different language at home than at school, specialists other than language teachers need to be empowered to work with all English learners, regardless of the first language of the child and whether the school psychologist is monolingual or bilingual. However, the fact that the book is not mainly targeted at language teachers might have been more clearly pronounced, especially in the title or subtitle, so as to avoid a potential mismatch between readers' expectations and the book's contents.

The structure of the monograph is well-planned and it clearly indicates the line of argumentation adopted by Unruh and McKellar. The first part, consisting of the first three chapters, provides the fundamentals of such areas as challenges of assessing and intervening with ESL learners with a special focus on the procedures adopted by problem-solving teams in US schools (Chapter 1); foundations of bilingual language development with brief reference to major SLA

theories (Chapter 2); and ways of collecting data (through records, observations, tests and portfolio) by psychologists dealing with English language learners (Chapter 3). One more chapter (Chapter 9), concerned with assessment and intervention tools such as standardized tests, dynamic assessment or instructional resources adds to this introductory knowledge base – however, it might be more convincing as Chapter 4, before the second part of the book is actually given, and not as Chapter 9, after having discussed all the specific areas of learner difficulties to be diagnosed and dealt with in the classroom. Alternatively, rather than distinguish Chapter 9, its contents could be placed in an appendix.

The second part of the book, composed of Chapters 4 through 10, deals systematically with specific categories of learning disabilities – oral expression, basic reading, reading fluency, reading comprehension, math calculation, math problem-solving, and writing. Each area starts with an introductory description, followed by a reflection of how language proficiency is intertwined with that area, enumeration of multiple indicators of disorders in that area, and, finally, a set of teacher interventions.

Finally, Chapter 12 exemplifies the discussion with case studies that are structured as psychoeducational reports. Two case studies are presented in a rich context created by confidential reports, reasons for referral, background information about the learners, results and interpretations of vision/hearing screenings, language proficiency, academic functioning, adaptive behaviour, social/emotional/behavioral functioning and many others.

The structure of the book would benefit from formally distinguishing such two distinct parts as described above, with the final chapter (perhaps even subdivided into two shorter chapters for two separate case studies) constituting the third one. Also, especially those chapters that are parallel in structure (Chapters 4-10 dealing with oral language, word reading/decoding, reading fluency and vocabulary, reading comprehension, math calculation, math problem-solving, and written expression) could have had roughly the same structure, with the way these learning areas are described reflected in the same headings for subchapters and subsubchapters. It seems that all this, together with numbering subchapters and subsubchapters, would help the reader become better oriented in the topics, ensure parallelism of structure and reinforce the authors' assessment and intervention philosophy applicable in all possible areas of learner deficiencies. The parallelism of structure is maintained, at least to some extent, by showing the same kinds of diagnostic tools (record review, interview, test) put into different ways of use for different learning disorders. While the case studies that the book finishes with present the approach adopted by the authors in an authentic context in a highly convincing way, there is not even a few-page conclusion that could show the overall picture and summarize the major findings.

The book is well-anchored in the reality of the US educational system, which is clearly evidenced in references to numerous legal acts, specific documents, educational pathways, and assessment instruments throughout the book. The rich context is also reflected in the number of tools, instruments, sets of diagnostic questions, checklists, lists of clinical signs of disorders, and other practical materials available in all of its parts. It might be the case that those readers who are less familiar with the educational system of the USA or have much less knowledge of or interest in the ways ESL education is structured, might not find the first part of the book equally appealing and helpful as those who actually work in ESL education in that country. Fortunately, the authors' perspective gets slightly more general and universal in the second part, where they address the question of dealing with learning difficulties by speakers of other languages as well. The range of languages encompasses mainly Spanish, with some examples also being derived from German, French, Chinese, or Japanese.

*Assessment and intervention for English language learners* also makes use of the administrative framework in which second language learners are placed in the US, talking, for instance, about what kinds of documents, what pieces of information, or what sources of data can be elicited and from whom. This, obviously, is extremely helpful in the context of different states, but for non-US readers might not be always easily to transplant into their instructional contexts. Actually, the authors could show, for instance, how specific parts of assessment and intervention look like in other countries, what parallel instruments for diagnosing learners are available outside the US, or what modifications would have to be applied to the US system of delivering assessment and intervention described in the book so that it becomes applicable in other countries.

The strength of the book, undeniably, lies in the holistic approach to diagnosing learners and responding to their needs. Rather than thinking only in terms of language proficiency, and discussing the tasks and techniques used to elicit specific aspects of learners' language output, the authors show assessment of learners from the most comprehensive perspective they could adopt. This means the use of varied data sources and data collection techniques, cooperation of a number of professionals employed at schools, as well as administration of varied standardized instruments. Another area prominently represented in the book, not only in the subtitle, but also in all the chapters, is the concept of evidence-based intervention – showing how evidence gained from comprehensive, well-balanced and carefully analyzed assessment leads to a change of educational practices is something language teachers, pedagogues, psychologists or special education specialists rarely look at to such an extent. In each of the major chapters, this is achieved by starting with ways of diagnosing a disorder and proceeding to the guidelines for dealing with it.

Due to these two foci, Unruh and McKellar's monograph is a highly useful read for all those language teachers, teacher trainers and researchers who want to go beyond the usual framework of language teaching methodology and look at bi- and multilingual learners from a broader perspective, grasping the psychoeducational context of simultaneous acquisition of English language skills, literacy, numeracy and other academic abilities. On the other hand, the book will be equally (or perhaps even more) useful for school psychologists and SEN specialists at schools, showing to them what effect inadequate mastery of learners' second language can have on their prospects of success in other academic areas. Unruh and McKellar are very explicit in how assessment differs for sequential bilinguals as opposed to monolingual students, and how understanding the limitations of the former due to their language acquisition path is essential for non-language educationalists.

Obviously, due to a plethora of problems and issues brought about by evaluation and support for learners of other languages at schools, *Assessment and intervention for English language learners* is more of a starting point for non-language specialists on the way to better understanding of what is happening in a bilingual or multilingual person's mind than a complete compendium of the area. However, this starting point is promising enough to ensure that given further similar attempts to bridge school psychology, language assessment, and second language acquisition are to be published, the integration of migrant or refugee children in the mainstream educational systems should be easier and more effective.

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