

**Solano-Flores, G. *Assessing English Language Learners: Theory and Practice*.  
New York: Routledge. 2016. Pp. 180.**

Solano-Flores' book *Assessing English Language Learners* provides basic principles for developing assessment instruments and strategies that measure the content knowledge and language proficiency of English language learners (ELLs). The book contributes to the professional development needs of in-service and pre-service K-12 educators under the prevalent ideology of accountability. This book demonstrates how classroom teachers can benefit from learning assessment terms, testing processes, and assessment strategies of ELLs. *Assessing English Language Learners* adds specific value to language testing literature by discussing how teachers should assess students with consideration to socio-cultural perspectives. It also provides teachers with support to build confidence in conducting assessment activities. The book can serve as an entry-level classroom textbook for graduate level students who are interested in teaching and assessing ELLs or can be used as a reference guide for ELL teachers. It is also convenient for students as it offers e-book versions that are often freely accessible through university libraries.

The book consists of nine chapters and is easy to comprehend. Solano-Flores begins each chapter with an overview, followed by chapter content divided into key statements. Each chapter ends with closing comments and relevant open-ended exercises for readers to discuss and reflect upon.

The first chapter illustrates the multiple facets of assessment and basic concepts in assessment. Solano-Flores shows a comprehensive view of "assessment as a process, an instrument, and a system" (p. 6). He provides definitions of key concepts to consider in the context of K-12 ELLs, including measurement error, sampling, validity, reliability, and fairness. To demonstrate methods of evaluating test quality in standardized assessment, Solano-Flores uses simple definitions and perspectives to present complicated terms about test items and psychometric properties.

To appropriately address the issue of assessing ELLs, Solano-Flores investigates assessment and language development under sociocultural contexts. He begins Chapter 2 by determining that language is used to convey and create shared meanings in society. He states that many current large-scale achievement assessments in K-12 settings unintentionally test ELLs' language proficiency. This

poses a great threat to validity and fairness in testing. Solano-Flores embraces an important notion of assessing ELLs as emergent bilinguals instead of as two different monolingual individuals. He explains how educators should better understand the underappreciated linguistic skills and language variations of ELLs and bilinguals. This chapter is especially important for programs and schools that involve immigrants and bilingual children as it demonstrates the uniqueness of measuring the language proficiency of this heterogeneous group.

Chapters 3, 7, and 8 take into account the influence of culture on cognition to promote educators' critical thinking about test instruments. In Chapter 3, Solano-Flores introduces different types of assessment activities that teachers can use in classroom settings to help better understand students' thinking, for example, having students think aloud their learning processes, asking students to read aloud sentences and rephrase them, as well as conducting interviews. Key concepts such as cognitive load and metacognitive skills are also discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 7 focuses on the effectiveness of test accommodations. The author presents and promotes the implementation of accessible resources such as translation, linguistic simplification, and extra time to ensure test fairness and meet the needs of ELLs. Chapter 8 investigates test review processes including examining the validity and fairness of test items and students' cognitive response processes. This chapter suggests ways that teachers can evaluate the alignment between the content of the test and classroom curriculum. These three separate chapters take into consideration the relationship between the characteristics of students and test items. They also demonstrate different methods used by researchers and administrators to improve test outcomes.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 explore three different types of assessments: language proficiency assessment (Chapter 4), the process of assessing content knowledge in large-scale and classroom contexts (Chapter 5), and formative assessment (Chapter 6). Chapter 4 poses questions on how to define ELLs as proficient in English. Solano-Flores challenges the ideas that educators should use the same criteria to measure ELLs' English proficiency as is used to measure native speakers' proficiency. Next, Solano-Flores proposes to use a 'confusion matrix' and 'linguagrams' to assess ELLs using multiple measures to examine students' English proficiency. The idea behind a confusion matrix is to assess ELLs twice using comparable tests. Based on the consistency of two test results, educators can eliminate false positive or negative English proficiency classifications of students. Another recommendation, linguagrams, measure students' four subskills in both their first and second languages. By comparing test results from both languages,

educators are more likely to obtain a more comprehensive evaluation of students. In terms of assessing writing, Solano-Flores proposes using a holistic approach to measure ELLs' writing. He also argues that to accurately assess essays, educators should focus on the structure and ideas rather than "superficial" spelling and grammatical mistakes. (p. 74).

Chapter 5 discusses how large-scale tests are developed and the limitations of the "teach to the test" approach (p. 90). Under the era of accountability systems, teachers and administrators are held accountable for students' grades. Solano-Flores provides some guidance for overcoming the problems of solely focusing on grades and being oblivious of students' overall performance. He recommends that educators use assessment beyond grading, interpret standardized test properly, and develop more classroom performance assessments.

Chapter 6 discusses the use of formative assessments in ELL classroom contexts. The author proposes formative assessment as a communicative process and illustrates two effective strategies: giving feedback to students and empowering students to think critically. Additionally, Solano-Flores suggests giving ELLs extra time to respond and offers strategies to deal with the issue of code switching: the act of switching between two languages. For example, when two ELLs play story-telling games in class, they code switch between two languages depending on which language is more suitable for their purpose. They use phrases in their first language to describe stories that happened in their home country, and switch back to English to talk about their feelings toward the event. Solano-Flores states that code switching is a natural behavior and educators should not prevent it; instead, educators should recognize that code switching between languages helps students construct meaning through interaction.

This book covers a broad range of important topics and is tailored towards educators who interact with linguistically diverse populations. *Assessing English Language Learners* is different from other fundamental textbooks. Solano-Flores believes that test designers should take into consideration the cognitive capabilities and language ability of ELLs and he provides guidelines to educators as to how to better understand, teach, and assess ELLs.

Throughout the book there is some repetition of key concepts, such as sampling (Chapters 1, 6, and 9), code switching (Chapters 2 and 6), validity and reliability (Chapters 1 and 9). Some of the repetition did not further this reader's knowledge of the subject. For example, code switching is first introduced in chapter 2 as a subtopic to help readers better understand the language variations of English

language learners. Later in chapter 6, it is introduced again as a subtopic to demonstrate the social dimensions of formative assessment. Also, the issue of recognizing the linguistic diversity of ELLs is addressed repeatedly throughout the book. Even though the concepts are applicable to other topics, the way Solano-Flores repeatedly introduces the same topics can feel repetitious. Additionally, some of the information could have been presented more cohesively. For example, chapters 3, 7, and 8 which all focus on cognition and chapters 1 and 9 which are both about basic concepts and the psychometric properties of test items, would have been better presented in sequential order.

Overall, *Assessing English Language Learners* reflects the specific social context of the current testing era and presents how large scale standardized testing fails to consider the linguistic heterogeneity of ELLs. The book emphasizes understanding and the development of cultural sensitivity through instruction and assessment. In terms of transferability, “this text...is ideal for any course covering theory and practice of ELL assessment” (p. 1). The general perspectives and characteristics of assessing ELLs, such as psychometric properties, giving different types of assessments, and providing feedback are transferrable to adult English language learners. In classrooms filled with pre-service and in-service teachers, I recommend professors select specific chapters to scaffold knowledge of English language testing in K-12 settings such as chapter 4 through 6 on different types of assessments and chapters 1 and 9 on definitions of psychometric terms. This book contains useful material for people who are relatively new to ELL assessments or wish to learn more about how to teach and assess ELLs in English speaking countries.

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