PART I

Assessment as a Context for Teaching and Learning

Bridges to Equity

True teachers are those who use themselves as bridges over which they invite their students to cross; then, having facilitated their crossing, joyfully collapse, encouraging them to create their own.

—Nikos Kazantzakis

I t's official. Due to the meteoric rise of the minority student population, the rigor of the new standards with their emphasis on college and career readiness, and the importance of academic language use throughout school, we have welcomed in an age where every teacher is now a language teacher (Zwiers, 2008; Walqui & van Lier, 2010; Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014a). This new reality that educators face comes at a time when we are challenged to make informed decisions about our students minute by minute, day by day, week by week, month by month, and year by year. To do so, we plan, gather, and analyze information for specific purposes from multiple sources so that the results, when reported in meaningful ways, inform teaching and learning. That's the core of the assessment process. If assessment is reliable, valid, and fair for all students from start to finish, then it can serve as the bridge to educational equity.

No matter how much progress we have witnessed in the last few years, discrepancies still remain when it comes to race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, linguistic background, and economic status of our students. Thus, this book is dedicated to building bridges that promote educational equity, most notably in the areas of instruction and assessment. Teachers' and school leaders' sensitivity to equitable treatment of all students, with the recognition that every one is a language learner, will hopefully pave the way to more inclusive and relevant practices and policies.

WHY FOCUS ON EQUITY?

The pursuit of educational equity has been very much part of U.S. history. Envisioned within the greater civil rights movement, its roots can be traced to the mid-twentieth century. Beginning with the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* that eliminated racial segregation, successive decades have included further attempts to address social and educational inequities. In 1965 we saw the introduction of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which attempted to hold states, school districts, and schools more accountable for improving the academic performance of students regardless of economic status, race, ethnicity, proficiency in English, or disability. In 1974 the *Lau v. Nichols* Supreme Court case expanded the rights of English Language Learners (ELLs) by ruling in favor of Chinese students who were denied equal educational opportunities on the basis of their ethnicity and language background, thus paving the way to the endorsement of bilingual education.

The landmark 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, Public Law No. 94-142) ensures that students with disabilities are provided free, appropriate public education in the least restricted learning environment that is tailored to their individual needs, as stated in their individualized education programs (IEPs). This law extends to ELLs from birth to age 21, stipulating that they are not to be denied language support due to a disability. A recent policy (rather than legislation or adjudication) that touches on equity of educational opportunity is state adoption of college and career readiness standards aimed at universally increasing curricular and assessment demands.

National equity assistance centers (EACs), funded by the U.S. government under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, provide assistance to public schools in the areas of race, gender, and national origin equity in order to promote equal educational opportunities. It is the contention of the centers that, if fully implemented, their six goals for educational equity will create a context that promotes equity. These goals include

- comparably high academic achievement and other positive outcomes for all students on all achievement indicators;
- equitable access and inclusion;
- equitable treatment;
- equitable resource distribution;
- equitable opportunity to learn; and
- shared accountability. (Regional Equity Assistance Centers, 2013, p. 4)

We begin laying the groundwork for assessment equity by describing the ever-increasing school-age population of linguistically and culturally diverse students. Of equal importance are the school contexts in which students interact. To that end, we identify the many educators who influence language learners and point to the necessity for linguistically and culturally responsive schools.

WHY CENTER ON LANGUAGE LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS?

Language is the universal medium for meaning making and for communicating to others. Additionally, language is the primary tool for mental representation and

cognitive processing. In essence, learning and cognition are interconnected as both heavily rely on language. As this notion of using language to mediate thinking and learning is not unique to any one group of students, we all can be considered language learners.

When the chain of connections between the mind and language is disrupted, such as when students do not understand the language of instruction, learning is disrupted (Kenji Hakuta, personal communication, 2014). We cannot afford this interruption; we must promote rich student discourse and sustained use of academic language across the disciplines wherever possible in the languages of our students.

During the past decade, the staggering growth in the number of students who represent our nation's myriad languages and cultures has affected teachers, school leaders, and administrators from preschool through high school and beyond. In fact, these changing demographics are transforming schools and communities (Noguera, 2014). The students in this heterogeneous mix have had very different life and educational experiences than the Anglo-centric norm; some newcomers are refugees or immigrants, while many others come from linguistic enclaves within the United States. What follows is a synopsis of some of the major changes in our student population over the past decade, with a focus on ELLs.

WHO ARE OUR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS? FACTS AND FIGURES OF THE CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC

The beginning of the 2014–2015 school year marked a turning point in U.S. educational history: For the first time, the minority student population escalated to the point where nationally it became the majority. While Texas has held this majority-minority student status since 2004, demographic shifts across the nation have now tipped the scales toward a greater representation of nonwhite students in many other states as well. In large part, school-age children from Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander backgrounds are responsible for this new wave in our student population, while non-Hispanic white students are on a decline. While there are over 150 languages spoken by ELLs, all but seven states claim Spanish as the most common one (Batalova & McHugh, 2010). With these changing student demographics trending across the country, it's time for all educators to embrace this new reality and harness the potential of every student, the hallmark of equity.

The future will see sustained growth of linguistically and culturally diverse students in the United States, especially ELLs. Whereas in 2008 ELLs—that is, students for whom English is an additional language and who qualify for language support—represented one in nine students in public schools, it is projected that by 2025 one in four students will be an ELL (McBride, Richard, & Payan, 2008). Figure I.1 shows the prekindergarten through high school (preK-12) demographic surge and decline of the largest racial/ethnic groups for 2 decades, ending in 2023 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

Young children are the leading edge of this upward trend of linguistic minority representation in schools. Although most of these children have been born in the United States and are therefore citizens, in 17 states Hispanic students make up 20% of kindergarten classes (Krogstad & Fry, 2014). Let's focus for a moment on the burst of population seen among ELLs, or, as they are known in some states, English Learners (ELs).

Figure I.1 Percentage Change and Projected Change in Ethnicity in the PreK-Grade 12 Student Population Over 2 Decades

	Change From 2001 to 2011	*Total %*	*Projections From 2012 to 2023*	*Total %*
Hispanic	+3.6 million (+7%)	25%	+3.4 million	30%
Asian/Pacific Islander	+.8 million (+8%)	5%	+.4 million	5%
Black	−.6 million (−1%)	15%	−.2 million	15%
Non-Hispanic White	−3.1 million (−8%)	50%	−2 million	45%

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (2014). *Racial/ethnic enrollment in public schools*. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cge.asp

What's in a Name?

Academic language is critical for academic success, and it has become an equalizer in the standards-driven reform movement (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006; Mota-Altman, 2006). Thus, we begin with the premise that *language learners* is a universal term descriptive of all students in prekindergarten through Grade 12, inclusive of their languages and cultural identities, and that academic language use is a vehicle that leads these students to achieve academically. That said, there are many different groups of language learners.

There is a growing variety of language learners, so let's clarify some of the school-based nomenclature associated with this intriguing group of students. School-age children exposed to cultures and languages other than English in daily interaction in their home environment are considered *linguistically and culturally diverse* students. Their linguistic and cultural roots afford these students distinct ways of seeing, thinking, interacting, and being that influence the way they learn in English medium schools.

Linguistically and culturally diverse students, who constitute approximately 20% of the K-12 student population in the United States, are tremendously heterogeneous and have a wide range of educational experiences. Some of these students may be first-generation immigrants, refugees, or even unaccompanied minors who have had little experience with English. At the other end of the spectrum, some may be *heritage language learners*. These students, generally born and raised in the United States, identify with one or more multicultural groups and may communicate in English and other languages.

Within the linguistically and culturally diverse population, there are several subgroups of students, the largest one being ELLs. Identified through screening and assessment, ELLs are students whose current levels of English language proficiency preclude them from accessing, processing, and acquiring unmodified grade-level material in English without scaffolding and instructional support. Already substantial, the numbers of these students are growing. In the 2011–2012 school year, seven of the eight states with the highest percentages of public school ELLs (over 10%) were in the western United States; ELLs constituted more than 23% of the public school enrollment in California. In addition, 14 states and the District of Columbia had percentages of ELL public school enrollment between 6.0 and 9.9%, followed by

15 states with a percentage between 3.0 and 5.9%. Rounding out the ELL count are 13 states with 3% or less (NCES, 2014).

The explosion of linguistic and cultural diversity can also be seen with our very youngest language learners, starting with toddlers. Prior to their kindergarten experience, young children who are in the process of developing two languages, whether simultaneously (the home language and English) or sequentially, are referred to as *dual language learners*. Head Start and early childhood circles use the term *dual language learners* to refer to children who communicate with family members in a home language or languages, are continuing to develop those languages, and are being exposed to English either at home and/or in child-care settings. According to Head Start program information reports, almost 30% of Head Start children come from families who speak a primary language other than English (Office of Head Start, 2008).

Once these students enter kindergarten, they may continue their dual language development by participating in a program where instruction occurs in two languages. From this point on, these students are now considered *emergent bilinguals* (a term also used to signify all ELLs by some researchers). The instructional program in which these students participate, if in fact there are opportunities for their home language to further develop alongside English, is generally known as a dual language or immersion program. Through schooling, these young children grow to become bilingual and biliterate and thus are increasingly able to communicate in two or more languages.

Other labels for language learners exist that are descriptive of some of their characteristics. Take for instance *Students With Limited or Interrupted Formal Education* (SLIFE), who are older (middle or high school) transient ELLs who attend school for a short while, return to their home country, and then often repeat the cycle, or who are highly mobile students who receive inconsistent schooling. The Unites States has also experienced some waves of undocumented and unaccompanied minors who are generally in the same age range as SLIFE. In addition to the necessity of English language development, acculturation issues, and the trauma of entry into a new country, these students must often also contend with work obligations and often feel alienated in the school community.

Long-term English Language Learners (LTELLs) are another class of older ELLs, generally with 7 or more years of language support. These students are orally proficient in English, while their academic language and literacy tend to remain around the midpoint of the language acquisition continuum. There are three subgroups of LTELLs: (a) students who have received inconsistent U.S. schooling in regards to their model of language support, (b) transnational students, who move back and forth between the United States and their families' countries of origin during the school year, and (c) students who consistently have received language support, but the support has not built on the students' home language development (Menken, Kleyn, & Chae, 2012).

Lastly, there are indigenous populations who have lived in the United States for multiple generations and wish to study, preserve, or revitalize their linguistic and cultural roots (Gottlieb, 2012a). American Indian ELLs include Native American, Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian students, some of whom live in tribal communities and some of whom are interspersed in the general population. Many Pacific Islanders, such as peoples from American Samoa, the Marshall Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam, also have indigenous roots and multicultural foundations.

Educational Services

Many other terms that are associated with educational services, delivery models, or funding sources often become attached to students. Although these labels, such as Title I, bilingual, or English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), might be convenient, they do not convey an accurate depiction of these students; instead, they describe the kinds of support programs or interventions the students receive. Additionally, response to intervention (RtI) and multi-tier system of supports (MTSS) are general education approaches for students, including ELLs, who may potentially qualify for special education services.

A lot of different terminology must be sorted out with regard to the description of language learners from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Resource I.1 at the close of Part I invites you to create a scheme for personal use or to reflect on the one used by your school, district, or state. In that way you will be able to consistently apply the terms throughout the book to your own setting.

The rise of the minority student population, in particular ELLs, has been accompanied by some complex societal and civil rights issues that often impact school systems, such as immigration, poverty, and inequity of educational opportunities. According to Kurt Landgrat, "We need to find new ways to reach out (to the new majority). This is not only socially conscious, but frankly in the best interest of the U.S. economy and in terms of equity of education" (quoted in McBride et al., 2008, p. 2). Equity of education is the premise on which we have built this book.

Interestingly, in the decade from 1990 to 2000, dual language programs, with proficient English speakers learning content and language side by side in two languages with their ELL peers, grew tenfold to over 2,000 in operation. These proficient English speaking students have become part of the mix of language learners, and their numbers continue to rise as the demand for dual language or immersion programs increases across the country. Growth in these numbers is attributed in part to research that has validated the mission of these dual language programs to promote biliteracy and to positive cross-cultural attitudes in our increasingly multilingual world (Wilson, 2011).

The challenge of providing equitable educational opportunities comes at a time when school leaders and teachers are focusing on implementing standards-referenced educational reforms. One solution is to make our schools more reflective of a can-do spirit and for educators to provide an equitable education by assuming an advocacy perspective (WIDA, 2012; Staehr Fenner, 2014). With increasing numbers of minority students filling our classrooms, the need for linguistically and culturally responsive education is becoming more and more apparent.

WHO ARE THE EDUCATORS OF LANGUAGE LEARNERS?

If there is in fact a "shared mission and vision within the school community that is inclusive, then the groundwork [is set] for not only establishing equality for all students but equity as well" (Dove, Honigsfeld, & Cohan, 2014, p. 1). Working as a team, every educator has a distinct yet complementary role to ensure that students have seamless access to and participate in appropriate and relevant curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Figure I.2 describes the overall responsibilities

Figure I.2   Primary Responsibilities of Teachers Who Contribute to the Education of Language Learners

Educators	*Instructional and Assessment Responsibilities*
Bilingual or dual language teachers	• Content-based instruction and classroom assessment in two languages • Oral language and literacy development in two languages
Content teachers (e.g., subject-area "sheltered" teachers)	• Integration of academic language and conceptual development in English • Content-specific skills and knowledge in English with support in the home language to clarify and advance conceptual understanding
Language specialists (e.g., English as a Second Language [ESL], English to Speakers of Other Languages [ESOL], English Language Acquisition [ELA], or English as Additional Language [EAL] teachers, among others)	• Language development in English • Introduction/reinforcement of content-related concepts in English • Support in home language, as applicable • Collaboration with content and general education teachers
General education teachers and teachers of the gifted and talented	• Language and literacy development in English • Academic development in English, along with assessment of content skills and knowledge • Collaboration with language specialists
Instructional coaches (e.g., data or literacy coaches)	• Model lessons with built-in instructional assessment • Support for coordinated content and language teaching • Display of language proficiency and achievement data for making decisions
Teachers of specialized subjects (e.g., technology, fine arts, physical education)	• Extension of language and skill development in English (with reinforcement in the home language, as applicable) • Development of cross-disciplinary literacy
Title I and other support teachers (e.g., intervention teachers or special education teachers if students have IEPs)	• Literacy reinforcement in the home language or in English • Reinforcement of math skills and concepts • Collaboration with content and language teachers

Source: Adapted from Gottlieb, 2006, p. 5.

of the teachers and teacher leaders who contribute to the total educational program of language learners. In addition, where available, paraprofessionals, especially those who are multilingual, provide another linguistic resource and model. At the close of this section, Resource I.2 offers you the opportunity to identify the language educators in your setting and reflect on their roles and responsibilities.

WHAT ARE LINGUISTICALLY AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOLS?

In linguistically and culturally responsive schools, each and every student is envisioned as a learner with inherent strengths, resources, and assets. These schools set high expectations and provide scaffolds to support the academic success of all students (Bazron, Osher, & Fleischman, 2005). Within these schools, administrators advocate on behalf of their students and teachers are culturally competent; these professionals realize that the academic challenges of culturally diverse students may stem from interactions among educators and assessment measures rather than from the students themselves (Cummins, 2000).

School leadership that is socially just supports equitable educational opportunities for students who historically have been marginalized, including those who are linguistically and culturally diverse. Leadership is not necessarily limited to principals but instead is inclusive of a collective of stakeholders who have the responsibility to enact school improvement (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). According to the literature, the successful education of these students rests on (a) facilitating their social integration, (b) cultivating their academic language proficiency, and (c) promoting their academic achievement (Scanlan & López, 2015; Brisk, 2006).

In linguistically and culturally responsive classrooms, teachers are mediators who help students build bridges from the known to the unknown. Teaching is grounded in an understanding of the critical role of culture and language, and teachers are sensitive to the sociocultural contexts in which learning occurs. Classroom instruction and assessment are congruent with the cultural value systems of the surrounding communities and reflect their "funds of knowledge" (Bazron et al., 2005; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). In applying culturally responsive teaching to instructional assessment, teachers should consider

- the range and types of linguistic and cultural experiences of the students;
- the sociocultural identities students bring to classroom activities;
- the inclusion of multiple perspectives in carrying out tasks and projects;
- interpretation and reporting of data within a linguistic and cultural context; and
- student self- and peer assessment as viable sources of decision making. (Gottlieb, 2012b)

All in all, schools have to become more responsive to increasingly heterogeneous student populations and their families. Schools that have a multicultural presence or that have undergone a cultural transformation tend to

- understand how learners construct knowledge through cultural lenses;
- learn about students' experiences and cultures;
- be socioculturally conscious by being aware of the school context;
- hold affirming views about diversity;
- use appropriate instructional strategies, such as tapping the students' home language and community resources; and
- advocate on behalf of all students. (Villegas & Lucas, 2007)

Students' knowledge of their own culture and that of others is important to their performance in school and in life. "Schools can make a positive and significant

difference for students when educators account for the complex interaction of language, culture, and context, and decisions are made within a coherent theoretical framework" (Miramontes, Nadeau, & Commins, 2011, p. 10).

Culturally responsive standards-based teaching combines the notion that culture permeates every classroom with the belief that teachers are responsible for ensuring the representation of the students' languages and cultures in everyday lessons. Additionally, students' resources are to be valued, enhanced, and incorporated into standards-referenced instruction (Saifer, Edwards, Ellis, Ko, & Stuczynski, 2011). If educators create a caring and nurturing environment, students will feel safe and will be more likely to take risks in their new or home language. Classroom communities that exhibit respect, personal connection, and mutual understanding based on acceptance of diversity will ultimately result in acceptance and promotion of linguistic equity in learning.

Culturally responsive teaching is about building trust with students who historically have been marginalized in schools (and society) through a learning partnership. Teachers' ability to use this earned rapport and trust of linguistically and culturally diverse students helps deepen the students' understanding. In turn, the students' increased ability to tackle more rigorous work leads to enriched learning (Hammond, 2015).

The optimal educational environment should be a dynamic school where there are opportunities for students to learn, grow, and thrive. In reality, in some school systems conditions are less than optimal. As a result, there can be underrepresentation or overrepresentation of minority students in certain high-incidence disability categories in special education, including the categories of emotional disturbance, speech pathology, and learning disabilities. In light of this dilemma, the notion of culturally competent assessment has gained traction for special education eligibility. Obtaining accurate information from assessments that contain minimal bias is not only required for validity's sake but is an ethical and equity imperative. Where is your school on the linguistically and culturally responsive scale? Refer to Resource I.3 to see where it might fall.

Today educators are focused on optimizing opportunities for the multicultural young children and/or young adults with whom they interact each day. These students have the potential to thrive academically. You too can help language learners, including ELLs and ELLs with disabilities, flourish by engaging in the equitable assessment practices introduced in the upcoming pages.

RESOURCE I.1

Describing Your Language Learners

Who are the language learners in your setting? What is the terminology that is used to describe each group of students and the kinds of support services they receive? If you would like, make a pie chart that reflects the representation of different groups of language learners or complete the table below by checking which terms are used in your setting. Share it with your colleagues and discuss student population trends nationally, in your state, your district, or your school.

Term for Language Learners	Personal or Local Definition	Used by the School	Used by the District	Used by the State
Dual language learners				
Emergent bilinguals				
English Language Learners (ELLs) or a comparable term				
ELLs with learning disabilities				
Gifted and talented ELLs				
Heritage language learners				
Linguistically and culturally diverse learners				
Long-term English Language Learners (LTELLs)				
Students With Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)				

RESOURCE I.2

Identifying Educators of English Language Learners

Think about all the teachers and other school personnel who are responsible for the education of ELLs. Make a diagram that serves as a metaphor for how educators work together in your school to provide comprehensive services to students. Then describe your figure and the roles and responsibilities of each educator.

Educators	*Roles and Responsibilities*
Bilingual or dual language teachers	
Content teachers (e.g., subject area teachers)	
Language specialists (e.g., ESL, ESOL, ELD, EL, EAL teachers)	
General education teachers	
Instructional coaches (e.g., data or literacy coaches)	
Teachers of specialized subjects (e.g., technology, fine arts, physical education)	
Title I and other support teachers	
Teachers of additional services (e.g., special education teachers or teachers of gifted and talented students)	

RESOURCE I.3

A Rating Scale of a Linguistically and Culturally Responsive School

Research has pointed to clear signs of a linguistically and culturally responsive school; these traits are identified in the rating scale below. You are welcome to use this tool as a thumbnail evaluation of where your school is situated in relation to its linguistic and cultural responsiveness. Use the following criteria in responding from 1 to 4: 1 = traces, 2 = intermittent signs, 3 = noticeable presence, and 4 = full integration of languages and cultures.

Linguistic and Cultural Responsiveness in My School	1	2	3	4
Multilingualism and multiculturalism permeate the air, from signage to murals to conversations in the halls.				
High expectations are set for all students, and language learners can reach their goals in one or more languages.				
Students' languages and cultures are valued every minute of every day.				
The linguistic and cultural resources of the community and family members are an extension of the school.				
Curriculum, instruction, and assessment invite multiple perspectives and reflect the identities of the students.				
Every adult in the school advocates on behalf of students, and special attention is paid to languages and cultures.				
Linguistic and cultural responsiveness is part of the school's and district's mission and vision.				