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Reconceptualizing Assessment in Early Childhood Education (ECE): Narrative Documentation and Asset-Oriented Ways of Understanding Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Children's Literacies

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the current state of assessment in ECE of young children learning English. Dominant and problematic notions and tools that currently limit how children's literacies are understood and assessed will be examined in order to provide context and counter points that demonstrate alternative assessment practices. A subsequent exploration of narrative documentation and asset-oriented ways of positioning children will be offered with specific emphasis on assessment practices that can help early childhood educators identify the various "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992) children possess in order to fully and effectively document their developing literacies and honor their identities.

Educational research I have valued and found valuable throughout my career has drawn on and benefited from strong connections between the researcher and his or her research. My own research has always been inextricably linked to and fuelled by my personal and professional experiences. As a critical narrative researcher who is interested in early childhood education, I see the value in developing and drawing on research methodologies that resist the pat, the simplistic, and the predictive in favor of ones which recognize the complexity and multiplicity of children's lived experiences. In being committed to a critical understanding of narrated experiences, I draw on and explore the relationships between my personal and professional experiences and research observations and interpretations. Like Diane Reay (1998), I suspect that "all research is in one way or another autobiographical or else the avoidance of autobiography" (p. 2). This notion has resonated with me throughout the process of confronting and reflecting on my autobiography while developing research.

It is therefore not surprising that assessment and evaluation as it relates to young culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD)¹ children learning English in ECE is a focus within my work. Much of what I will be drawing on throughout this paper is informed by a larger study (Iannacci, 2005) which was shaped by my own experiences as a young child learning ESL in the Canadian school system in the 1970s. Despite the fact that I was in the process of learning English, I was assessed as in need of and placed within a special education class during the first grade. This deficit-based school identity stayed with me for many years and caused me a great deal of pain. These experiences eventually led me to become an elementary school teacher. Unfortunately, the conservative political party that came to power shortly after I began teaching created mandates that once again fostered problematic tools and practices used to assess and evaluate CLD children learning English. It was therefore not surprising that approximately half of the students in a self-contained special education class I taught were CLD and learning English, yet they were identified as having a learning disability shortly after they immigrated to Canada and began school.

Critical questions that emerged from these personal and professional experiences have grounded my life work and are the focus of this paper. Although these questions and concerns emerged as a result of my life and career rather than researched "gaps" in the education of CLD students learning English, these gaps unfortunately exist as do larger macro factors that forward the need to look critically at issues of assessment as they relate to these students within ECE contexts.

Context

The ESL/EAL field has become more and more affected by the global and local ramifications of international economic restructuring. Globally, this has meant (among other things) increased mobility of labor markets and cross-cultural contact (Burbules & Torres, 2000; Cummins, 2005), resulting in 375 million people currently learning English worldwide (Beale, 2007). Locally,

¹ Throughout this paper culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) refers to children who are often officially and problematically referred to as English as a Second Language (ESL), English Language Learners (ELL), or English as an Additional Language learners (EAL). At the time of data collection for this research, ESL was the official designation in Ontario for learners for whom English was not their first language. It has now changed to ELL. However, ESL, EAL, and ELL are limiting, deficit oriented and problematic since they exclusively focus on the language the person is acquiring rather than their existing "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992). The term CLD attempts to make explicit the vital resources these children possess (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008).

students in North American elementary schools are more culturally and linguistically diverse than they have ever been (Obiakor, 2001). Within the Canadian context, a significant number of children in elementary schools located in urban centers speak a first language other than English or French (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2003; Roberts-Fiati, 1997). The province of Ontario has experienced a 29% increase of ELL students within elementary schools since 2000 (People for Education, 2007). Further, the population of Ontario is expected to grow from roughly 12 million in 2001 to 16 million in 2028 with 75% of this growth coming from immigration (Glaze, 2007). Despite these demographics, educational researchers have noted a dearth of research about CLD students in ECE and disparity in providing for these students (Bernhard et al., 1995; Falconer & Byrnes, 2003; Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Toohey, 2000). This disparity has been especially significant in an educational era that has privileged standardized, coverage-oriented curriculum and assessment regimes that have furthered universal and deficit constructions of CLD children learning English. Further, the limited scholarship about young children learning English has traditionally been methods-focused with very little produced from sociocultural and critical perspectives (Toohey, 2000).

These dynamics have led to the misidentification, inappropriate placement, and over-representation of minority students in special education (Obiakor, 2001; Ontario Ministry of Education 1994, in Bernhard 1995; Patton, 1998) and therefore, the pathologizing of CLD students learning English. Pathologizing refers to “processes by which persons belonging to a particular group are seen by a more powerful group as abnormal. This supposed abnormality is perceived to be in need of correction, usually through medical or ‘scientific’ intervention” (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p. 3). As demonstrated by research conducted by Shields, Bishop, and Mazawi (2005), and Heydon and Iannacci (2008), one of the most prevalent ways pathologizing occurs in education is through assessment and evaluation. Limited and problematic notions about children’s literacies as a result of problematic assessment practices have resulted in inaccurate and limiting constructions of children and their learning which has ensured their pathologization.

This paper contributes to the more recent growing body of work in early years literacy research grounded in sociocultural theory as it informs early literacy (Bourne, 2001; Boyd & Brock, 2004; Gee, 2001) and also draws on critical multiculturalism (Kincheloe & Steinburg, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2004; May, 1999; McLaren, 1994) as an analytic lens in order to critically examine the current state of assessment in ECE of CLD children learning English. As such, dominant and problematic practices and notions that currently limit how children’s literacies are understood and assessed will be examined in order to provide context and counter points to these practices and discourses and demonstrate alternative assessment practices. An exploration of narrative documentation and asset-oriented ways of positioning children will therefore be offered with specific emphasis on assessment practices that can help early childhood educators identify the various “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 1992) children possess in order to fully and effectively document their developing literacies and honor their identities within early childhood education contexts.

Framing

As mentioned above, sociocultural theory as it informs early literacy and critical multiculturalism theory inform the analyses offered throughout this paper. The first tenet of sociocultural theory “is that the mind is social in nature” (Wertsch, in Boyd & Brock, 2004, p. 4). The second tenet is that “language in use plays a central role in mediating our actions as humans.

Consequently, the uses of language in the context of interactions, and the various analytical ways of looking at that language become central when considering human learning” (p. 4). Literacy is conceptualized as a social and socially mediated practice. As such, coming to literacy is not exclusively about the acquisition of a code, but also, and more importantly, a culture. Classroom literacy practices, therefore, can be understood as a particular set of cultural events and it is imperative to critically examine what students appropriate as they encounter school literacy as well as the impact this appropriation has on their identities. To this end, critical multiculturalism further informs an analysis of the assessment practices encountered by CLD children learning English in their classrooms and allows for an examination of what they appropriate as well as the impact this appropriation has on their identities.

Critical multiculturalism, as it relates to education, is influenced by critical pedagogy which “is the term used to describe what emerges when critical theory encounters education” (Kincheloe & Steinburg, 1997, p. 24). Critical theory is “especially concerned with how domination takes place, the way human relations are shaped in the workplace, the schools and everyday life” (Kincheloe & Steinburg, 1997, p. 23). As such, critical pedagogy examines pedagogy as a cultural practice that produces rather than merely transmitting knowledge within uneven relations of power that inform teacher-student relations (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). The influence of critical pedagogy has helped link multicultural education with wider socioeconomic and political inequality.

The aforementioned framing is utilized in this paper to critically explore assessment, one of the dimensions of schooling that Cummins (2001) identified as influential in shaping power relations students encounter within learning contexts. Cummins argued that an educator’s role definition with respect to assessment can be characterized along a *legitimation-advocacy* dimension. The legitimating function of assessment occurs when the discovery of deficits is the sole focus of assessment. Within this orientation, students are rendered disabled and pathologized through the use of biased assessment tools that locate “problems” within them. Cummins (2001) suggested an advocacy role to reverse this legitimating function of assessment, a role that requires educators “to become advocates for the students in critically scrutinizing the societal and educational context within which the student has developed” (p. 223). The conditions in which students are learning need to be considered in ensuring that assessment goes beyond psychoeducational considerations that do not take into account a child’s language and culture, genuine partnerships with culturally diverse parents, how encouraged students are to actively use languages they already know and are acquiring, and opportunities for students to demonstrate their strengths in the classroom (p. 223-224).

Methodology/Methods

The study this paper draws on used Critical Narrative Research (CNR) as an expression of ethnography to document and explore children’s literacies and identities in various early childhood education classrooms. CNR is an emerging genre that frequently border crosses a variety of theoretical orientations and borrows from ethnographic traditions while aware of its colonial underpinnings (Clair, 2003). CNR research is concerned with culture, language, and participation as issues of power in need of critique with the intent of change in the direction of social justice (Moss, 2004).

Data collection consisted of two phases of observation in two kindergarten and two Grade 1 classrooms in two schools throughout a school year. During both phases of the research, I engaged in “overt participant observation” (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001, p. 436) and ensured that

research subjects knew that they were being observed. Once university, school board, principal and teacher approvals and permissions to conduct research were granted and secured, preliminary briefing sessions with students took place. The briefing introduced and made explicit my role within the classroom and clarified the information and permission form/letter students took home to their parent(s)/guardian(s). The letters clearly stated the nature of the research as well as the role of the researcher. Letters and permission forms were written in the students' first language to ensure that their parents fully understood the study and were therefore translated into Albanian, Arabic, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish and Turkish. All the remaining students in the classrooms received letters in English in order to inform their parent(s)/guardian(s) of my presence and role within their child's classroom as well as the nature of the study.

During fieldwork, school documents, field notes, photographs and children's work were collected. Interviews with teachers, parents, school board personnel and students were also conducted throughout the year. This documentation was then deconstructed through reflection about and a distancing from the relations of power that informed what was observed. Literacy events, practices, themes, and salient issues that emerged from the data were discussed after they had been contextualized and interrogated for inconsistencies and contradictions. Reconceptualized understandings about the data were subsequently developed through an analytic-interpretive process that began with the archiving, sorting, development, and rereading of data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This process allowed for the juxtaposition and identifying of similarities and/or contrasts within data, which subsequently revealed patterns, themes, narrative threads, and tensions. Data relevant to key issues being examined in this paper from the larger study with respect to assessment are presented as a way of demonstrating and critically exploring key issues that affected CLD children learning English.

Data: "Tricky Things"

All kindergarten children in Ontario are subjected to early identification and screening in order to assess possible disabilities they may have and interventions they may need. The medical model language that names this assessment process is replete with significant and unfortunate consequences for children as they are positioned as patients in need of diagnosing and fixing. A main focus of the early screening is assessing phonics and phonemic awareness. The Rosner Test of Auditory Analysis is the oldest published test of phonemic awareness (Torgesen & Mathes, 1999). The test and other phonemic awareness assessments are believed to be a predictor of reading development. The "ultimate purpose for assessment of phonological awareness is to identify children who are likely to experience reading difficulties" (Torgesen & Mathes, 1999, p. 9). The following sample items from the Rosner are the types of tasks CLD children learning English were expected to answer correctly:

- Say 'coat'. Now say it again, but don't say /k/.
- Say 'stale'. Now say it again, but don't say /t/.
- Say 'smack'. Now say it again, but don't say /m/.

Children in this study found these phoneme deletion-focused items very difficult. Interestingly, adult English speakers also have trouble with these tasks when asked to complete them in anxiety inducing situations (e.g., during research presentations I have given) which in many

ways, resemble what CLD children learning English encounter when they are administered the assessment. Nelson, Nygren, Walker, and Panosha (2006) acknowledged the fact that no studies have addressed the harms of screening and interventions and noted that test “results can erroneously label children with normal speech and language as impaired, potentially leading to anxiety for children and families” (p. 309). Despite the futility of the test tasks, the anxiety they produce, and the lack of consequential validity (Murphy, 1998) phonemic awareness screening has, the results of these tests are used to make pedagogical decisions which are also problematic for CLD children learning English.

Despite the fact that classrooms in which I collected data contained many CLD children learning English, poor phonemic awareness test results were not critically assessed, but rather used to validate the need for 30-45 minute phonics and phonemic awareness direct instruction sessions being implemented within a kindergarten classroom daily by an “expert”. This was disconcerting to the play-based teacher who felt that the test items consisted of “tricky things” children were asked to complete and subsequently punished for by assigning them ineffective and disengaging instruction. The results also contributed to the overall identity of the children within the school as deficient and in need of remedial intervention to help prepare them for Grade 1. This identity was evident in teacher discourse and the official “compensatory” designation the school was assigned as a result of school board and Ministry of Education assessment processes. This designation ironically and unfortunately qualified the school for extra resources that mainly consisted of other problematic assessment and evaluation processes and pedagogically impoverished programs that further pathologized students attending the school.

Data: “Painful”

Similarly, phonics-focused assessment tools and practices consisted of decontextualized, fragmented, meaningless tasks that again were believed to be indicators of development. Despite the fact that copious amounts of research and theory regarding ESL instruction have reinforced the importance of context-embedded instruction (Cummins, 2001) that allows CLD students learning English to use and develop a myriad of resources to help them negotiate and make meaning of a variety of texts and cues (verbal, non-verbal, pictorial, print, etc.), CLD children learning English who participated in this study were subjected to a battery of tests that isolated language and skills in the name of trying to predict whether these students would have reading or other difficulties with learning. Although these tasks are not cognitively difficult, the decontextualized nature of the tasks put students at a disadvantage that ensured poor results. In the case of one of the children in my study named Khaled, the assessment was such a negative experience that his teacher wrote “painful” on the top right-hand corner of the first of a series of assessments she administered to him in kindergarten (Fig. 1). It remains unclear as to whether the assessment was more painful for Khaled to experience or his teacher to administer.

~~MATH~~ Done

counts from memory from 1 to 11

counts with one to one correspondance from 1 to 11 painful

is able to print numbers from 1 to 1

is able to recite phone number no

is able to recite address numbers and street no

is able to create a pattern using blocks (2 attributes, 3 attributes) no

is able to extend a pattern using blocks (2 attributes, 3 attributes) no

identifies rectangle, circle, diamond, square, hexagon, triangle.

identifies red, blue, yellow, green, purple, orange, pink, black, white, grey.

mixing colours: red+blue=purple, red+yellow=orange, yellow+blue=green

is able to read words in environmental print:
Crest, Coke, Stop, Exit, Wheelchair, Lay's, Washroom, Dog, Don't Touch

LITERACY

is able to sing the alphabet song no

is able to identify upper case letters

is able to identify lower case letters

is able to print upper case letters

is able to print lower case letters

is able to print first and last name

is able to identify initial consonant sounds

Figure 1. Khaled's "painful" series of assessments

Letter Recognition Assessment

Student: _____

Date: _____

	Letter	Sound	Word		Letter	Sound	Word
A	x			a			
H	✓			h			
Z	x			z			
P	x			p			
S	✓			s			
L	x			l	x		
D	✓			d			
W	x			w			
I	x			i			
O	✓			o			
K	x			k			
Y	x			y			
C	x			c			
N	x			n			
V	x			v			
R				r			
T				t			
J				j			
F				f			
B				b			
G				g			
U				u			
Q				q			
M				m			
X				x			
E				e			
				a			
				g			

Total Correct: _____ Total Correct: _____

Comments: _____

Figure 2. Sound recognition portion of the assessment series

The letter and sound recognition portion of the series of assessments (Fig. 2) that children had to complete was particularly problematic. Almost all of the CLD children learning English in my study did very poorly on this assessment. One of the teachers recognized this and asked me to administer the test. Normally students would be provided with all the letters of the alphabet on a table (upper and lower) and told to, for example, find the letter “T”. They would then be asked to verbally make the /t/ sound. Finally, they would be asked to say a word that begins with the letter “T”/the /t/sound. Again, most students struggled a great deal with this task. When I administered this assessment I did not conform to the trajectory of the test (letter, sound, and then word recognition/identification) but rather, I started with concretes. For example, I would ask what was in front of the student and I, (a table). Then I would ask the student what sound he or she heard at the beginning of the word table (/t/). Finally, I would ask the student to find the letter “T” (upper and lower) on the table from a selection of five to six letters rather than the entire alphabet. This concrete to abstract trajectory yielded significantly better results with each of the students I reassessed (including Khaled).

What is interesting and ironic about the lack of adherence to following a concrete to abstract trajectory when administering this assessment is that the culture of the learning contexts I observed demonstrated a problematic commitment to developmental understandings of learning. Part of this stemmed from the fact that the official curriculum for kindergarten and Grade 1 was extremely hierarchical and contained statements like, “By the end of Kindergarten, children will...” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1998) and “By the end of grade one students will” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1997), followed by a series of overall and specific expectations children were expected to demonstrate by the end of the school year. These set norms organized around ages and stages are a result of a misunderstanding and misapplication of Piagetian developmental theory that has plagued early childhood education for years. Yet, what was fundamental to Piaget’s theory is the notion that concretes are essential to early learning, and that understanding of abstracts develops in time. As a researcher who is influenced by Vygotsky’s work, I am skeptical of the totality of this notion. I do, however, find the abuses of Piaget in ECE disconcerting in that when his work could benefit children (e.g., during the letter/sound recognition assessment), it is ignored while other models he has developed (age and stage conceptualizations of development) are over-applied and misused to the detriment of children.

I want to note that although I was asked to carry out the letter/sound assessment and did so in ways that allowed CLD children learning English to be more successful, I do not believe that this assessment or phonological awareness assessments are predictors of reading difficulties as they are fundamentally not about reading. Reading is meaning making (Rich, 1998), and all literacy is about making meaning. These assessments are meaningless and do not allow children to demonstrate their literacies, their assets, their competencies, their strengths, or their funds of knowledge. As Cummins (2001) pointed out, they further a “legitimation” function as they identify deficiencies that are unrelated to anything literacy focused. This orientation renders children disabled and pathologized because of the biased and invalid nature of assessment tools that locate “problems” within them. The ways in which students’ deficiency in completing these assessments is understood as related to literacy development is where the real problem and deficiency lies.

Literacy in the 21st century has become theorized in very sophisticated ways. This necessary theorization is representative of how literacy is actually being used and developed in social contexts. These conceptualizations are commensurate with recent definitions of literacy that the Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada (LLRC) have identified in their 2008 position statement. The statement was developed over the course of a decade with input from a variety of

researchers throughout a thorough vetting process. The LLRC defines literacy broadly and understands what it means to be literate as situational. The organization argues that individuals generally acquire numerous literacies as they navigate different linguistic domains and promote understandings of literacy acquisition in a range of developmental, socio-cultural, and media contexts. The assessments I observed being used and have critically analyzed were not remotely reflective of any of these notions and therefore not reflective of what literacy is. Resolutely, they cannot be considered effective tools that will allow educators to assess and develop their students' literacies.

Alternatives: Narrative Documentation and Asset-Oriented Ways of Understanding Children's Literacies

The assessment practices and tools I observed were essentially norm-based and reflective of a deficit and medical model that renders and positions children as inferior and pathological. Instruction offered to the students as a result of poor assessment results mirrored the decontextualized and context-reduced nature of the assessments. Further, it also affirmed and furthered the deficit identities the children were ascribed within these learning contexts as subsequent instruction was also fragmented, incomprehensible, and impoverished. What has been explored thus far demonstrates how links between assessment and instruction can forward a legitimating function of assessment (Cummins, 2001) that can render students disabled. Thankfully, the opposite is also true.

Alternatives to these practices exist and have been utilized in a variety of ECE contexts. The ECE field owes a great deal of thanks to the tireless work done in this area by the pedagogues of Reggio Emilia, Italy as past and present practices developed in this context have demonstrated ways of resisting the pathologization of young children. Further, work done by Margaret Carr and her colleagues in New Zealand in developing the socioculturally based *Te Whāriki* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996) curriculum and its assessment practices, demonstrates how students' competencies can be documented and used to develop effective instruction. Both of these exemplary models of ECE provide effective alternatives to what has been described thus far and will be drawn on to conceptualize assessment practices that are narrative rather than normative, and forward an *advocacy* dimension of assessment (Cummins, 2001) which considers and helps establish conditions for children's learning that are respectful, responsive, and further cultivate assets students possess. Pedagogical documentation, developed in Reggio Emilia, is a practice and process commensurate with these aims.

Pedagogical documentation involves capturing learning moments through observation, transcriptions, and visual presentations that provoke reflection and inspire teachers, children, and parents to consider the significance of the interactions taking place, and the next steps to be taken in teaching and learning (Rinadli, 2001 in MacDonald, 2007). Pedagogical documentation therefore refers to both content and process. The content that comprises pedagogical documentation is artifacts such as audio and video recordings, photographs, and examples of children's work that represent what children do and say, and how pedagogues relate to the children within the learning context. The process involves promoting dialogue and reflection through collaborative co-constructed interpretation of content with children, parents, and teachers (MacDonald, 2007). The cornerstones of pedagogical documentation are observing children closely and making notes, collecting content, discussing this content, and reviewing/reflecting on the content in a collaborative manner as to co-construct what the content

means. Finally, the above process is used to develop future learning opportunities and invitations for children.

Similarly, learning stories are structured written narratives informed and accompanied by visual pedagogical documentation (photos, illustrations, etc.) that document and communicate the context and complexity of children's learning (Carr, 2001 in Perry, Dockett, & Harley, 2007) and the ways in which the learning environment enables and/or constrains learning (Hill, 2011). Learning stories are used as powerful research tools that position the learner at the leading edge of his or her competence and confidence and are structured so that educators first describe learning that is occurring and detail their observations of a child/children engaged in learning (Carr, 2004). Educators review this information and contemplate what it means and what their observations are telling them. This reflection can draw on theory/research and previous learning they may have experienced. Finally, all of this information helps the educator develop learning opportunities and possibilities that identify future instruction or actions s/he can take to capitalize on what s/he saw students doing and learning. As the emphasis in pedagogical documentation and learning stories is on what children can do and what they know, both of these assessment practices are asset-oriented (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008) and reject "at risk" discourses as they position children as "at-promise" (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995) and enable educators to identify and build on students' "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992). Ultimately, they fully demonstrate that disability is social construction rather than something inherent within people as children are assessed for their individual competencies rather than against standardized measures and assessments designed to locate problems and subsequently position them as abnormal and pathological. These assessment practices and processes influenced my understandings of what is possible when it comes to assessment and have affected how I document and analyze my observations during research. As such, I offer the following narrative followed by a discussion of what can be learned from it.

A Gift From Ines

Ines attended senior kindergarten at Elmwood Elementary School after arriving in Canada in February from Argentina. She began receiving ESL support in September of her Grade 1 year. Most of her verbal utterances were in English but she would code switch into Spanish when she did not know the English word (e.g., hielo for ice) or to demonstrate her ability to speak her first language. Such switches were at first very rare for Ines to make in the regular classroom where most of her energy was focused on fulfilling her Grade 1 teacher's expectations. To this end, Ines often mirrored and mimicked what other students were doing, being constantly aware of and attentive to what was happening in the classroom and trying to appear as if she understood everything. It was clear from observing and working with her that conditions within the classroom did not always enable this to happen.

Ines attended ESL sessions with Michelle (the ESL teacher) and her participation during these sessions was qualitatively and quantitatively quite different than during whole class instruction in the regular Grade 1 class. Michelle's encouragement of first language use seemed to foster a comfort level that allowed for Ines' code switching. Interestingly, after an ESL class I noticed Ines beginning to teach her classmates Spanish when the opportunity presented itself in her regular classroom. For example, as I read the regular class two Spanish/English bilingual books, *Hairs/Pelitos* by Sandra Cisneros (1994), and *Taking a Walk/Caminando* by Rebecca Emberley (1990), Ines sat in a chair right beside me in front of the class and happily translated words and sentences within the book into Spanish as her classmates repeated them (e.g., school/

escuela). Throughout the year, some of her classmates would repeat words she taught them. I asked her how she felt about this after observing such an incident. She beamed and said, “It makes me happy.” Ines enjoyed the bilingual books so much that she asked me for her very own copies. I provided her with the books and later, when I asked her if she was enjoying them, she said, “I’m reading with mom. I learn to read in English and Spanish. It’s good. I read with my sister first in Spanish, then in English. My mom says it’s good.” Ines also asked me for more letters in Spanish similar to the one I had sent home with her asking her parents for permission for her to participate in my study.

On one occasion while I was recording observations related to Ines, she came over to me and asked what I was writing. I explained that I was writing about her in order to learn. She asked me if she could write in my notebook. I handed it to her and she drew a picture of a man. I asked her who it was and she replied, “You.” Underneath the picture she wrote, “Man” and “Ombra.”

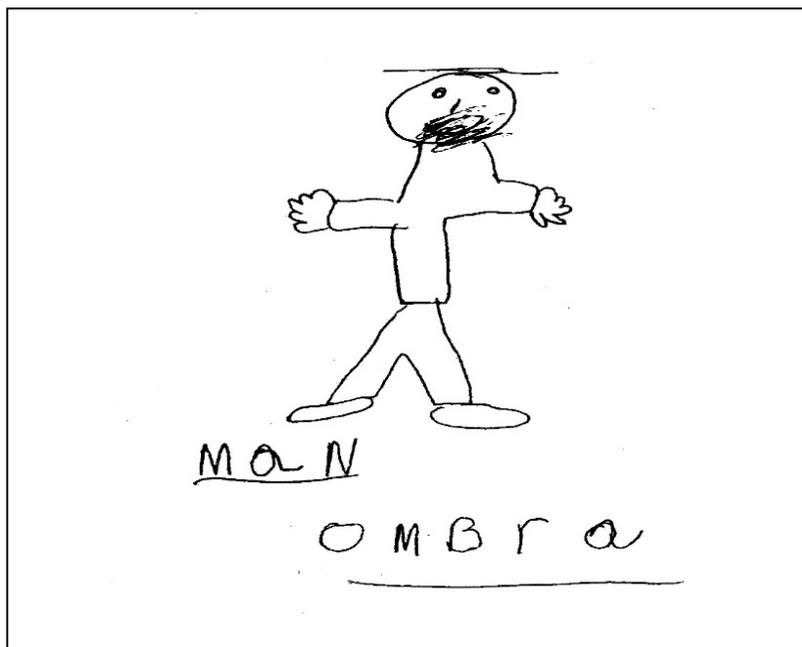


Figure 3. Ines’ drawing of me labeled in Spanish and English

What Can We Learn From Ines?

The narrative I constructed using my fieldwork data could be used to identify what assets Ines possesses and potential instruction that capitalizes on these assets. Despite letter/sound recognition assessments that indicated the opposite, it is clear that Ines’ graphophonemic system was very well developed and that her spelling development in Spanish and English were parallel. Her spelling hypothesis in Spanish was sophisticated and purposeful. Beyond this she was interested in creating pictorial and print texts that mirrored the structure of bilingual books she enjoyed and was immersed in. She used literacy to demonstrate her assets and funds of knowledge. Her linguistic resources were on full display in the “identity text” (texts in which students have invested their identities and reflect who they are) (Cummins, 2005) she created which fully showcased important parts of who she is and what competencies she possessed.

It is clear that she would benefit from further opportunities and invitations to engage in Spanish/English bilingual books during read aloud, independent, and home reading. Further events that position her as someone in possession of valuable assets in her regular class would also greatly benefit Ines. When using bilingual books during shared reading sessions, Ines could sit beside the teacher and either read what was written in Spanish first or translate what the teacher read in English. In fact, this configuration of practice arose as a result of Ines' desire to demonstrate her knowledge of Spanish to her classmates. I replicated this practice with other students who also became my co-teachers and were consequently viewed as classmates who possessed valuable assets that became explicit and instructionally relevant.

Literacy instruction developed for Ines could also be organized in ways that capitalize on her desire to create bilingual books or texts. Her interest could be developed so that she could create a complete bilingual narrative with the help of a classmate. Ines' Spanish would be accessed as would her classmate's English so that both students would be supporting one another as they developed the bilingual book. Again, as the identity text she created mirrored the structure of the bilingual books she was being exposed to, she could use and extend her resources in order to complete this book. As bilingual print seemed to be an effective resource that Ines utilized in her writing, multilingual environmental print consisting of common items (e.g., blackboard, window) and concepts (e.g., colors, numbers) found in the classroom could be displayed. Multilingual posters, alphabets of the languages spoken by Ines and her classmates, product packaging with Spanish written on it, common Spanish phrases, and work done by Ines in Spanish could also be posted and brought into the classroom to create a multilingual print environment that fully recognizes, capitalizes on and further develops her assets. All of these instructional responses are dramatically different than the scope and sequenced, fragmented, direct instruction phonics and phonemic awareness sessions I saw many CLD students learning English having to endure in response to their "deficiencies."

Conclusions

It is clear that assessment practices can facilitate and constrain students' literacies and therefore depict development in ways that are either deficit-based or asset-oriented. Assessment and instruction are inextricably linked. When assessment demonstrates students' resources, instruction can then be organized in ways that capitalize and build on these assets. Assessment and instruction need to be holistic and context-embedded rather than fragmented and context-reduced and as such, foster learning environments where meaningful, purposeful, and responsive curricula are developed and co-constructed with children and their parents. The development of learning environments that generate assessment and instruction in response to children's literacies and language development is essential. Understanding children's cultural and linguistic assets as curriculum resources rather than impediments aids this generative process. Structural and systemic dynamics are essential to consider as a way of operationalizing and supporting this curricular change.

One of the potential ways we might challenge current assessment practices and procedures and question the impact they have on students is to begin conceptualizing education under a child rights framework. Field (1995) suggested, "there are no laws to protect children from the endless labor of education or the view of 'mind' that dominates that education" (in Cannella & Viruru, 2004, p. 115). What would happen if legally we began to insist that schools abide by principles that protect children from the tyranny of what we have configured for them in the name of education? What would their education look like? The following excerpts from the

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) (1989) provide a policy framework that can guide a transformative approach to early childhood education:

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
 - (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate and for civilizations different from his or her own.

Article 31

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational, and leisure activity. (n.p.)

Much of what was done to me as a child, what I saw happening to CLD students in schools as a teacher, and observed in this research in the name of assessment and evaluation did not reflect these articles and the ethos that informs them. UNCROC-informed ECE contexts would cease employing these problematic practices and work to ensure that CLD students' cultures, religions and languages inform lived literacy curriculum designed for them. A variety of ways for children to express and further develop their literacies would be facilitated as context-embedded and co-constructed curriculum would be hallmarks of UNCROC-informed ECE contexts. The focus of education would be to cultivate reciprocal and responsive relationships with people, places, and things and therefore to prepare children to live their adult lives in ways that mirror and replicate these goals and foci. Practices, procedures, and pedagogies would therefore be concerned with *who* children are rather than *what* they must become.

Ultimately, the data and analysis offered in this paper reinforce the importance of multilingual and multimodal literacy practices, accessing students' resources, teacher professionalization and school, board, district, and ministry policies and procedures that support narrative (e.g., pedagogical documentation and learning stories) rather than normative assessment practices. Children like Ines have the right to be seen, treated, and provided for as competent and capable students. Our ability to view and respond to children in this way is crucial to fostering rights-focused ECE.

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