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## Personal Research Agenda

### *Primary Area of Interest*

One of my primary research interests is centered on improving psychoeducational assessment methods, and ultimately instructional practices, for culturally and linguistically diverse populations. A specific interest of mine within this general area is early literacy assessment for English language learners (ELLs). My personal research agenda outlined below includes discussion of my previous and current efforts in this area, specific research questions I plan to address, and the implications of this research for school psychology practice.

### *Previous and Current Efforts*

My research related to psychoeducational assessments for ELLs began during my graduate studies. For my dissertation research, I investigated the validity evidence for an alternate English language proficiency assessment--intended for students who are ELLs with significant disabilities that may prevent their meaningful participation in the general ACCESS for ELLs assessment administered annually in 18 states. The two sources of validity evidence studied were (a) the alignment between the assessment and the WIDA English Language Proficiency Standards and (b) teachers' perceptions of the assessment in terms of its ease and efficiency of administration, its utility for informing instruction, the validity of inferences that can be drawn from its results, and its potential consequences for students who are ELLs with disabilities.

Recently I co-authored an article for an upcoming issue of *School Psychology Forum: Research in Practice* on important factors to consider when selecting and implementing literacy interventions for ELLs. These factors include (a) the student's language proficiency in his or her native language and English across the domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing; (b)

whether the student is experiencing difficulty with literacy skills or demonstrating typical features of the second language acquisition process; (c) the student's prior and/or current literacy instruction in English and in his or her native language; (d) the linguistic demands (native language or English) of the literacy intervention; and (e) the availability of native language support. Careful consideration of some of these factors (e.g., whether a student is experiencing difficulty with literacy skills or demonstrating typical features of the second language acquisition) requires targeted assessment procedures that have not been well researched in the context of a response to intervention (RTI) framework.

### *Research Questions*

I have identified several specific research questions that I would like to address as part of my research agenda over the next three to five years:

1. What are the general growth patterns that exist in Spanish-speaking bilingual students' early literacy skills?
2. How does initial English language proficiency affect growth rates?
3. Which early literacy measures predict later reading performance for ELLs?

### *Implications for Practice*

Addressing these research questions has direct implications for practice. Gaining a better understanding of early literacy skill development in English and Spanish for Spanish-speaking ELLs in bilingual classrooms could inform assessment and instructional decisions. Many scholars have argued that RTI has the potential to reduce the number of inappropriate referrals to special education for students who have not been given adequate instruction to meet their needs, particularly ELLs (Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Prater, & Cirino, 2006). To be able to utilize RTI with ELLs, however, requires research on typical early literacy skill growth patterns for ELLs using curriculum-based measurement.

## Collaborative Multi-Site Research Program Proposal

Researchers have only recently begun to examine RTI procedures, including universal benchmarking of basic reading skills using curriculum-based measurement techniques, for students who are ELLs. Domínguez de Ramírez and Shapiro (2006) reported the results of assessing oral reading fluency in English and Spanish for 62 elementary school students in bilingual classrooms at three time points over the school year using curriculum-based measurement. Assessments of oral reading fluency in English were also completed at the same time points for 83 students in monolingual English-speaking classrooms. As expected, the ELLs read less fluently on English passages than the monolingual English-speaking students across grades and testing periods. Domínguez de Ramírez and Shapiro found that the monolingual students read more fluently in English than the ELLs did in Spanish, and the monolingual students made greater progress over the school year in reading English than the ELLs did in reading Spanish.

Although their study provided preliminary information regarding expected growth patterns in English and Spanish oral reading fluency for ELLs in Spanish-English bilingual classrooms, the authors emphasized the need for a great deal of future research in several areas. First, Domínguez de Ramírez and Shapiro recognized that they did not take into account bilingual students' initial language proficiency in English or Spanish when examining growth rates. Second, although oral reading fluency has been shown to be strongly correlated with comprehension for monolingual English-speaking students (and is therefore often used as a quick indicator of general reading skill), this may not hold true for English language learners (i.e., they may be able to decode words but not fully understand the meaning of the text). A third limitation, not noted by the researchers, is that they did not examine early literacy skills for

kindergarten and first-grade students such as letter naming fluency, phoneme segmentation, and decoding skills, which precede development of fluent oral reading. These are three specific areas in which a multi-site research program could extend the existing research related to early literacy and language development and assessment for Spanish-speaking ELLs.

### *Research Questions*

The following research questions would begin to address these issues:

1. What are the general growth patterns that exist in Spanish-English bilingual students' early literacy skills (i.e., letter naming, letter sounds, phoneme segmentation, and nonsense word fluency in English and Spanish)?
2. How does initial language proficiency in English and Spanish influence these growth rates?
3. Which measures in kindergarten and first grade predict later reading performance for Spanish-speaking ELLs?

### *Participants*

Approximately 200 elementary school students in Spanish-English bilingual classrooms would be participants in the proposed study. The students would be first be assessed in kindergarten and followed through the end of third grade. A multi-site research project would facilitate geographic diversity within the sample.

### *Budget Estimate*

A rough budget estimate for this project is \$100,000. This amount would allow for three data collection periods each year for four years. Data would be collected by classroom teachers with the assistants of graduate students. The actual budget for the project would vary greatly depending on how many research sites and schools are involved in data collection.

### *Potential Advantages and Challenges*

The primary advantages of a multi-site research program to address the outlined research questions are that it would allow for schools in various regions of the country to be included in the study and scholars with complimentary areas of expertise could collaborate on the design of the study and analysis of the results. A potential challenge common with many multi-site research projects could involve data collection inconsistencies across sites, but could be prevented with clear, consistent communication among the research sites.

### References

- Domínguez de Ramírez, R. & Shapiro, E. S. (2006). Curriculum-based measurement and the evaluation of reading skills of Spanish-speaking English language learners in bilingual education classrooms. *School Psychology Review*, 35(3), 356-369.
- Linan-Thompson, S., Vaughn, S., Prater, K. & Cirino, P. T. (2006). The response to intervention of English language learners at risk for reading problems. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 39(5), 390-398.