Capturing What Counts: Language and Literacy Assessments for Adult English Language Learners

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Not everything that counts can be tested and not everything that’s tested counts.

(attributed to Einstein)

Learner assessment is one of the most contested issues in language learning and teaching. Teachers and programs serving bilingual adults are caught between having to use standardized tests to meet accountability requirements – tests that often fail to capture the gains that literacy students are making – and having to find assessments that provide more meaningful insights into who is learning what, how and why. This chapter will address some of the complexities that surround assessments for language minority adults, provide a brief overview of the advantages and shortcomings of standardized tests and then offer descriptions and examples of alternative program-based assessments designed to capture what students can do and the changes that occur as engagement with literacy of all kinds increases.

The Complexity of Assessing Language and Literacy

Assessing literacy is a complicated undertaking made so by the fact that language and literacy are extremely complex processes as yet not fully
understood (Alderson, 2000; Bachman, 1990; Ellis, 1997; Grabe, 1995) Literacy cannot be separated from language, and language is central to cognition, communication and culture. Proficiency in a language entails knowledge of the morphology (word endings and their meaning), syntax (sentence structure and tenses), phonology (sound system) and vocabulary of that language along with the understanding of the socio-cultural conventions that govern language use. Clearly, no one assessment will be able to capture all of these components and multiple assessments will need to be used if a full picture of students’ strengths and challenges is to emerge.

Literacy assessments of bilingual adults are particularly complicated since the ability to understand and express ideas through print adds another dimension to language proficiency. Assessing the literacy levels of individuals who are learning another language is particularly problematic since two language systems interact and literacy in the second language cannot be adequately captured unless we have some knowledge of the underlying proficiency in the first language. If testing is done only in the target language – English for example – program staff will know little about a learner who scored low. Unless programs have a good sense of the literacy levels in the first language, it is difficult to determine if low scores are attributable to language difficulties (the learner has not yet acquired English and therefore cannot read in English) or lack of underlying literacy skills (the learner has not had the opportunity to acquire literacy skills in any language although oral proficiency may be quite good). To get a true sense of the literacy abilities of any bilingual individual, assessments must consider at least three
elements of proficiency: language proficiency in the target language (i.e., English in ESL programs), literacy in the target language (again English in our case) and literacy in the native language. Assessing only one component (such as English literacy) cannot fully inform teaching and is likely to provide a skewed picture of what a learner can do and the progress he or she is capable of making.

The type of assessment selected reflects a program’s orientation toward education and its views on what is important to teach and test. Since curriculum and assessment are linked, a program's choice and implementation of assessments reflect its view of language, literacy, and learning, whether these ideas are consciously articulated or not. Which assessments are chosen and how the assessment process is carried out not only illustrates what "counts as success" but also reveals something about the roles that learners and teachers play in the program. In essence, assessment decisions are based on pedagogical (and in some cases political) concerns that reflect the philosophies, theories, and approaches that a program supports. If assessment is to be an effective part of an ESL literacy program, it must fit into the overall framework the program has chosen for itself. (See also Wrigley 2004)

**Approaches to literacy assessment**

Given the many perspectives on the roles, functions, and uses of literacy, it is not surprising that approaches to literacy assessment vary widely. Some programs focus on evaluating overall communicative competence through integrated tests, while others focus on one or more particular areas, such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. As the emphasis on basic reading,
reinforced by the “No Child Left Behind” Act, continues, tests that focus on the components, or sub-skills, of reading are finding their way into adult literacy (Strucker, 2002). Now underway is a performance-based assessment developed by the National Institute for Literacy’s Equipped for the Future (EFF) Initiative that uses language and literacy tasks that reflect the challenges that adults face every day as they interact with print, try to understand what others are saying or attempt to get their point across in spoken or written language (Stein, 2000). Although not developed specifically for bilingual adults, the EFF performance-based assessment shows promise in moving the field away from pencil and paper based tests toward assessments that allow learners to demonstrate competence on tasks that reflect real world challenges.

Currently, a wide range of assessments are used by programs serving language minority adults. While there are some attempts underway to use curriculum standards to link what’s being tested to what’s being taught, most states now require a standardized test for accountability and leave it up to individual programs to create and use alternatives. In their summary of assessment and evaluation Lytle and Wolf (1989) divide assessment being used in adult literacy programs into four areas:

- standardized tests, which may be either norm referenced (students are compared to each other, most often across programs) or criterion referenced (student achievement is compared to an externally derived standard)
• materials-based assessment, in which assessment is based on a particular set of teaching materials, often commercially packaged and sold
• competency-based assessment, in which learner performance is compared to pre-established competencies that need to be achieved
• participatory assessment, in which learners play a significant role in deciding both the content and process of assessment.

For program purposes, we can combine these four assessments areas into two broad categories:

• General assessments, such as standardized tests, that are designed to measure achievement, knowledge, and skills of large groups of students across programs. The standardized tests selected by states are said to have “content validity” (they measure the components related to language and literacy development). Since they are used across states and curricula differ a great deal from site to site and program to program, standardized tests don’t reflect what individual teachers teach. Nor are they related to the goals that propel immigrants to participate in programs. These tests do, however, reflect the larger goals of the system, namely to improve the language and literacy skills of adults (as defined by the tests) who are not yet proficient in English.

• Program-based assessments, that reflect the educational approach and literacy curriculum of a particular program. These assessments seek to capture what students know and what they want to know and they tend to take a broader view of literacy, encompassing not only basic skills, but
skills and strategies related to literacy behaviors use across cultures and languages. Some programs, most notably those serving youth, may include knowledge, skills, and understanding related to affective factors and social and emotional development (Wrigley, 2003).

**Standardized testing**

When it comes to systematic assessment across programs in the general assessments category, standardized tests dominate adult education. This is true for second language learning, adult literacy, and ESL literacy. One reason for the popularity of standardized assessments may lie in the history of testing in the United States, and the recent mandates of the National Reporting System which has emphasized the need for program accountability and sees program quality largely in terms of increases in test scores and less in data that demonstrates that education meets the needs, desires, and interests of the adults for whom the system is designed (Merrifield, 1998).

Since the focus of adult ESL in the United States is on the acquisition of English proficiency, not on the development of bilingualism and biliteracy, there are no standardized tests in languages other than English that have been normed on adults. Research studies in adult ESL literacy that have sought to gain a sense of the relative level of native language literacy that an adult English language learner possesses have had to rely on standardized tests, such as the Woodcock reading battery, that were developed for children (Condelli and Wrigley in press).
**Advantages of standardized tests**

Standardized tests are popular because they offer certain advantages: (1) their construct validity and scoring reliability have been tested; (2) they are cost-effective and don't require a great deal of training to administer; (3) funding sources accept them as part of the documentation of program accountability; (4) they allow for comparisons of learner progress across programs; and (5) they give learners a sense of where they stand compared to students in other programs (see also Brindley, 1989)

**Shortcomings of standardized tests**

In spite of their apparent advantages, standardized tests have a number of disadvantages. These are most evident in the standardized tests commonly in use in adult literacy, that is tests that are pencil and paper-based and use a multiple choice formats. In general, these types of standardized tests

- fail to distinguish between language, literacy, and culture. In other words, they don't tell us whether a learner has trouble with an item because (1) he or she is unfamiliar with the cultural notion underlying the task, (2) lacks the requisite knowledge of English vocabulary or sentence structure, or (3) does not have enough experience with reading and writing to complete the task

- reduce the complexity of language and literacy learning to a discrete set of skills ignoring the integrative nature of language

- don't reflect what has been taught or capture all the learning that has taken place
• don't capture changes in language use and literacy practices beyond the classroom

• don't provide data on the socio-linguistic and affective dimensions of language and literacy

• don't discriminate well at the lower end of literacy achievement, failing to capture experience with environmental print or provide information on the different levels of "initial literacy," such as being able to write the names of one's children but not those of strangers

• focus on print-based tasks, the very things that literacy students have trouble with

• don't provide opportunities for literacy students to show what they can do in "real-life"

**Standardized tests and bilingual adults**

While these shortcomings hold true for any standardized test, there are additional concerns if these instruments are used to assess the literacy levels of adult English language learners often referred to as ESL literacy learners.

ESL literacy learners may not be familiar with the cultural conventions underlying these tests. For example, one ESL test asks students to read a label on a piece of pre-packaged meat, listing weight, price per pound, and total price. Students who are not used to buying their meat pre-packaged may have difficulty understanding the underlying concept, even though they might be able to read the individual words (see Weinstein-Shr, 1990). Standardized tests, in an effort to
be "fair" to all, either discount the unique background knowledge that learners bring to school or assume that cultural conventions are shared across countries.

Standardized tests often fail to distinguish between language problems, in which the learner is unfamiliar with the language or concepts of the test item, and literacy problems, in which the learner lacks the requisite reading and writing skills but could easily respond to similar items presented as part of a conversation.

Standardized tests treat language and literacy as isolated from the social context of the learner. Students are assessed individually and no help may be given or received. ESL literacy students, as a rule, work together to help each other solve problems that require English or reading and writing and often develop strong coping skills and social networks that allow them to deal with problems that require literacy. By disallowing access to resources, peer assistance, or group work, standardized tests fail to measure the very strengths that many bilingual adults bring to class, the ability and willingness to work together and solve problems collaboratively.

In addition, most standardized tests fail to take into account the wide range of literacy practices in which learners engage in their mother tongues. By disregarding the biliteracy aspect of ESL literacy, they give the impression that literacy in English is the only literacy that counts (Macias, 1988, Wiley, 1988) and fail to provide valuable information about learners’ past and current experiences with literacy in two languages (see Rivera and Huerta-Macías, this volume).
Program-based assessments

In an effort to make assessment more responsive to the concerns of learners and teachers, many programs are developing and using alternatives to standardized tests. These assessments are meant to influence teaching and learning, that is they are expected to have “consequential validity” and serve as a tool for continuous monitoring so that instruction that meets learners where they are can be planned and executed. Among the advantages of program based alternative assessments are the following:

• reflect the local curriculum and provide information that is helpful to the program
• are developed by the individual program, sometimes with the help of evaluators or other researchers, and thus are responsive to the program context
• focus on learning processes, not just outcomes, allowing for trial and error instead of giving learners just one chance to answer each question; they do not insist on a "cold start" response$^{13}$
• actively involve learners by giving them the opportunity to (1) discuss their goals and interests in literacy, (2) choose the kind of reading and writing they want to be evaluated on, and (3) talk about what they have learned.

In other words, they are part of a process in which assessment is done with adults, not to them.

Most importantly, perhaps, alternative assessments go beyond conventional skills-based notions of language and literacy. When carried out as part of an
initial intake process and repeated at regular intervals during the teaching cycle, they can provide information that can be used for curriculum development.

Increasingly, alternative assessments also focus on non-linguistic factors, such as learners' changing perceptions of what it means to be literate, how to help one's children to enjoy literacy, increased confidence in one's ability to deal with tasks that require literacy, and a stronger voice in presenting one's own ideas. In addition, assessments that capture turbulence issues (such as illness, unemployment, etc.) and other factors that shape opportunities to learn and success are finding their way in programs serving adult English language learners and their families.

**What should be assessed?**

Given the multi-dimensional nature of language and literacy learning (Kucer, 2001) and the integral relationship between first and second language literacies, decisions regarding what should be assessed and how remain a significant challenge. However, since the needs and interests of adults participating in programs go beyond the acquisition of basic skills, it seems worthwhile to assess knowledge, skills, and strategies in a number of domains and consider progress and success in at least two areas: those related to language and literacy development and those related to non-linguistic aspects particularly increased opportunities.

Evidence of success in language and literacy development may include the following:
• increases in English proficiency, including gains in strategic, socio-linguistic, grammatical, and rhetorical competence

• progress in reading, including increased use of reading and writing strategies; systematic use of verbal and non-verbal clues to access print, predict meaning, and confirm predictions; a broader range of reading materials selected and read; and more sustained reading

• progress in literacy development, including greater ability to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings in print; developing a sense of voice; and demonstrating style and creativity

• greater approximation to standard English writing conventions; increase ability to self-edit

• greater ability to use literacy in efforts to link personal experience with the experience of others and with writings from the larger community, society, and the world

• greater sense of "critical literacy," using language to connect personal and collective experience and to examine the circumstances of one's life

• a broader range of literacy practices in the classroom, at home, in the community, and at work

• a deeper awareness of the role that literacy and biliteracy can play in one's life and in the life of the community.

Evidence of success in non-linguistic domains may include the following:

• increased participation in a language and literacy program and increased engagement with print in both languages
• greater confidence in one’s ability to handle challenges, a feeling of greater independence, and pride in one’s accomplishments

• increased opportunities for job placement or advancement, admission to vocational or training programs, and transition to mainstream ESL or academic classes

• increases in civic engagement and greater involvement in community activities or in efforts to advocate for oneself and others

• greater confidence in one’s own abilities and increased self-efficacy

• greater social and emotional maturity (particularly for populations labeled “at-risk”)

Assessment at different stages of a program

Assessments have multiple functions and multiple uses. They (1) provide information on the context in which literacy occurs (workplace, family, school, community); (2) serve as initial assessments of the strengths that learners bring to the program and of the challenges they face; (3) indicate the levels of proficiency learners have attained in language and literacy; (4) help document the needs, goals, and interests of the learners; (5) document the progress learners are making and the changes that occur in their lives; and (6) provide evidence of program success and show where a learner may need additional development or support.

Different forms of assessments serve different functions, and different types of assessments are used at various stages of a program. These types include
community needs assessments, intake assessments, initial assessments, progress assessments, and performance reviews.

**Community needs assessments**

Community needs assessments are designed to identify the needs and goals of potential participants. Information may include demographic data, and information on employment patterns in the community, and the availability of childcare or transportation services. Needs assessment information is often used to decide on scheduling, class sites, and the kinds of ancillary services that will be provided. At the worksite, the needs assessment often takes the form of a situational analysis,” which describes the context in which the workplace literacy program takes place.

**Intake assessments**

Intake assessments are designed to elicit information regarding learners’ needs, goals, and prior educational backgrounds, including previous experience with both schooling and literacy, whether in English or in the mother tongue. Intake increasingly includes information on how, where, and why learners are using English and literacy in their daily lives, such as at home, in the community, at work, or in their interactions with the school system. Some intake assessments also try to probe the perceptions of literacy that learners bring to class and the expectations that learners bring to the program.

**Initial assessments**

Initial assessments are designed to gauge how proficient a learner is in English and may also measure what levels of biliteracy he or she possesses.
Used as diagnostic tests for placement, for development of a learning plan, or as a baseline against which progress can be measured, initial assessments now frequently include learner self-assessment, and, in some cases, peer assessment.

**Progress assessments**

Progress assessments are designed to show changes in the ways students are interpreting print and using literacy. While these assessments have traditionally been dependent on how well students can do pencil and paper tests, we now increasingly find assessments that look beyond the test and seek information on how learners use literacy and English to explore and express ideas, solve problems, or effect changes in their lives. Progress assessments are often used in formative evaluations designed to provide feedback to learners and teachers and improve program services and literacy classes.

**Documenting social contexts as part of assessment**

ESL programs that are part a comprehensive social service models, most often those that are part of community-based organizations, often take a broader view of what it takes for adults to succeed. They may see success in language and literacy development connected to the larger social, economic, and cultural factors that shape learners’ lives and may seek to work together with the adults they serve to address challenges, improve individual circumstances, and advocate for social change (see Rivera, this volume). In these programs, documenting challenges and barriers to both individual learning and social well-
being provides a basis for understanding the lives of learners and a starting point for advocacy.

Gaining a broader sense of students’ lives beyond the classroom also provides insights to teachers and counsellors who may wonder why some students are angry and hostile while others may appear quiet and subdued but may nevertheless be alienated from their peers and disengaged from school-based learning. These profiles are common in inner city programs that serve immigrant youth who may be part of the 1.5 generation or women who are mandated to improve their work related language skills in order to not lose government support.

**Family and Community Development Matrix**

One assessment that looks at social context is the *Family and Community Development Matrix*, a tool used by a number of community action groups in California and elsewhere serving farm workers as well as by a Youth Literacy Demonstration Program in British Columbia, Canada. As used in the youth project (see Wrigley, 2004), the matrix provides a framework for capturing information that students and parents and other care takers share in interviews and through conversations. All private information remains confidential and is shared in aggregate form only. The matrix helps capture where families see themselves on a continuum from in crisis to thriving along a range of social indicators such as health, family relationships, employment, and safety. This information can then be used for various purposes: to capture social concerns and work with social service agencies to remedy them and to gain insights into
student behaviours so that appropriate support can be developed, and to
document the number of people in crisis being served in a particular program and
to (advocate) for increased funding.

**Major Challenges and Promising Practices**

Alternative assessments are not without their shortcomings. Many teacher-
made assessments are ambiguous and home grown assessments often lack
rigor. They can be highly unreliable and if used unchecked, they may be worse
than standardized tests that have undergone a lengthy process of field testing
and norming. If alternative assessments are to provide more than insights to a
single teacher, teachers must be trained in creating and implementing
assessments and in analyzing and interpreting results. Additionally, teachers
working with bilingual students must also understand the complexities of second
language development. Since most adult literacy teachers are already underpaid
and overworked, asking individual teachers to take on the task of designing tests
is not likely to yield instruments capable of capturing meaningful data on baseline
skills or progress.

If program-based assessments are to be trustworthy and meaningful, they
must be the result of development by teachers and others who have been trained
in the development of performance tasks that use rubrics and scales and know
how to use work samples as a basis for making informed judgments. They will
need experience in conducting needs assessments, talking with students, and in
using observation data to gain a rich picture of what students can do and what
challenges they face. These tasks become more difficult and complex with the
added dimensions that second language and biliteracy development bring. The following section presents two examples of programs who have taken on the assessment challenge and have built frameworks for alternative assessments that are likely to yield rich data and provide meaningful educational information.

*Participatory Assessment in Massachusetts*

In addition to the thrust toward more learner-centered assessments, there is a movement to share control of the evaluation process with the adults who participate in the program. Some literacy educator point towards the need to redefine the role of the learners so that they can become involved in identifying their own goals and purposes for literacy. For example, Wolfe (1988) suggests having learners choose materials to be read during an assessment, select the writings they want to have reviewed, and provide self-reports of progress through journals and peer interviews.

Some programs are beginning to think about assessment as a "service provided to the participants and teachers in the program, rather than a vehicle for funding sources to monitor success according to abstract, generalized standards" (Sterling, 1989, p. #). Lytle and name the others report on the difficulties inherent in sharing control and in setting up a mechanism that involve students assessing each other. They make it clear that changing the process of evaluation and assessment calls into questions many of the underlying assumptions and perceptions held by teachers, administrators, students, and staff. This questioning requires reconceptualizing and reassessing literacy definitions, purposes, interests, and roles. As Hanna Fingeret (1989) points out in discussing
participatory programs, participatory assessment "should be viewed as a process of cross-cultural communication, negotiation, and mutual learning" (p. #).

There are now a number of programs that involve learners in documenting their own language and literacy progress and success.

In *Making Meaning, Making Change*, Auerbach (1990) describes an assessment model that is part of a participatory framework. This model, implemented as part of the University of Massachusetts Family English Literacy Program, looks at the process of designing and implementing an assessment framework and lays out the tools that can be used in participatory assessment. Based in part on the work of Lytle and Wolfe (date), the program suggests strategies for involving students in the assessment process during various stages of the program: during initial intake, as the class moves along, and toward the end of the cycle. The program suggests the following strategies for end of cycle assessments:

- peer interviews in which students ask each other questions that they have generated individually or collectively. Questions can deal with topics such as "what have you learned in the class?," "what can you do now that you couldn't do before?" or "what should change about the class?"
- student-teacher conferences in which questions asked at intake might be reviewed. Answers to these questions can show that learners (1) have made changes in literacy practices (when, where, and how they read), (2) have increased the range of literacy materials they use (movie guides, newspapers, letters), or (3) made changes in the support systems they
use or the support they provide to others (spouses, kids, neighbors), or the type of literacy interaction around literacy in the family (listen to kids read to them, writing notes to the teacher, taking kids to cultural events).

- student self-evaluations in which learners use charts, checklists, or narrative writing to show changes that may have occurred in their goals, interests, and needs for language and literacy
- class evaluations in which groups of learners anonymously provide feedback on the class, discussing what they disliked or what they would change
- program evaluations in which students from various classes come together to discuss programmatic issues like class structure, curriculum content, use of the native language, child care scheduling, class size, grouping, and funding concerns.

A Framework for Assessment of Bilingual Learners in El Paso

Several years ago, the Small Group Instruction Project at El Paso Community College used a curriculum that was based on generative themes important to the students (see Macias and Quintero, (date). For several years, the El Paso program developed a framework that assessed the various areas of language and literacy that bilingual learners, teachers and coordinators considered significant. In trying to evaluate learner progress, the program developed an assessment framework that included the following three assessment tools:

1. a literacy behavior profile that identifies classroom interactions and includes questions such as does this student "attend regularly,"
"participate verbally in class," "use English in class," and "display critical thinking"

2. a reading inventory that includes a description of readings the student has mastered, along with a checklist for indicating evidence that the student has understood the materials, checklist categories include "oral response to affective questions in Spanish (or English)," creative writing response, informal discussion with friends and classmates, and "use of knowledge gained from readings outside of classroom"

3. A student writing evaluation included:
   • strengths and limitations in writing behaviors; descriptors may include phrases such as "writes independently but asks for constant assistance from tutor," "asks tutor for spelling of individual words," and "asks tutor for spelling of entire sentences"
   • mechanical/kinetic skills, such as "writes on lines," "leaves spaces between words," and "forms letters of uniform size"
   • sentence structure skills such as "the student uses adjectives/adverbs/pronouns correctly" and "the students uses complete sentences"
   • affective dimensions of writing. Here categories include "student writes from personal experience," "expresses emotions in writing," "shows pride in work," and "will read aloud to tutor (classmate)"
   • links between classroom work and outside literacy. Teachers are asked to provide examples to items, such as "Has this student
approached you to initiate literacy use? Describe" or "Has the student given you an indication that s/he is using the literacy skills used in your group outside of class? Describe."

The information gathered on these questionnaires about behaviors, skills, and strategies was rated on a 1 to 3 scale (never, sometimes, often) and recorded during the second week of class, at mid-cycle, and at the end of a cycle. During that time, teachers also collected three writing samples to evaluate. In addition to marking quantitative information on the assessment form, teachers wrote a short paragraph outlining the progress that a particular student made during the cycle. For several years, the assessment process was continuously examined and refined to reflect new insights. This type of assessment is promising for learners who are developing bilingual/biliteracy skills. The value lies in its ability to capture progress in underlying literacy behaviors and skills, irrespective of the language in which they are expressed.

Alternative assessments for bilingual adults are relatively new and are threatened by the pre-dominance of standardized testing done to meet accountability requirements. However, a number of programs are now adapting assessments originally designed for literacy programs serving mono-lingual English speakers in K-12 contexts. Although these assessments are sometimes time consuming to develop, the insights they provide can serve to strengthen both teaching and learning.

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1 The project lost its original funding and no longer assesses a broad range of skills.
Promising Assessment Practices

Student-teacher interviews and conferences

Student-teacher interviews and conferences involve discussions between teachers and individual learners. Such conferences may focus on particular pieces of reading and writing that learners are working on, or they may try to document changes that are occurring over time. Some conferences focus on whether learners (1) have made changes in literacy practices (when, where, and how they read); (2) increased the range of literacy materials they use (movie guides, newspapers, letters); (3) made changes in the support systems they use or the support they provide to others (spouses, kids, neighbors); (4) changed the way they use literacy in their family (listening to children's stories, writing notes to the teacher, taking kids to cultural events). Interviews and conferences are particularly appropriate for bilingual learners …..

Reading profiles

Profiles not only assess language and literacy skills that learners have, but also focus on the strategies they use both in reading in the native language and in English. To develop a profile, a teacher or aide may sit down with an individual student and ask her to read a section aloud together with the teacher and then continue reading silently. The teacher may use a chart that captures reading fluency and comprehension along with competence in sub skills related to phonemic awareness, word identification, or understanding of key vocabulary. At higher levels, strategies that students use to make meaning may be captured as well as the teacher encourages students to predict what might happen next, or
connect and idea from a text to something else discussed in class. Information on how well a student is able to retell or summarize a story provides details on that particular skill are and is often an integral part of the profile. Conducting the assessment bilingually offers insights into dual language competency of learners acquiring a new language.

*Reading files and free reading logs*

Reading files and logs record what learners have read and their reaction to it. In some cases, these files include checklists on what learners can read, do read, and would like to read (e.g., the Bible, newspapers, letters from home, TV guides, bills, advertisements, recipes, children’s report cards, paychecks). Other programs might use a box in which students place cards that indicate what they read, when they read it, and how much they liked it. In some programs such as the National Adult ESL Lab School in Portland, Oregon, reading logs capture what and how much students read during a period of Sustained Silent Reading and what their responses are to what is being read. Logs are particularly appropriate for readers developing a new language.

*Writing portfolios*

Portfolios contain samples of learner progress along with comments on the work done. In many cases, learners choose the work they want to see included, such as pieces of other people’s writing they have enjoyed reading, their favorite language experience stories, or samples of their "best" handwriting. As a rule, teachers help students organize the information and, in collaboration with other teachers, decide on procedures for analyzing and interpreting the data.29 Writing
portfolios may contain pieces of text read in English, but reaction in Spanish, or vice-versa.

*Role plays, case studies, and simulations*

Through role plays that surround a literacy event (e.g., an official looking letter arrives in the mail and the group must respond), teachers can assess the coping skills that students use to deal with everyday literacy materials. These coping skills may include guessing meaning from context, looking up key words, checking letterhead, logos, and/or the address of the sender. Asking students what they might do in a particular situations (such as being given a traffic ticket or receiving an eviction notice) can help teachers to identify the level of background knowledge that learners have. Similarly, having someone "play" a mother who has been asked to conference with the child's teacher about a report card will provide information about the learner's experience and expectations of such literacy events. Repeated several times throughout the semester, reports of role plays can help document learner progress in oral language and literacy as well as the development of socio-cultural competence, an added dimension of bilingual/biliteracy development. They also link classroom work to real life situations.

**Conclusion**

Standardized tests using pencil and paper-based multiple choice formats are here to stay. Their ease of use, their reputation for high levels of validity and
reliability and their cost effectiveness are likely to outweigh any shortcomings when large numbers of students need to be assessed and data needs to be aggregated across sites. However, it is now a generally accepted wisdom in education that no single measure should serve as the basis for assessing and evaluating student ability and growth and alternative assessments can fill many of the gaps left by large scale standardized tests. These assessments, if properly designed and implemented by trained teachers, can measure what is taught and capture a much broader range of skills and strategies associated with language and literacy/biliteracy development. Particularly for programs serving bilingual adults, alternative assessments can open our eyes to the communication and literacy skills that adults possess in the native language and can document the changes that occur as a second language is added to a first. (At least one more sentence needed)