



School Psychologists and the Opportunities and Challenges of Serving Dual Language and English Learners: an Introduction to the Special Issue

Carol Robinson-Zañartu¹ · Cathi Draper Rodríguez² · Pedro Olvera³

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As this special issue goes to press, the numbers of students who speak or who are learning multiple languages in US schools continue to rise. Overall, their achievement falls significantly below that of their monolingual peers, and the numbers who leave school early, pushed out by systemic inequities, are staggering. In countries across the world, multiple languages are valued and fostered; yet in the USA, our dual or multiple language learners often are undervalued, confused with students with disabilities, and even viewed as outcasts, especially when their second or third languages are from non-European countries. At best, we as educators and support personnel are undereducated about how to best help these students flourish. What are the issues that give rise to these problems in the USA, and what can school psychologists do about them?

The special issue was conceived in response to the huge interest of California's school psychologists in learning best practices to address a multiplicity of needs of dual language learners (DLLs). Workshops on the topic at recent CASP conferences have been filled to standing room only audiences; school psychologists report having significant and varied concerns about their linguistically diverse students and want more information, if not action, on this issue. Well beyond the issue of assessment for special education, concerns range from how to best work with emotional responses to the trauma of deportation threats to the need for cultural adaptations to evidence-based intervention practices.

School Psychology Educators of California (SPEC) initiated the development of a White Paper, led by this issue's co-editors, that would highlight the comprehensive role of school

psychologists across tiers of service delivery in relation to dual language and English learners. Multiple discussions and opportunities for input over the period of a year led to the opening paper of this issue, which has now been endorsed both by SPEC and by the Board of the California Association of School Psychologists (CASP). The White Paper on school psychological service to dual language learners reflects our strong conviction about taking a strength-based view of our dual or multiple language learners and highlighting the multi-faceted and comprehensive roles of school psychologists, rather than with a major focus on assessment tools and instruments.

This special issue of the *Contemporary School Psychology* highlights articles that approach school psychology's role with dual language learners from a comprehensive perspective. The articles represent contributions from university researchers from California and across the nation, some in conjunction with advanced graduate students, and from bilingual school psychology practitioners. Articles are organized to parallel the White Paper, in that they begin with more systemic issues and roles with the school at large, and move into school psychologists' work with consultation, interviewing, differentiating, assessing, and intervening.

In the first article, Joaquin Aganza, Angelica Gamboa, Elizabeth Medina, and Stephanie Vuelas take on one of the major sociocultural issues of our time—immigration—and frame its fallout for our youth as a mental health mandate for school psychologists. They call the article *Breaking the Silence: A Framework for School Psychologists Working with Students of Undocumented Immigrant Families*, pointing out that too many schools have chosen to avoid these issues because of the sensitivity and challenges associated. They discuss the mental health issues that emerge and their effects on behavior and achievement, as well as best practices across tiers of practice that school psychologists can use in addressing them.

The second article continues the theme of mental health with Latinx students, providing recommended steps for

✉ Carol Robinson-Zañartu
crobinsn@sdsu.edu

¹ San Diego State University, San Diego, CA, USA

² California State University Monterey Bay, Seaside, CA, USA

³ Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA, USA

screening consistent with culturally responsive practice. In their article *Considerations for Mental Health Screening with Latinx Dual Language Learners*, authors Agustina Bertone, Kathryn Moffa, Rhea Wagle, Isabelle Fleury, and Erin Dowdy advocate for universal mental health screening and address some of the issues specific to this population.

The issues of new immigrant students are often left aside by school psychologists, until or unless they are referred for assessment. Authors Yolanda Barba, Andrew Newcombe, Rachel Ruiz, and Natalya Cordero argue that early engagement should be a priority of school psychologists. In this third article, *Building Bridges for New Immigrant Students through Asset-Based Consultation*, they propose and illustrate an adapted consultative approach, the Asset-Based Consultation (ABC) model, with which school psychologists can help teachers address the academic, social, and emotional needs of this group. The ABC model combines instructional consultation and the Cultural Assets Identifier (CAI) within a multicultural, response-to-intervention framework, individually tailored to support school psychologists in teacher consultation regarding newcomer students.

In the fourth article, *Culturally Responsive Interviewing Practices*, authors Michael Hass and Annmary Abdou provide school psychologists with background and rationale for providing culturally aware interview practices. Drs. Hass and Abdou utilize the framework from the *Cultural Formulation Interview* and describe how school psychologists can implement this model with culturally and linguistically diverse families. This article provides school psychologists with a model of decision making when developing interviews for all families and, in particular, families from diverse backgrounds.

In the fifth article, *ASD or ELL?: Distinguishing Differences in Patterns of Communication and Behavior*, authors Andrea Dennison, Susan P. Hall, Jesi Leal, and Deidre Awtry Madres provide a critical examination of the literature to differentiate the needs of English language learners with and without Autism Spectrum Disorder. The authors discuss how complete understanding of these needs will allow for school professionals to make informed decisions regarding choosing research-based interventions. Understanding the developmental differences between learning another language and learning another language while impacted with ASD will allow for schools to make more appropriate educational decisions.

What guidelines, standards, and issues of fairness and equity should guide assessment dual language learners? In the sixth article, *On the Measurement of Cognitive Abilities in English Learners*, Samuel Ortiz presents a critical review of research that has been conducted on the cognitive assessment performance of EL/Dual Language Learners, and discusses the extent to which they conform to these standards and guidelines. He then sets out to provide greater clarity and definition on the many variables that impact the assessment of DLLs, and to share empirically

derived conclusions useful in creating evidence-based assessment. He provides a framework for best practices in cognitive assessments with DLLs with specific attention to the issues of fairness and equity.

The seventh article, *Assessing and Supporting Spanish–English Bilingual Language Development among Latinx Dual Language Learners in Early Learning Settings*, challenges school psychologists to participate early with dual language learners. Authors Kelly Edyburn, Matt Quirk, and Carola Oliva Johnson used a mixed methods study to examine how early childhood educator instructional and contextual factors support the language development of bilingual children and whether these efforts positively impact dual language proficiency. Having found positive impacts of high-quality instruction and use of targeted instructional supports for bilingual acquisition, they advocate for increased attention to bilingual language development in early childhood settings. The authors challenge school psychologists to help improve culturally and responsive instruction and assessment in early childhood settings and to serve as experts in dual language learners' ongoing linguistic development.

The final article, *Supplemental Phonological Awareness and Phonics Instruction for Spanish-Speaking English Learners: Implications for School Psychologists*, by Diana Ginns, Laurice Joseph, Marie Tanaka, and Qingqing Xia reviews existing studies (experimental and quasi-experimental) that report on the effects of supplemental phonological awareness and phonics instruction on the reading performance of Dual Language Learners (DLL) who are Spanish-speaking. The authors identified 10 original studies that met their strict criteria and that had positive impacts in decoding and reading performance. The results and implications for practice are discussed.

We would like to thank each of the authors for their important contributions and would like to acknowledge the work of our very thoughtful reviewers, sought from around the country, who provided detailed support in helping refine each of the articles to assure currency, accuracy, relevance, and value to school psychologists within the context of culturally responsive practice.

It is our hope that the studies, conceptual pieces, interventions, and models for culturally responsive practice found within this *special issue* will provide a foundation from which school psychologists will think and act more broadly on behalf of DLL students and their families. Further, we hope that this will ultimately lead to more equitable outcomes.

Carol Robinson-Zañartu, Cathi Draper Rodríguez, and Pedro Olvera

Guest Co-Editors

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