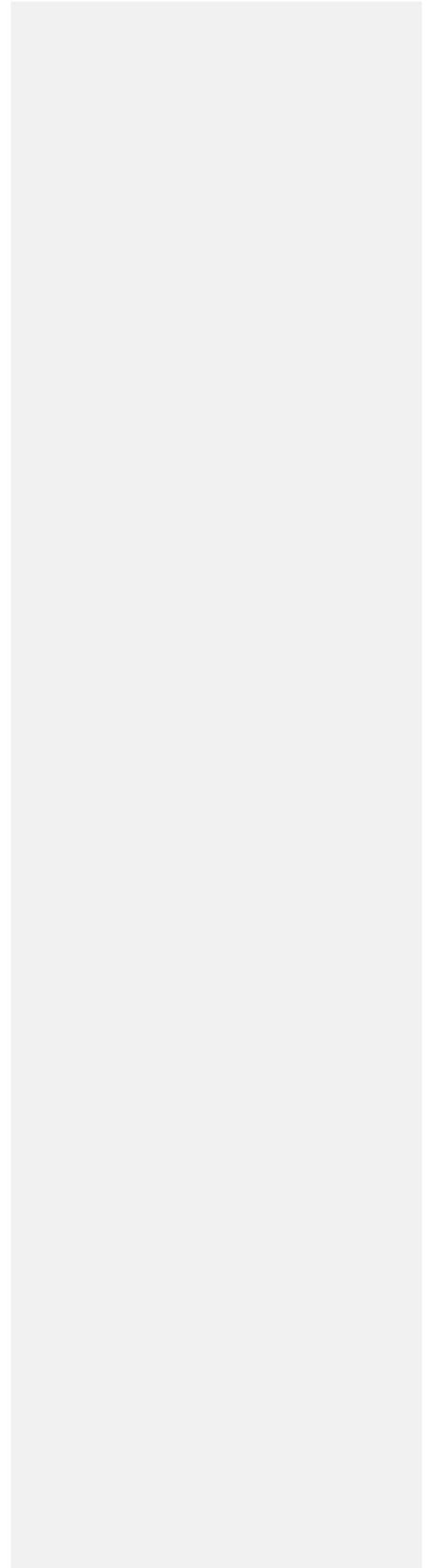


Validity of NECAP and Testing ELL students
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[A very much better draft!](#)



Abstract

The state of Rhode Island mandates that all ELL must take the Math portion of the state mandated test within the first year of attendance in the country. This practice demonstrates the thought that math is a universal language that all individuals are capable of learning regardless of language. While basic computation could be considered universal, the presentation format of the material is not. ELLs' new to the country are not familiar with the testing format and all the language that is included in the presentation. The ELL students who take the state mandated tests are never given the chance to be successful when the information presented is not given at a level and in a language which is understandable to the student. Hamayan, Marler, Lopez, & Damico (2007) state that it takes two years for a student to become proficient in conversational skills where it takes five or more years to become proficient in academic English. The length of time for proficiency depends on many factors including motivation, academic proficiency in their native language, and previous formal schooling.

According to The New England Technical Report (2006) The New England Common Assessment Program(NECAP) was designed to measure what students’ know and are able to do by using a variety of test item types. The overall design of the test supposedly, “provides reliable and valid results at the students level and breadth of coverage of a content area for school results.” The state of Rhode Island uses the NECAP as tool to follow federal regulations under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, in which schools and states are held accountable for student achievement and ability to acquire basic skills in order to become an, “increasingly competitive, global economy,” (U.S. Government, ~~01/29/2009~~).

While the intentions of state testing may have been positive and in the overall interest of the greater good, the English Language Learner(ELL) has been left out of the equation. These mandates are not looking at the specific language needs of this growing population of students. Through the NECAP, ELL’s are never given the chance to demonstrate their true understanding of content, due to the fact that they are forced to take a test in English well before they are proficient in the English language.

ELL’s, students have to wait one year before taking the Reading and Writing portion of the NECAP. Yet, ELL’s are immediately forced to take the math portion of the test. This notion maybe have been justified , if the math test was a valid math test for ELL students. The truth however is that many of the problems are wordy and involve minimal direct testing of math equations and concepts. In order to understand the test, a student must be proficient in academic English.

Comment [RIC1]: What are possible good reasons? If you mention it, you need to explain it. ☺

Comment [RIC2]: Why?

Within the New England Common Test Program 2006-2007 Technical Report, the test preparers analyzed the validity of the items on the NECAP. When looking at item editing to determine uniform style, it was stated in the Technical Report that items, “were written at a reading level that would allow the student to demonstrate his or her knowledge of the tested subject are regardless of reading ability.” This statement suggests, that the authors of the technical report feel that a third grade student will be able to read the test regardless of his or her inability to read at a third grade level. When encountering the NECAP, ELL students may come upon several language - related difficulties including lack of familiarity with the vocabulary, poor reading fluency which leads to slow progress through the test , and difficulty understanding the syntax structure of the words usage may occur. (Dolan, Murray, & Strangman 2006)

Comment [RIC3]: Good!

Reading ability directly affects the accuracy and capacity of students to complete the test. Sentence completion, word reading, rhyming, passage reading, writing responses, problem solving, table reading, and computation cannot be completed without the ability to read and comprehend the words presented for each task. Yet when a third grade ELL student who is not proficient in English, takes any portion of the test, it is assumed by the test creators that they are able to demonstrate their knowledge regardless of their inability to read at a third grade level.

The math portion of the test, assess a variety of skills, but requires a substantial amount of reading to determine the correct method of solving the presented problem. For example, a math item may tell a story about a boy saving his money to buy a bicycle that

cost ten dollars and describe how much he saves each week. The student may be asked to find out how much more he needs to save in order to buy the bicycle. Throughout the problem, numerical words, numbers, and symbols may be used. The ELL student may see the numbers and be able to determine that he/she may need to add the amounts. The student may then add the numbers correctly but miss the second step which is find out how much more the boy money the boy needs. The item will be marked incorrect due to the comprehension of the language and the incompleteness of the second step in the problem.

Wright & Choi (2006) surveyed teachers in Arizona to determine the impact of high stakes testing and ELL students. The majority of the surveyed teachers understand importance of testing and feel that teachers and students need to be held accountable for instruction and learning. Rhode Island and the federal government have determined that the NECAP or similar tests are the tools that should be used to determine accountability for all students, including ELL students. Yet when Rhode Island uses the NECAP test, it is given in only one language and portions are given within the first year of the students' entry into the U.S. before the student is fluent in the English language.

Hamayan, Marler, Lopez, & Damico (2007) state that it takes two years for a student to become proficient in conversational skills where it takes five or more years to become proficient in academic English. The length of time for proficiency depends on many factors including motivation, academic proficiency in their native language, and previous formal schooling. Yet students are regularly participating in this testing that is

no way a true demonstration of their academic ability based solely on the fact that they are being tested in a language that is unfamiliar and in which they have not yet mastered. Neill (2006) feels that the complexity of the language on the test contributes to the fact that students may not be able to understand the test question because the language is unclear or complex. State and formal tests use a “super standard English” that is often unnatural and confusing to the ELL students.

In Rhode Island, ELL students are placed in various learning environments including bilingual classrooms, sheltered ESL, and ESL pullout. Within these classrooms, various languages are used to instruct and support learning. The NECAP is only available in English. Thus creating a conflict in academic language learning and language being tested.

Neill (2005) states that a larger number of “ELL students, which are often more ethnically diverse and more low income, typically start behind in the adequate yearly process race.(AYP) “The ELL students are expected to have to catch up and maintain the AYP similarly to their native English speaking counterparts.” With the ELL students being counted in on the schools progress, it is unlikely that the school will make improvements and demonstrate their true potential. Neill also has determined that many ELL’s are racial-ethnically minority and low income, and have some disabilities. The students who have disabilities will then further be counted toward the AYP goals and increase the chances that the school and student will not show progress. Under NCLB, it is impossible for students to meet APY due to the fact that it takes more than three years

for a student to attain English academic proficiency. Neill (2005)

A larger majority, 70% of the teachers in the previous study, felt ELL students should be excluded from testing for at least three years after entering the United States. (W.& C. 2006) While 90% felt there should be an alternative assessment program for ELL students.

Solutions

With the current efforts to increase the education of students in order to become globally competitive, the need for all students to demonstrate educational proficiency is imperative. Yet with the current high stakes testing it is impossible for ELL students to demonstrate proficiency. Changes need to be made the educational system and government jurisdictions in order to meet the growing needs of the population of ELL students in this country.

Gomez (2000) has deemed assessment portfolios, a systematic collection of student work, could be used as a valid demonstration of academic ability and growth over time. Items must be measured against predetermined scoring criteria such as rubrics, check lists, rating scales, and could include such things as performance-based assessments, writing samples, solutions to math problem solving tasks, lab reports, and norm-referenced tests. (Gomez (2000) The portfolio items are then used to paint a picture

of the students strengths and weaknesses which will drive the instruction of the classroom

teacher and school curriculum planning.

Colorin' Colorado(2007) describes the use of informal performance based assessments as a valid tool in assessing ELL students. Performance-based assessments can be used to assess ELLs' language proficiency and academic achievement through oral reports, presentations, demonstrations, written assignments, and portfolios. When using performance-based assessments, it is important to establish clear and fair criteria from the beginning. Colorin' Colorado feels that it is important to develop these criteria in conjunction with other teachers or specialists at your school. The performance-based assessments promote a wide range of responses and do not typically produce one single, correct answer. Therefore, evaluation of student performances and products must be based on teacher judgment, using the criteria specified for each task. Colorin' Colorado (2010)

Neill (2005) has determined that ELL students who are determined behind should not be expected to catch up and make additional AYP in a the short time frame. Goals should be based on the individual student while maintaining high expectations. When measuring student performance Neill (2005) also agrees that a variety of measures need to be used. This includes portfolios, work sample, and grades. When determining progress, teachers need to select appropriate material in which they can use a standardized process to grade and measure the students abilities.

With this process Neill (2005) recognizes that teacher training is essential in this process. Teachers need to understand which products are appropriate to include in the

samples and scoring procedures need to be determined. Teachers could also benefit from scores being sampled and feedback being given to check and monitor the process and products.

Within the NECAP process could be changed to increase the reliability of the test. Language simplification, the rewording of test items to “minimize construct-irrelevant linguistic complexity,” need to be complete to increase comprehension of the material. Neill (2006) The mathematics portion of the test needs to measure what it says it measures, math. Limit the wording, provide more visuals, and direct computation and mathematic problem solving.

Alicea (2005) demonstrates The World-class Instructional Design and Assessment’s (WIDA) argument that ACCESS for ELL’s is a good instrument to measure and report ELLs’ growth in English language proficiency and academic achievement in a consistent manner. In addition, Alicea (2005) states that ACCESS for ELLs’ will be a tool to measure ELLs’ readiness to take part in large-scale assessment in English with or without accommodations. The ACCESS test should be used to determine the students overall language ability which is turn should be used to determine the students ability to take the state mandated testing in English. Without determining language proficiency before testing, it is undetermined whether the mandated test is measuring language proficiency or actual content knowledge.

Conclusion

Under NCLB, ELL students and schools are being unfairly measured and judged

using the stated mandated high-stakes testing. Children are forced to take tests in language which is not their native language immediately upon entry to the country and AYP goals are set without ever looking at the needs of whole child. Schools are forced to comply and are labeled based on the lack of APY for students who are being unfamiliarly measured. The mathematics portion NECAP test, in Rhode Island, is unjustly given immediately to those who enter the country. Yet studies show that mathematics is not the only subject being solely tested within this test. Items are wordy and written in a form that is unfamiliar to ELL students. Yet the NECAP Technical Report finds that the test is written in a way that students can comprehend the material regardless of the reading ability. A student is unable to successfully complete this test without possessing the ability to read in English and understand technical academic language.

Damico (2007) stated that academic English language proficiency can take at least five to seven years to obtain. Under this wide spread understanding, no child without English proficiency should be asked to take a test which is given in a language they are not proficient in. This includes the mathematics portion of the test which is not solely measures mathematics.

Changes need to be made to the NCLB act in order to fairly and justly measure an ELL students' testing appropriateness. Alicea (2005) has determined ACCESS to be a source of determination for language proficiency. Using this tool, states could be able to understand the students English proficiency and decide when is the appropriate time to give state testing. Yet NCLB needs to be altered to give this option to states.

If states are given the opportunity to use ACCESS as a determining testing factor, students need to continue to be monitored to measure progress. Several of the studies and articles above have shown that portfolios and ongoing performance based assessments are more appropriate for ELL students. Portfolios and performance based assessments include using rubrics, checklists, writing samples, reports, and presentations to name a few. These tools will give an accurate picture of the students' strengths and needs within the classroom and demonstrate the students' growth over time when properly maintained and developed.

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Rubric for the Assessment Issues Research Paper [35 Points; 7 points each]
CEC 8: Assessment; CEC 9 Professional and Ethical Practice; Knowledge: Domain-Specific Knowledge; TESOL Standard 4.a, 5.a.

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	CEC Standards	Approaches Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard
Identification of Issues in the Assessment of ELL Students with Disabilities	Understands various issues of assessment for students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. CEC 8: ICC8K1, ICC8K2, ICC8K3, ICC8K4, ICC8K5, GS8K1, GS8K2, GS8K3, GS8K4, ICC8S6	Did not identify two relevant issues, or the issues identified are not specific to culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities	Adequately identified two relevant issues in the assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities	Identified two highly relevant and critical issues in the assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse learners with disabilities. <i>7</i>
Quality of Research Conducted	Understands assessment issues that impact ELL students. Pursues opportunities to grow in his/her knowledge of the field through well-conducted academic research. CEC 9: ICC9K1, ICC9S8	The research conducted was limited or lacking in currency, depth, or breath.	The research conducted was adequate to discuss the two assessment issues selected and the candidate cited a satisfactory number of relevant sources.	The research conducted was extensive for each topic and the candidate utilized an excellent variety of sources. <i>7</i>
Discussion of the Issues from a National, Regional, and Local Perspective	Demonstrates understanding of the various issues of assessment for special education testing and the various ways that tests can be biased and therefore invalid measures of what ELL students know and can do. CEC 8: ICC8K1, ICC8K2, ICC8K3, ICC8K4, ICC8K5, GS8K1, GS8K2, GS8K3, GS8K4, ICC8S6	The candidate provided some discussion of each issue but failed to discuss the issue from both a national and regional/local perspective. Some citations are relevant; however the citations are lacking in variety, relevance or completeness.	The candidate satisfactorily discussed each issue from a national perspective and linked the national picture on the issue to local or regional conditions. Relevant and complete citations are provided for each issue. <i>5</i>	The candidate provided a rich and highly detailed discussion of the issue from a national, regional and local perspective. The citations are well done. They are well selected, complete, and correctly formulated according to APA format.

CEC Standards

Approaches Standard

Meets Standard

Exceeds Standard

Solutions Provided to Resolve the Two Identified Issues	Advocates and serves as an educational resource for other professionals, students and families in their schools and communities. Provides alternatives to biased and limiting assessment practices. CEC 9: GC9K1	The candidate failed to provide solutions for the two issues as culled from the research conducted, local best practices or his/her own recommendations.	The candidate provided a satisfactory range of suggestions to resolve each issue as culled from research, local best practices and his/her own proposed recommendations.	The candidate provides a range of highly detailed and well-formulated solutions to the assessment issues discussed. ⁶
Professional Presentation of Information	Presents information in a highly professional manner that will serve the local educational community; Writing is a model of English academic proficiency. CEC 9: ICC9S8	The candidate demonstrates some level of academic proficiency in English but deficiencies are noted. Required page length not met or the paper is not well constructed within the page limit set.	Candidate demonstrates a satisfactory level of academic proficiency in English. Required page length is met and the paper is organized and written in a satisfactory manner.	The candidate demonstrates superior proficiency in English for academic purposes. The candidate maintains the required page length while providing a succinct and expertly-organized paper. ⁶

Name _____

Date 12/2010

Score 31