A VISION FOR USING AN ARGUMENT-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR VALIDITY APPLIED TO A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF ASSESSMENTS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS IN SECONDARY GRADES

Brief I: Perspective on Language Development

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The Comprehensive Assessment System (CAS) Framework presents a vision for a system of assessments for English Learners in secondary grades that brings assessment closer to the classroom and fully involves teachers in assessment development and validation.1 The CAS Framework is intended to signal a new and equitable direction and to provoke reflection and debate among all those concerned with improving outcomes for English Learners. This brief describes the perspective on language development for secondary-grade English Learners that underpins the CAS Framework and notes its implications for assessment.

Language Development

English Learners need opportunities in the classroom to develop their language competencies during interactions with peers and teachers while simultaneously learning academic content. Content and language development are not treated as separate entities. Learning disciplinary concepts and analytical practices is not distinct from the linguistic means through which the understanding is developed and expressed; the demands of understanding concepts, practices, and relationships are not privileged above the demands of linguistic resources, nor vice versa.
This perspective on the integration of content and language development incorporates three additional concepts:

**Apprenticeship.** Involves active individuals participating with others for the purpose of developing the mature participation in the activity by the less experienced people.\(^4\)

**The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).** Defined as the distance between what the individual can accomplish during independent problem-solving and the level of problem-solving that can be achieved with the assistance of an adult or in collaboration with a more expert peer.\(^5\)

**Scaffolding.** A process of ‘setting up’ invitations for students to engage and learn in ways that make the student’s entry easy and successful and then, when teacher observation determines, gradually pulling back and handing the role to the students as they become skilled enough to manage it.\(^6\)

In the following example of practice, we can see how these three concepts are employed to support integrated content and language development in an English language arts lesson.

A class with English Learners is being introduced to the genre of narrative. The teacher discusses that the purpose of narratives is to entertain and teach lessons. Next, the teacher reviews a typical narrative sequence: a setting and a character are introduced; the character is portrayed as possessing certain characteristics; then something happens to the character and the resolution to the situation changes the character. She also introduces students to the kind of expressions that move the action forward: *once upon a time, one day, suddenly, after that,* and *then.* After reading and discussing these elements in a narrative, students are asked to create their own narratives. The teacher does not expect perfectly constructed narratives at once. However, as narratives are explored, and new narratives are written, each time, the students’ products get increasingly better as they improve their understanding of the structure and their ability to use English in more sophisticated ways.

The students are **apprenticed** into the language to make sense of concepts (i.e., narrative structure).

The teacher is **scaffolding** the students' understanding of narrative structure. Gradually, the students appropriate the ability to construct narratives.

The teacher targets student's emerging understanding and creates contexts for **learning in the ZPD** which are scaffolded through substantive social interaction.
Effective Pedagogy

Table 1 illustrates the characteristics of effective pedagogy that follow from this perspective on language development and contrasts it with traditional pedagogical practices for English Learners.

Table 1. Changes in Language and Content Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FROM . . .</th>
<th>TO . . .</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeing language acquisition as an individual process</td>
<td>Understanding it as a social process of apprenticeship</td>
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<td>Conceptualizing language in terms of structures or functions</td>
<td>Understanding language as action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeing language acquisition as a linear and progressive process aimed at accuracy, fluency, and complexity</td>
<td>Understanding that acquisition occurs in nonlinear and complex ways</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasizing discrete structural features of language</td>
<td>Showing how language is purposeful and patterned</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treating content and language standards as separate atomistic entities</td>
<td>Weaving clusters of standards together to integrate the development of conceptual understanding, analytical practices, and language development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engaging in activities that pre-teach content</td>
<td>Engaging in activities that scaffold students' development and autonomy as learners with the ZPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing separate objectives for language and content learning</td>
<td>Establishing objectives that integrate language and content learning</td>
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<td>Using simple or simplified texts</td>
<td>Using complex, amplified texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using lessons focused on individual ideas or texts</td>
<td>Using clusters of lessons centered on texts that are interconnected by purpose or by theme</td>
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Implications for Assessment

Assessment of English Learners needs to reflect the nature of the learning context and students' experience in learning content and language simultaneously in order to support changes in pedagogical actions outlined in Table 1.
Endnotes


5 Vygotsky, *Mind in society*


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