

OSLOMET

The practice and challenges of assessing language competencies of multilingual learners

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Assessment in Multilingual Contexts: Trends & Challenges in Foreign Language
Education NKUA, ILTA & CEM

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Multilingual Turn

Turn

- ‘A development that has established itself, or is in the process of establishing itself.’
Meier, 2016

Multilingual Turn

- ‘Focus on superdiverse linguistic contexts... **multilingualism, rather than monolingualism**, as the new norm of linguistic and sociolinguistic analysis. It has increasingly challenged bounded, unitary, and reified conceptions of languages and related **notions of ‘native speaker’ and ‘mother tongue,’** arguing instead for the more complex fluid understanding of ‘voice’.’

May, 2013

Challenges

- Classrooms have been professionally socialized into a monolingual approach and a deficit orientation when it comes to multilingualism (Simensen, 2007)
- Call for a critical study of theoretical and practical implications for the field of language teaching and assessment (Jessner, 2008; Ortega, 2019; Schissel et al., 2019; Shohamy, 2011)



Our study: RQs - Participants





Research questions

- **RQ 1: How is language assessment enacted in English and Norwegian classes?**
- **RQ 2: To what extent do teachers take the language background of language-minority students into account in their assessment?**
- **RQ 3: What dimensions of validity are evidenced in the assessment practices used in elementary English and Norwegian classes?**

Research Design

Mixed Methods Design

- Ethnographic, case study, classroom observations (observation schedule)
 - 6 English lessons - 16 Norwegian lessons
 - 4:2 observers, notes
- Teacher interviews: individual and focus group, recorded (Guided Interview Questions)
- Assessment samples, school-district assessment documents

Analysis

- Content analysis: semi-structured & in vivo

(Analysis of Observations / Assessment Samples: ongoing)

The school

School: Oslo School District

- **2nd grade primary school pupils**
- **Class A: 23 students,**
- **Class B: 24 students**
- **Around seven years of age**

Background



- **English: 1 h pw**
- **Norwegian: 6 hs pw**
- **Screening test: language minority Ss**
- **Formative and Summative Assessment**
- **Grade-free**
- **Compulsory, standardized national tests reading, mathematics, and English in 5th grade**
- **Teachers make use of self-designed classroom tests**

Participants

Pseudo-nyms	Elementary school experience	Teaching experience E/N	Functions	Formal qualification: ECTS	Training testing/ assessment
Lars (male)	1 year, 3 months	5 months (E)	Resource teacher (N)	0 (E) TE and pre-school education	None
Kate (female)	19 years	3 years (E) 16 years (N)	Lead classroom teacher of 2B group	TE 1-10 60 ECTS (N)	Short course in assessment/ screening of reading development
Ida (female)	1 year, 3 months	1 year (E)	Lead classroom teacher of 2A group Resource teacher (E)	TE 1-7 (N, E) 30 ECTS (N) 30 ECTS (E)	Short course in assessment/ screening of reading development

Results



Standardized tests (timed)	Dynamic screening tool	Teacher-made assessments (tests)	Learning-oriented feedback to students	Self-assessment tasks	Student-response techniques
<p>N: Initial screening test of language proficiency: NSL [=Norwegian as a language for learning]</p> <p>N: Annual national screening tests (Norwegian): Intended to measure reading comprehension, vocabulary, orthography</p> <p>E: Optional, but mandated by Oslo school district: Listening- and reading test in 3rd grade</p> <p>(E=English, N=Norwegian, G=in general, no distinction made between the two languages)</p>	<p>N: Good Reading Development: Gradual screening of aspects of phonological awareness and other aspects of reading (word decoding, reading fluency, reading comprehension, Interest in reading)</p>	<p>N: Word/concept graphic organizers</p> <p>N: Dictation</p> <p>E: “Simon Says” (Action-based response to cues: receptive focus)</p> <p>E: “Checks” - often self-assessed</p> <p>E: Greeting every student personally at the door (diagnostic)</p> <p>E: Learning ticket (based on communicated aims and criteria)</p>	<p>N: Monitoring writing tasks by means of active prompts</p> <p>N: Process-oriented differentiated feedback in longer projects based on shared criteria</p> <p>E: Immediate comments from T based on monitoring of individual tasks in the classroom</p> <p>G: Open questions</p>	<p>N: Self-assessment tasks based on criteria (for instance, letter shapes)</p> <p>G: Medals - gold – silver – bronze based on student-made achievement targets</p>	<p>N: 3-2-1 (three things I learned, two things I found exciting, one that I did not understand)</p> <p>N: “Tweet game” Signal at unknown words in oral text</p> <p>G: Red-yellow-green (droplets, bricks)</p> <p>G: Thumbs (up, to the side or down)</p> <p>G: Check-out (post-it notes, exit pass)</p>

Overview of assessment activities

Ex. 1 – Scaffolding

‘I have used many “temabilder” - **topic pictures** – space, seasons, ocean – where we work with everything we see on the picture – words, verbs – **I make sure I don’t take it for granted that everyone knows the words** – and when we read they mark the words they don’t understand – and they can peep when I read a text and they don’t understand a word.’

Kate



Ex. 2 – Elaboration / modification

‘You need to say things in **several different ways**, which one needs to **be more aware of**. And when I need to explain what needs to be done, **I may use simpler sentences or easier words**, so that I am sure that they know what they need to do.’

Ida



Ex. 3 - Elaboration and corrective feedback / recast

‘Then you are **extra conscious** of using **concepts**, speaking with **complete sentences**. When I speak with the Norwegian pupils, who only speak Norwegian, then I do not need to be so aware of answering with complete sentences, or that everything is grammatically correct. But one is even more aware of this when speaking with a pupil who does not speak Norwegian at home, for example. Then **I repeat what they say in correct Norwegian**, for example.’

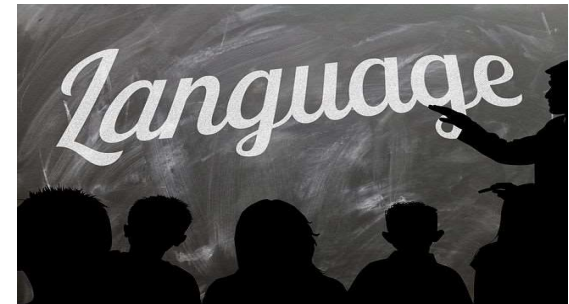
Ida



Ex. 4: Continuous / Informal Orientation

‘... **Listening especially carefully** to the bilingual pupils when they are speaking if they use the **correct sounds**, if they have **correct sentence structures**, and also if they **understand** what I ask about’

Ida



Accommodations

(Do you do anything different with bilingual pupils when you have those individual screenings?)

‘No, not in testing situations. But **when I follow up on test results** I do things differently, **I adapt**. But I see that often those that score low are both bilingual and ethnically Norwegian.’

Kate

Accommodations

‘But when it comes to the (screening) tests, **I am not allowed to explain the tasks in another manner** than how it states exactly in the test materials. However, I **perhaps see the results a bit differently**, for perhaps they could have done better, if I could have explained in another way’

Ida

Construct Validity

‘Well, they [these screening tests] are a bit **unfair** as far as [language-minority students] are concerned. There are words and concepts that Norwegian children don’t use so much’

(Kate, II, 23:23. The example she gave was *stillas* (= ‘scaffold’)

Consequential Validity

It is painful to sit there and not understand anything. So, as I said, **these mapping tests are a little, painful** – to sit an hour and not understand.'

Ida

Screening tests - Accommodations

A father asked me once if I do something about the pupil speaking Moroccan at home – what **he wanted to hear is that we don't put emphasis on that** – that we do it the same – no “forskjellsbehandling” (**no discrimination**) – and that is the answer he got – that I don't put emphasis on it.'

Lars

Place of English

“The **main focus** is on Maths and Norwegian and I try to **squeeze in some English**”
Lars

Washback Effect

‘It is important to take care of Norwegian plus you get **national tests** in those 2 subjects which takes time and energy – important to do it properly – **English becomes more structured later**.’

Lars

Training Needs

‘More about bilingual pupils, I think it’s hard to know, because **there are many languages**, and some similarities and differences, so it could be an advantage to **what these different languages have in common and what is different**, so that you could **be more aware** of. Especially for languages that there are a lot of, for example, **Arabic**, what is typical that they have difficulties with in the Norwegian language, or other languages. That I know very little about. That would make it easier for me to help **the children** and also perhaps **the parents** to help them be aware of the differences’

Kate

Training Needs



‘Methods, techniques – and maybe about bilingualism - I find there is a **big difference between them** and those that have Norwegian as native language – in vocabulary – and **no matter how much we work with them, the others are also advancing at the same time**, so they are always behind’

Kate

‘Those who struggle a lot, or those who have just arrived in Norway. **How should one work with those** who have just come from a **new arrival** class? Or someone who cannot speak any Norwegian? **How should one assist them** when they join the mainstream classroom? ’

Lars

Conclusions

In the Multilingual Context of the Norwegian primary school:

- Amount of Assessment
- Types of Assessment orientations (e.g. summative, scaffolding techniques and other formative practices)
- Affective dimension of assessments (mapping, screening)
- Differentiation – Accommodations (physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development, well-being)
- Issues of content, construct and consequential validity
- Contextual Tensions/Challenges (Test washback, the interplay of L1 and L2, time..)
- Teacher discourse about Assessment

Way forward

- More research
- **Multilingual** Assessment Literacy
- **Action Research**
- **Communities of practice**





Mona



Dina



Dragana



Therese



Language Assessment Quarterly

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group

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Thank you!
Tusen Takk!
Ευχαριστούμε πολύ!

