ABSTRACT
                This guide examir s problems in the assessment,
evaluation, and teaching of language minority children who come from
diverse sociocultural backgrounds. School system must find valid
means to assess linguistic minority students and must offer
instructional approaches that can facilitate growth and development.
General guidelines for assessment include understanding the referral
question, selecting assessment tools based upon reliability and
validity, using caution in interpreting test results, employing more
than one measure, and avoiding inferences not warranted b the tests.
The guidelines are applicable when using such assessment tools as
observations, interviews, objective personality inventories, or
projectives. Sociocultural influences are likely to have a major
i pact on the student's performance on intellectual assessment, on
evaluations of learning disabilities, and on the measurement of
socioemotional adjustment. Care must be taken so that assessment
procedures accurately measure the characteristic of interest rather
than sociocultural factors. Teachers can provide an educational
atmosphere that enhances the growth and development of all students
by understanding their own as well as their students' cultural
backgrounds, by incorporating ethnically diverse teaching materials
in class, and by helping parents to become actively involved in the
education of their children. References are included. (JDD)

Sociocultural Issues in the Assessment and Classroom Teaching of Language Minority Students

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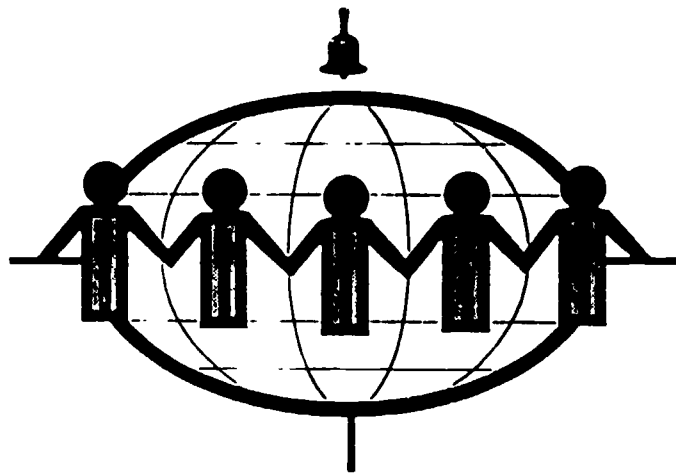
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Introduction

One of the most urgent problems confronting the public school system is the education and training of language minority students. Part of the problem lies in the fact that many of these students are immigrants and have limited proficiency in English. Indeed, considerable controversy exists over the approaches to use in educating language minority students in the United States utilizing bilingual education, English-as-a-second-language programs, immersion strategies, etc.

While the acquisition of English language skills remains a central focus, an important and related concern has also emerged, namely, the difficulties educators (including assessors, teachers, and administrators) have in working with language minority students who come from diverse sociocultural backgrounds. There is ample evidence that educators, particularly those from schools where there are many different language minority students, need to develop skills in dealing with these students who enter the educational system with various learning styles, backgrounds, motivations, and expectations (see Bilingual Education Office, California State Department of Education, 1986). Those unprepared to deal with sociocultural differences among students may be unable to assess students or to provide the kind of instruction that can enhance students' school performance.

This monograph discusses the importance of sociocultural factors in education. In particular, it examines the problems that assessors have in the assessment and evaluation of language minority children. Assessors are increasingly asked to evaluate the academic, emotional, or cognitive status of students while teachers must devise classroom instructional methods that take into consideration sociocultural influences. The intent is to provide a basic understanding of sociocultural factors in assessment. Some discussion is also made of the importance of these factors in teaching. This monograph, therefore, is primarily addressed to those who, in the course of their work, must conduct some sort of student assessment. The evaluation may involve the student's intellectual functioning, speech and language functioning, identification of learning disabilities, or determination of socioemotional adjustment.

It is hoped that the issues and suggestions presented to assessors in this monograph can facilitate the development of more appropriate skills in the selection, utilization, and interpretation of evaluation tools for language minority students. The suggestions offered are general rather than specific in nature. In view of the diversity of assessors, evaluation tools, students, and circumstances, it is inappropriate to provide a rigid and specific set of procedures. The general guidelines are intended to create a context for assessors, in which sociocultural variables are considered.

Importance of Sociocultural Factors

For two reasons, sociocultural factors deserve serious consideration within the educational system. First, public schools are experiencing a rapid growth in language minority students. In the state of California during 1981-1982, Hispanic and Asian students represented nearly one-third of the public school population, as shown in Table 1. In Los Angeles, these two groups comprised about 77 percent of the children in the public school kindergartens. Table 1 also reveals the ethnic disparity between teachers and students: Non-White students comprise about 44 percent of the public school system's population while only 16 percent of the teachers are non-White.

Obviously, not all Hispanic and Asian students speak an ethnic minority language, and not all Whites are fully proficient in English. Furthermore, many Blacks, American Indians, and other ethnic individuals also speak languages other than English. An estimated 23 percent of 5-to-17-year-olds in California speak an ethnic language at home (*California Tomorrow*, 1986).

In the state, about 500,000 students in grades K-12 are classified as limited English proficient students, a figure expected to grow at an annual rate 6-10 percent (Sue & Padilla, 1986). This growth is largely attributable to immigration from Latin America and Asia. Between 1980 and 2000, Hispanics and Asians are expected to double in population, while the projected increase of Whites during this time period is only about 16 percent. These figures point to the need to accommodate, within the educational system, language minority groups and the diverse sociocultural backgrounds that they bring.

Table 1

Population in California Public Schools in 1981-1982

	Students	Teachers
White	56.4%	82.7%
Hispanic	25.8%	6.0%
Black	9.9%	6.5%
Asian	5.5%	3.2%

Source: California Tomorrow (1986)

A second reason is that currently there is increasing recognition of the role that sociocultural factors play in academic performance. The status of various groups is apparent on three indices:

- Educational attainment
- Dropout rate
- Achievement test scores

For Californians over 24 in 1980, 77 percent of Whites, 69 percent of Blacks, 66 percent of American Indians, 44 percent of Hispanics, and 76 percent of Asian Americans graduated from high school (Kaufman & Dolman, 1984). Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians are far more likely than Whites to drop out of high school (Kelley, 1986). Scholastic Aptitude Test scores also vary according to ethnicity. Whites attain a higher average on the verbal subtest than Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians; on the quantitative subtest, Whites exceed all other groups with the exception of Asians.

These differences in performance are influenced by many factors, particularly sociocultural ones. Language minority groups must often deal not only with English language problems but also with sociocultural differences between the home/community environment and the school. Kagan (1986) notes that Hispanic culture tends to emphasize values involving cooperation. When thrust into the American public school system with its emphasis on competition and individual achievement, many Hispanic children may fail to perform as well as other children. Here, the problem does not involve a deficiency in learning skills or motivation; it has to do with a discrepancy in sociocultural values.

Sociocultural factors are important not only because of their effects on educational outcomes of children but also because educators and parents are confronted with dilemmas that are present in a culturally heterogeneous society. For example, how can educators provide an instructional environment that is conducive to learning and the psychological growth of pupils who are Chinese, Hispanic, Puerto Rican, ect., and who are likely to exhibit markedly different skills, attitudes, and background? As mentioned previously, educators are predominantly White and very likely to have dissimilar sociocultural backgrounds from many of their students. The problem here involves philosophy and practicality. On the one hand, an assimilative philosophy holds that the educational system and instructional practices should be standard and uniform; diverse sociocultural groups of students should change (i.e., assimilate) to fit the system. On the other hand, a cultural pluralistic philosophy argues that educators should somehow accommodate students by learning skills that respond to different cultural groups. In essence, educational practices are modified to suit students.

From a practical perspective, a strict assimilation approach has failed. Instructional programs must respond to the sociocultural heterogeneity of pupils if we are to maximize the achievement performance among language

minorities. The issue becomes one of finding the means to respond to cultural diversity rather than one of trying to fit students into a monocultural educational system (Cortes, 1986).

Obviously, language minority students must assimilate to some degree and learn functional skills in mainstream American culture. But how this is accomplished, how respect for cultural diversity can be maintained, and how academic achievements can be enhanced are the central questions. These questions are also of concern to parents and communities. Most parents want schools to facilitate the educational growth and development of their children, without the denigration of their ethnic cultures.

How can this be accomplished? As a beginning step, this monograph examines how educators can take sociocultural factors into account in their assessment and instruction of linguistic minority students. Assessment refers to the academic, socioemotional, cognitive, and speech and language evaluation of students, tasks that have a profound impact on the lives of students. Also discussed are various teaching approaches that can be used with culturally-diverse students. The objective is to provide some concrete suggestions on how educators can become more proficient and effective in assessment and teaching of language minority students.

Assessment: A Case Study

John is an 11-year old Japanese student who was referred by his teacher to the school psychologist. John was excessively quiet and shy in school. Although his grades were slightly above average, the teacher noted that John was extremely anxious when asked to speak in front of the class. The psychologist administered some psychological tests to John and concluded that John was emotionally disturbed, excessively timid, and overly anxious. When informed of the test results, John's parents were shocked. They perceived him as being quiet and well behaved, but able to relate to them and his close friends in an appropriate manner. The parents then took John to a psychotherapist. After reviewing the psychological test results and seeing John for several sessions, the psychotherapist indicated that John was not emotionally disturbed. He felt that the test results were not valid indicators of John's emotional state, since the tests had not been standardized on Japanese Americans. John was shy but not emotionally disturbed (Sue & Padilla, 1986, p. 55).

John's case illustrates several issues to which educators must attend. First, teachers have to conduct evaluations of students. In this example, the teacher made some observations of the adjustment of the student. Second, observations are frequently supplemented by the use of psychological tests, achievement measures, and other assessment tools. Knowing how to use evaluation measures and which ones to use is extremely important. Third, evaluations of students have important implications. They are used to reflect achievements, progress from one class to another, indicate need for guidance and counseling, determine suitability for higher education, etc. Fourth, interpretations of the results of assessment measures are by no means easy or routine, especially with language minority students. In John's situation, different interpretations were offered for the test results. Let us examine these and other issues in assessment, beginning with an overview.

The Importance of Accurate Evaluation

In assessment, we gather information and draw conclusions about the traits, skills, abilities, emotional functioning, and suitability of an individual. Assessment occurs constantly in our lives everyday. When we judge the suitability of a person for a job, a dating partner, etc., we are making an evaluation regardless of whether formal or informal means are used. The main problem in assessment is the accuracy of our evaluations: Are the conclusions that we draw accurate and correct? For assessors in the public school system, accuracy is essential because of the important consequences that accompany evaluations in areas such as the following:

Assignment of grades and conducting tests

Teachers must evaluate the performance of students using letter grades and/or narratives describing the achievements of students. These evaluations can influence students' progress from one class level to another and entry into select high schools or universities. Furthermore, grades often affect parent-child relations, as in the case of concerned parents who demand better performance from a failing student, or the self-esteem of students. Teachers frequently administer a variety of achievement tests to students. These tests are used to measure students' progress and learning.

Determination of developmental levels and cognitive functioning

Assessment can also reveal cognitive or developmental deficiencies among students. This is important since proper instructional programs can be made available to students who have been identified as needing special programs.

Identification of socioemotional adjustment

Assessors often notice that some students exhibit adjustment problems ranging from shyness to acting-out behaviors or even psychiatric disorders. The proper identification of these students can lead to special guidance and treatment so that school performance and social behaviors can be modified.

Educators are involved in a variety of assessment tasks that play an important role in students' lives. Because of this role, there is a need to understand assessment concepts and principles, particularly with language minority students.

Assessment Issues

A basic understanding of testing and measurement is necessary in order to minimize invalid conclusions that can be drawn in assessment procedures. While it is beyond the scope of this monograph to present an indepth discussion of psychometric and statistical principles, two key and interrelated concepts are essential in assessment: reliability and validity. These concepts are introduced by the presentation of case examples within a sociocultural assessment context. It should be noted that the ethnic examples should not be construed as characterizing or stereotyping particular ethnic groups. Rather, the intent is to examine concepts by using hypothetical case examples that contrast ethnic differences.

Reliability

At a local high school, teachers have been asked by the principal to select graduating seniors for a scholarship award. The selection procedure involves evaluating the scholastic records of students. The five students having the most outstanding records are then interviewed jointly by two teachers who must select the academically "most outstanding" student. The five students include two Hispanics and three Anglos. After interviewing the students, the two teachers find that their ratings of the students are quite discrepant. In fact, one teacher has rated the two Hispanic students as being the best while the other has considered these two students as the weakest of the five.

This example illustrates a problem in *reliability*. Reliability refers to the consistency of scores obtained by persons. One way of determining reliability is to see how well raters agree with each other, as in the case example. Here, the interview is used as an assessment tool or measure. Reliability of measures or tests can also be examined by other methods such as test-retest, alternate forms, and split halves. In test-retest reliability, the same test or measure is administered on two (or more) occasions to see if individuals receive the same scores. For example, an assessor may administer intelligence tests to a class of students at the beginning of the school year and then at the end of the year. By and large, we would expect the scores achieved on the first administration to be related to the second, This is not to imply that all students will achieve identical scores on the two testing sessions. Scores may differ because of changes within the students (e.g., fatigue, illness or anxiety) or changes in testing conditions (e.g., distractions present during one testing session and absent during the other session).

Nevertheless, if the test is reliable, there should be a high relationship between scores on the first and second tests. Obviously, under some conditions, reliability would not be expected to be high. If the time interval between the first and second administration of the test is long (e.g., testing one's intelligence at age 4 and then at age 32), reliability is usually lower than when the interval is short. Developmental changes among individuals may profoundly affect performances over time. Furthermore, some characteristics that can be measured are more susceptible to changes within the person or within the testing situation.

The consistency of a test can also be determined by using alternate forms or split halves. Alternate-form reliability refers to the correlation between scores achieved by persons who are tested on one form of the test with another comparable form of the test. In split-half reliability, a test is divided into comparable halves, and scores on one half is correlated with scores on the second half. If tests are reliable, we would expect a high correlation between scores on comparable tests.

In working with language minority students, it is essential to ask if tests are reliable. The situation cited earlier illustrates a particular problem in reliability: Why were the two teachers' evaluations of students so discrepant? Although many different explanations are possible, we do know that subjective evaluations of individuals who differ in sociocultural background are particularly susceptible to misinterpretations. Two studies in the mental health field reveal how the cultural background of raters as well as those being rated can have an impact on assessment. Tseng and McDermott (1981) wanted to find out if Japanese and Caucasian psychiatrists differ in the evaluation of Caucasian American patients. They presented the psychiatrists with videotapes of the patients and asked them to make ratings of the patients. The Japanese psychiatrists were more likely than Caucasian psychiatrists to rate the patients as emotionally labile or unstable. Even more striking were the results of a study (Li-Repac, 1980) in which Chinese and Caucasian American therapists were asked to rate the behaviors shown by Chinese and Caucasian clients on videotaped interviews.

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Table 2

Characteristics Attributed to Patients

Patients			
		Chinese	Caucasian
Raters	Caucasian	adaptable alert dependable friendly practical	active aggressive rebellious
	Chinese	anxious awkward confused nervous quiet reserved	affectionate adventurous capable

As shown in Table 2, descriptions of the patients varied according to the ethnicity of the rater and of the client being rated. These two studies suggest that 1) raters who differ in cultural background may use different criteria or norms by which to evaluate others and 2) clients or students who come from different ethnic groups may be judged quite differently by raters. There is a need to be ware of, and to control, the problems in interrater reliability.

Validity

The *validity* of a test is concerned with what the test measures and how well it does so (Anastasi, 1982). When teachers assign grades to students, we assume that the grades reflect the achievement and academic performance of students, rather than, say, the degree to which the teacher likes students. Otherwise, the grading process is an invalid indicator of academic performance. For a test to be valid, it must be reliable. However, a measure with high reliability may not be valid. This can be illustrated in the situation of the two teachers who had to select the most outstanding student. Even if the two teachers had complete consensus on the interview ratings of the five students (high interrater reliability), the interview procedure may be invalid if the ratings were based upon how well the students dressed or how much the teachers liked the students. The interview is not measuring what it should be measuring—namely, academic excellence.

For linguistic or cultural minorities, a great deal of controversy exists over the validity of assessment instruments. The controversy involves whether assessment measures are valid for one cultural group but not another, i.e., the controversy over cultural bias. A number of investigators have argued that tests and measures are often culturally biased.

Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend (1969) reported that on a measure, various ethic groups were compared on level of adjustment. Results indicated that Puerto Ricans scored the highest of any group on psychological disorders. Do the findings mean that Puerto Ricans are more disturbed than other groups? The Dohrenwends were uncertain how to interpret the results. In addition to the possibility that Puerto Ricans are more disturbed, a number of other explanations were important to consider. Perhaps Puerto Ricans tend to endorse items indicative of disturbance, to be more honest and less defensive, etc., than other groups on the questionaire. In order to test the validity of the adjustment questionnaire, the investigators administered the questionnaire to different ethnic groups who were psychiatric patients. Using another measure of adjustment, they selected the patients so that all ethnic groups were comparable in level of disturbance on this other measure. Since the patients were comparable and matched, they should not differ on the questionnaire, if the questionnaire is a valid measure. Results again showed that Puerto Ricans scored higher on the questionnaire. Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend believed that the questionnaire was not a valid adjustment measure for different ethnic groups. They speculated that because of cultural differences in symptom expression on the questionnaire, Puerto Ricans may appear, but not really be, more disturbed.

The well known Larry P. vs. Wilson Riles Federal District Court case in California also illustrates the controversy over test bias. Larry P. was one of six elementary school Black children who were assigned to educable mentally retarded classes on the basis of their performance on standardized IQ tests. Attorneys for Larry P. argued that the tests were biased against Blacks and violated their client's right to equal educational opportunity. Psychologists on both sides of the issue testified in court. Some argued that although the tests had not been normed for Blacks, they were valid. Others testified that the tests were biased and in effect discriminated against Blacks. The Court ruled in favor of Larry P.

The Larry P. case is one of many in which bias in testing has been charged. Some rulings have favored the bias position while others have not. What is important to remember is that tests may have differential validity for different groups and that tests should be cautiously used in such situations.

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Mercer (1971) has shown that performance on IQ tests may be related to sociocultural factors. In her study, Black, Hispanic, and Anglo children were administered an IQ test. Anglos averaged higher scores than the other two groups. Mercer then divided the Black and Hispanic children according to the extent to which the children had been "Anglocized." That is, she rated the children according to whether the children's family was similar to Anglo families in backgrounds, values, attitudes, etc. Interestingly, Black and Hispanic children whose families were quite Anglo in background achieved scores that were much higher than Blacks and Hispanic whose families differed from Anglo families. In fact, these children had average IQs equal to those of Anglos. Mercer believes that IQ tests may be measuring knowledge and skills that are specific to the dominant culture (i.e., Anglo culture) rather than tapping into innate abilities or intellectual potential. *Linguistic minorities may be falsely labeled as retarded or as lacking intellectual skills on the basis of traditional IQ test performance.*

Not all agree that IQ tests are biased against linguistic minorities (see Kaplan and Saccuzzo, 1982). Nevertheless, there is consensus that the interpretation of test results must be cautiously made when comparing groups that differ in sociocultural backgrounds. Let us now turn to general methods used by teachers to assess students, means of trying to reduce bias, and specific tests to evaluate intellectual, cognitive, and emotional functioning.

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General Assessment Procedure

Assessors use various techniques to assess the functioning of individuals. Techniques a psychologist might use, for example, involve observations/ interviews, objective psychological tests, and projective tests.

Observations and Interviews

Observations of overt behaviors provide the most basic method of evaluating others. For example, in the classroom, teachers can observe a wide range of behaviors among students. The students may be listening attentively to the teacher, talking to other students, disrupting the class, daydreaming, etc. On the basis of students' behaviors or appearance, teachers may draw inferences or conclusions about the intelligence, motivation, or adjustment level of students. As an assessment procedure, formal or informal observations must be in terms of reliability and validity. If the observations are invalid and/or unreliable, inferences concerning students may be inaccurate.

Observations are frequently used in conjunction with interviews. The interviewer observes the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of individuals and evaluates the content of what is said. Linguistic minorities pose special problems if the teacher or interviewer cannot speak the primary language of a limited English proficient person. It is often difficult to know if the interviewer's questions in English are properly understood, if the interviewee's responses address the questions or if the interviewer knows what the interviewee is saying. Problems occur even when a bilingual interpreter is used. In one study, Marcos (1979, (p.173)) noted the difficulties in translations involving English speaking clinicians, translators, and non-English speaking clients. He recorded on audiotapes the following interview segment in which the clinician was attempting to evaluate a Chinese client:

Clinician to Chinese-speaking client: *"What kind of moods have you been in recently?"*

Interpreter to client: *"How have you been feeling?"*

Client's response: *"No, I don't have any more pain, my stomach is fine, and I can eat much better since I take the medication."*

Interpreter to clinician: *"He says that he feels fine, no problem."*

In this example, the interpreter did not focus on the client's moods and left out information that might be valuable to the clinician in making an evaluation. A further illustration of translation problems can be seen in the following segment with a Spanish-speaking individual:

Clinician to Spanish-speaking client: *"What about worries, do you have many worries?"*

Interpreter to client: *"Is there anything that bothers you?"*

Client's response: *"I know, I know that God is with me. I'm not afraid, they cannot get me...(pause) I'm wearing these new pants and I feel protected. I feel good, I don't get headaches anymore."*

Interpreter to clinician: *"He says that he is not afraid, he feels good, he doesn't have headaches anymore."*

Here the interpreter minimizes the problems and fails to follow up on some interesting statements (e.g., what is the significance of wearing new pants?). Marcos suggests that an interviewer and interpreter should beforehand discuss the goals of the evaluation, areas to be assessed, sensitive topics that may have to be discussed, and procedures to be used. Furthermore, the interpreter's level of competence in both languages should be established, and if the interviewee is a family member of the interpreter, any biases in the attitude of the interpreter must be controlled.

Psychological Tests or Inventories

A wide variety of psychological tests are available to assess the intellectual, cognitive, personality, or attitudinal characteristics of students. Many of these tests or inventories are fairly structured in that students are asked to indicate correct answers to tasks or to reveal their attitudes, beliefs, or feelings. In objective tests, the tasks are quite structured and the responses are restricted. For example, a multiple choice test or inventory limits the response alternatives that are possible. In such tests, the responses are readily quantified and compared. The performances of individuals are taken as signs or indicators, say, of intellectual or personality functioning, and norms are developed so that the performance can be evaluated relative to the performance of others. Validity of the test can be evaluated in a variety of ways, such as comparing one's IQ score with subsequent academic achievement in school or comparing one's level of shyness on one inventory with shyness scores on another.

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The term "objective" used to characterize these tests or inventc...s does not mean that they are inherently valid or free of bias. Rather, it refers to the properties of the test that typically involve restricted responses and administrative scoring, and interpretive procedures that are fairly standardized and require little subjecti e skills on the part of the examiner.

In the case of linguistic minorities, the central issue again is one of validity. Objective tests or measures are often standardized and validated with White populations and then used with linguistic minority groups. Under such a situation, the test may demonstrate validity for the standardized group but not for the nonstandardized groups. This is particularly true when the tests are culturally specific—that is, tests that demand skills, backgrounds, or knowledge typical of one culture but not another.

Since one would expect members of one culture in which a culturally specific test is developed to outperform those from another culture, it is possible to find ethnic minority groups scoring higher on certain tests (Williams, 1974). Dove (1968) developed the Chitling Test which assesses knowledge of Black culture. The following items are included on the test:

1. A *handkerchief head* is:
   (a)   a cool cat
   (b)   a porter
   (c)   an Uncle Tom
   (d)   a hobby
   (e)   a preacher

2. T'Bone Walker got famous for playing what?
   (a)   trombone
   (b)   piano
   (c)   *T-flute*
   (d)   guitar
   (e)   *hambone*

Blacks are likely to score higher than Whites on the test (correct answers are c and d to the two items). Obviously, culture specific tests are inappropriate assessment instruments for different groups if they are used to evaluate characteristics unaffected by culture.

If tests have differential validity for different cultural groups, then the groups cannot be meaningfully compared. However, the mere fact that one group scores lower than another group on a test does not necessarily imply that the test is invalid. It may be that one group really does lack the specific skills or abilities being measured. The only way to determine the appropriateness of a measure is to conduct validity studies involving different groups.

Another category of psychological tests is projective techniques. Whereas objective personality inventories restrict responses, projective techniques present individuals with ambiguous stimuli and ask them to freely respond. On the Rorschach Inkblots, individuals are presented with inkblots and must indicate what they see and why they saw what they did. Another projective device is the Thematic Apperception Test in which pictures are shown and respondents are asked to tell a story about the scene in the pictures. In the Sentence Completion Test, a series of incomplete sentences are presented to individuals with instructions to complete the sentences. These projective techniques, and others such as the Word Association Test and Draw-a-Person Test, are intended to reveal the underlying personality dynamics, needs, and concerns of respondents.

Although formal scoring methods have been developed for many projective devices (Exner, 1983), the interpretation of responses is often dependent on the skill and training of examiners. The validity of projectives, then, is to a large extent determined by the skills of the examiner.

In the use of projective techniques with linguistic minorities, one advantage is that examiners can more freely use their interpretive skills and do not have to follow well-established rules or norms for evaluating responses. This is an advantage because on psychological tests, norms are usually derived from White populations. On the other hand, conclusions drawn from projectives are subject to bias and distortion in addition to problems involving the skill and knowledge of examiners in working with linguistic minority groups.

The tests and measures discussed so far do not cover the wide array of different assessment tools available to assessors and psychologists. The previous discussion is intended to introduce the concepts of reliability and validity, especially in the testing of linguistic minorities or culturally diverse groups.

In view of the problems that have plagued assessment procedures, could we continue the testing of linguistic minorities? In the case of Larry ., Judge Robert Peckham ruled that the state of California should discontinue using IQ tests with Black children for any special education purpose. Some individuals have argued that many tests are culturally biased and should not be used for linguistic minorities (Kaplan and Saccuzzo, 1982). However, if evaluations of students' achievement, skills, intellectual, and emotional levels have to be made, and tests are not used, on what basis can these evaluations be made? As indicated previously, if psychologists and assessors simply use subjective judgments, there is evidence that outcomes will be as biased (or even more so) than using tests. What is needed is not the abolition of tests. Rather, means must be found to control or limit abuses that often occur in the assessment of linguistic minorities. In the next sections, general guidelines are presented and then specific considerations for assessing intellectual, cognitive, and socioemotional status are outlined.

General Guidelines for Assessing Linguistic Minorities

Janie is a 9-year old daughter of a recently-arrived immigrant from Mexico. She entered a third grade classroom in the Los Angeles public school system. Her proficiency in English was limited, although she seemed able to comprehend much of what was discussed in the classroom. Janie's teacher was concerned not so much over Janies's English but over her inability to learn. Janie was quiet and cooperative but took a long time to learn tasks. She often responded in a simple and naive manner to questions. A teacher's aide who spoke Spanish was asked to help Janie. After a while, the aide reported that even in conversations using Spanish, Janie seemed to be unable to perform in an adequate manner. The teacher was worried that Janie might be somewhat retarded or deficient in cognitive skills. The school psychologist was then asked to conduct an evaluation of Janie. How should the psychologist proceed?

There are several general guidelines that are important to follow in assessment, particularly when working with linguistic minorities.

Clarify what the referral question is.

The first step in the assessment process is to know what one is interested in measuring. Psychologists are often asked to evaluate the adjustment, personality, or functioning of students. It is far more helpful to the psychologist if the request could be clarified and made more specific. A teacher who is worried about the aggressiveness shown by a particular pupil should specify this rather than mention adjustment problems as the issue of concern. In this way, the psychologist can make more appropriate decisions as to the best evaluation tools to use.

Psychologists also need to know what the purpose is of the evaluation. In the case of Janie, the psychologist may wish to evaluate cognitive and intellectual functioning. The selection of assessment tools may vary depending upon whether the purpose is to simply know Janie's level of functioning or whether Janie is being considered for placement in an Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR) class. The latter task would probably call for more detailed and extensive evaluation because of the importance of the decision.

Select the most appropriate test for the task.

Tests are often used because they are available, have been traditionally used in the school, are familiar to the examiner, or are easy to administer and score. Although factors such as ease of administration, cost, degree of expertise required, etc. must be considered, the most important factors are the reliability and validity of the test to assess the characteristic of interest.

Test manuals should have information on the reliability and validity of the instrument, as well as the test's limitations with certain populations, circumstances, etc. They typically present norms and the samples upon which the norms are based. The examiner should carefully read the information and decide if a particular test is appropriate.

For linguistic minority students, special precautions are necessary.

Assessors are confronted with special problems in trying to assess linguistic differences from Anglos upon whom the tests are typically normed and standardized. What can be done under such circumstances?

First, the assessor should use some judgment in evaluating the testing situation and the outcome of tests. As noted by Garcia (1981), linguistic minorities may differ from more mainstream children in motivation and practice with certain tests. These differences will affect the validity of tests for the various groups, so assessors must be very careful in interpreting the results.

Second, if one chooses to administer to linguistic minority students a measure for which norms do not exist, it is often wise to use several different measures. For example, suppose in assessing Janie's cognitive functioning Janie was administered the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children. Furthermore, assume that norms or validation studies on the WISC do not exist for Hispanic populations. With this assumption, it is clear that Janie's WISC performance should not be routinely interpreted. What is helpful is having other measures of cognitive performance. If, in addition to the WISC, we obtained behavior ratings of Janie's intellectual functioning at home and play, the results from different measures can be compared. Consistency in the results of the different measures would give us increased confidence in the WISC results for a particular child. Marked discrepancies would have to be reconciled. Of course, in Janie's case, a Spanish WISC using Hispanic norms would yield more useful information than a WISC with English norms administered in English.

Third, the assessor would be well advised to be cognizant of and understand the sociocultural backgrounds of students. This is important not only in the administration of tests and measures but also in the interpretation of the results. Linguistic minorities may approach tests with certain mental sets that differ from Anglos. As mentioned earlier, motivation and experience on tests may differ and affect outcomes (Garcia, 1981). By understanding students' cultures, the testing situation and the interpretation of test scores can be placed in a more appropriate context. If the assessor lacks such understanding, a consultant knowledgeable in the students' cultures should be asked to aid in the evaluation.

Finally, for students who lack English proficiency, it may be necessary to administer tests in their native language, especially if the tests are intended to measure attributes other than English proficiency. However, simply translating a test from English to another language does not ensure validity for linguistic minorities. In fact, a translation invalidates the test for which English norms are given; thus, scoring and reporting such scores yields invalid information. Only through validation studies can the validity of a test be determined. Optional, of course, is assessing the student in the primary language by a linguistically-competent professional using tests written in the target language, normed and standardized on a population group similar to the student.

Avoid making interpretations that exceed the limitations of the test or measure.

Tests are designed for specific purposes and users should avoid overinterpreting the results. For example, a bright student who performs poorly in math should not be routinely and generally labeled as an underachiever. The student may be performing well in other subjects and more information is needed. Similarly, on a test designed to measure anxiety, an assessor should avoid drawing conclusions about other attributes (e.g., rebelliousness) for which the test is not designed. It is appropriate to form other *hypotheses* (e.g., the student may be rebellious) but should not be stated as conclusions.

Realize that students' performances on tests are influenced by many factors.

In general, performance is a function of a wide range of variables including student factors, examiner factors, and situational factors. Student factors include personality, sociocultural background, skills, and abilities. They also refer to the mood, mental set, and attitudes at the time of testing. It is sometimes difficult to know whether scores on a test reflect the skills of students or the other factors such as sociocultural background or mood at the time of testing. The skills, attitudes, sociocultural background, etc., of examiners comprise examiner factors. Examiners who lack skills in administering (or interpreting) tests, who have biased attitudes, and who are unaccustomed to working with linguistic minorities may have a detrimental impact on the assessment process. Finally, situational factors are those that are present during the testing process. The physical arrangements (size of room, temperature, and lighting), social context (e.g., social setting), and tester-testee relationship (rapport, trust, etc.) can affect test performance (Korchin, 1976). The task is to see if these factors are influencing performance and to somehow minimize all factors irrelevant to the characteristic being assessed, so that the test has validity in assessing the characteristic.

In summary, assessors and psychologists need to be careful in test administration and interpretation, particularly when working with language minority students. Table 3 outlines the points that should be considered.

Table 3

General Guidelines For Assessment

1).   **What is the referral question?**

   - Be as specific as possible
   - Know how the evaluation will be used

2).   **What is the most appropiate test or measure?**

   - Select tests on the basis of reliability and validity to assess characteristic of interest
   - Take into consideration ease of administration and scoring, cost, expertise required, and test limitations

3).   **What precautions need to be considered in working with linguistic minorities?**

   - Check to see if test has been standardized and normed on linguistic minority population to which the student belongs
   - If the test has not been standardized and normed on the student's group, use caution in interpreting results and employ other measures
   - Know and understand sociocultural background of student and enlist aid of appropriate consultant if necessary
   - Use tests that the student can linguistically understand

4).   **How should test results be interpreted?**

   - Avoid making conclusions on characteristics that are not being measured by the test
   - Observations of these characteristics can be used as hypotheses for further testing rather than as conclusions

Specific Guidelines For Assessment

Schools must often evaluate a wide range of characteristics among students. These characteristics include intellectual and cognitive functioning, speech language/auditory functioning, perceptual-motor abilities, reading level, achievement in content subjects, career interests, and socioemotional adjustment. Sometimes, tests are given periodically to assess the growth and development of students on these characteristics. At other times, assessment is necessary in order to make decisions, such as the placement of students in special classes or programs, as well as to identify the status of students who appear to have deficiencies or problems. In view of the large array of tests available and of the possible combinations of tests (a battery of tests), it is virtually impossible to adequately discuss all tests that are commonly used. For the purposes of this monograph, the focus is upon the assessment of linguistic minority students in the areas of intellectual, cognitive learning, and emotional functioning.

Intellectual Assessment

Alan is a 10-year old, fourth grader whose family moved from Taiwan to the United States two years ago. His parents were relatively poor in Taiwan and wanted their son to have an opportunity to receive a good education and to better his life. During the past two years, Alan's father took his family to three different cities, because in his work as a cook he was unable to secure permanent employment. Alan could speak some English but was somewhat behind his classmates. What concerned the parents was that Alan was achieving barely passing grades. The father felt that Alan was lazy and constantly berated him for his grades. Alan's teacher was also worried because he seemed intellectually slow and unable to think and comprehend. She did not believe the difficulty was simply attributable to Alan's English skills since he was able to define words. The teacher suspected that Alan has a learning disability and suggested that he be given an intelligence test such as the WISC. The teacher then discussed the situation with a colleague who recommended against an intelligence test. The colleague felt that the test results would not be valid in view of Alan's Chinese background and limited English proficiency.

One can see at least two major issues in Alan's case: What is the level of intellectual functioning and what are the appropriate procedures or instruments to use in making an evaluation for a linguistic minority student? These two issues, of course, confront many educators. If the goal is to determine Alan's intellectual ability, an evaluation should also examine the possible role that other factors play. For example, Alan's intellectual performance can be influenced by the following sociocultural factors:

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- Language—perhaps Alan's difficulties stem from
  an inability to fully comprehend English, despite the
  teacher's belief that language was not a major
  stumbling-block.

- Sociology differences—moving from Taiwan
  may have created value conflicts or adjustment
  problems that interfere with academic performance.

- Socioeconomic status—his parents' low
  socioeconomic status may have limited Alan's
  previous educational and learning environment.

- The family's frequent relocations could have made
  it difficult for Alan to progress normally in school.

- The father's interaction with the son may have
  created, or may indicate, emotional conflicts within the
  family that affect performance.

Any or all of these factors may account for Alan's performance, so that his scores on the WISC would probably not be an accurate reflection of his intellectual ability. Thus, it is important to collect as much information as possible so that scores can be properly interpreted. The assessment might include a detailed life history of Alan, his socioemotional adjustment, language skills, etc. If there are any signs of physical problems (e.g., perceptual-motor, visual, or reading difficulties), a physical examination is advisable.

In selecting tests to assess *intellectual ability*, the goal is to find tests that accurately measure ability rather than level of acculturation, reading skills, English language skills, degree of adjustment, socioeconomic class, etc. The assessor should select those tests that are best suited to a particular student. For example, for a student who has difficulty reading in English, an intelligence tests that largely relies upon English reading skills would be inappropriate. Obviously, in the case of linguistic minorities, a number of challenges are posed, and no single test can control for English skills, cultural background, etc. Indeed, there are no culture free tests. However, some tests are "fairer" than others in assessing linguistic minorities, or portions of test may rely less on English verbal skills than others. On the WISC, two major divisions assess verbal and performance intelligence. Many linguistic minority children score higher on the performance than the verbal tasks because the tasks require English proficiency and more cultural knowledge specific to American society. The verbal portion may therefore be less accurate than the performance portion in estimating the intellectual ability of linguistic minorities. A Spanish version of the WISC is available.

Attempts have been made to develop culture fair tests that primarily rely on pictorial, figural, or spatial tasks (e.g., the Leiter International Performance Scale, the Culture Fair Intelligence Test, and the Raven Progressive Matrices). However, no test has been found that is "fair" to all cultures. Ideally, selection of tests should be tailored to particular students, so as to minimize the influence of characteristics (e.g., English or cultural values) that are not of interest in the assessment process. Schools are well-advised to keep a list of tests, indicating validity, limitations, ability to control certain characteristics, and populations for which the tests are intended. (A list of linguistically-competent professionals available to administer the tests would also be helpful).

Learning Disabilities

Specific learning disabilities can loosely be defined as disorders in which there is a severe discrepancy in achievement and intellectual ability in listening comprehension, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or calculating mathematics. Learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, emotional disturbance, mental retardation, or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage are not considered specific learning disabilities (Adelman & Taylor, 1986). How serious the discrepancy between achievement and ability must be poses a major difficulty in assessment. For linguistic minority students, the assessment task is especially problematic because of three points. First, understanding or using language is involved in the definition of learning disorders. Language minorities may show English language limitations that can be confused with general language deficiencies. Second, these students may experience emotional conflicts in cultural values that are reflected in achievement. Third, sociocultural differences may, in effect, be experienced as "disadvantages." As argued by Anastasi (1982), when one must adjust to and compete with others from another culture, one's cultural differences could be seen as "cultural disadvantages." Let us examine a case example to illustrate some of these points.

Victor, an eighth grader from a Mexican-American family, exhibited major problems reading even simple English. When asked to read a passage, Victor would read slowly, omit or add words, and lose his place in the passage. The teacher believed that Victor had a reading disorder. She also noticed that the WISC-R had been administered to Victor two years ago. His verbal scores were much lower than his performance scores, although his overall IQ was about 90. A psychologist was called to evaluate Victor's ability to read. The psychologist was prepared to administer a battery of tests including the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities, Bender Visual-Motor Gestalt Test, WISC-R, and Graham-Kendall Memory for Designs Test, as well as to have a neurological evaluation. After discussing the situation with Victor's parents, the psychologist began to doubt the reading disability possibility. The parents reported that Victor had no difficulty reading in Spanish, a fact confirmed by a Hispanic consultant to the case. Apparently, Victor was terrified at having to read aloud in English and ashamed he could not perform as well as classmates. This fear inhibited his

ability to read even when not performing in front of the class. That Victor's problem was caused by psychological (and perhaps cultural factors) rather than a specific reading disability was further confirmed when his English reading level markedly improved after work with a private tutor.

Many linguistic minorities score low on English verbal tasks. This is not surprising because English is often a second language and because families are unable to provide the same level of experience with English found in those families where English has been the primary language for many generations. But for a diagnosis of learning disability among linguistic minorities, one must exclude those deficits caused by emotional, economic, or cultural factors. Assessors should conduct assessments of learning disabilities with several considerations in mind. First, can the child adequately learn, given the right conditions? Many linguistic minorities may show deficiencies because they are unaccustomed to the educational practices in American schools (Kagan, 1986). If, as in the case of Victor, learning can occur, the diagnosis of a learning disability is unjustified. Second, if the deficiency is limited only to English and not to other languages, the diagnosis may be inappropriate. Presumably, a learning disability involves problems in language processing or use—not a problem with just one language. Third, it is important to assess the effects that cultural differences, pyschological adjustment (e.g., motivation, anxiety, and hostility), and socioeconomic status may have on learning. If they have a substantial influence, a misdiagnosis of learning disability may occur.

Socioemotional Adjustment

Assessors must often evaluate the adjustment level of students. Evaluations can be made for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they are used to note the level of responsibility and maturity for some kind of award. At other times, students' personal and social growth may be assessed for the purpose of facilitating their instructional process. Perhaps one of the main reasons for assessing adjustment is because particular students may show problems in aggressiveness, rebelliousness, shyness, reality testing, or motivation.

In the assessment of socioemotional adjustment among linguistic minorities, several factors are important to keep in mind. First, sociocultural factors and discrimination and prejudice often shape behaviors among students. Second, while personality tests and evaluation procedures can describe and compare students' behaviors, it is necessary to understand the nature of these behaviors. Third, the specificity of behaviors and the situations that elicit them must be examined.

Culture exerts a sizeable effect on behaviors. American society encourages individualism and individual competition, self-disclosure, direct verbal communication, and materialism (Kagan, 1986; Shon, 1980). Many non-Western societies and cultures are more likely to emphasize values involving family and the collective (rather than individualism), mutual dependence, and cooperation. It should not be surprising, then, to see

behavioral differences among individuals from different sociocultural groups. The history of prejudice and discrimination against ethnic and linguistic minorities also has an impact. Many minorities may come to believe that they cannot advance through individual effort in the mainstream of American society and show their opposition to the dominant group and its institutions (Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Knowledge and understanding of these factors are important in order to place the behaviors and personality characteristics of linguistic minorities in a proper context.

In using tests or other evaluation measures of personality and adjustment, the guidelines from Table 3 are applicable. It is especially important to not only describe behaviors but also to explain them. Recall the case of John previously discussed. John was excessively shy and quiet in class. He ranked in the bottom 10% of students in terms of assertiveness. Is John emotionally disturbed? In a statistical sense, his lack of assertiveness is unusual since 90% of students score higher. However, let us imagine that John comes from a traditional Japanese family that emphasizes the importance of good behavior, nonassertiveness, and conformity, especially in the presence of an authority figure such as a teacher. Surely, his behavior cannot be interpreted in the same manner as another student who is equally nonassertive but for reasons involving excessive insecurity, lack of confidence, or anxiety. While it may be desirable for John to become more assertive in the classroom, he is not emotionally disturbed.

Seligman (1975) has made a similar point in his discussion of passivity. Depressed persons often exhibit passivity. However, individuals can be passive for instrumental reasons (e.g., staying passive and depressed brings forth sympathy and attention from others), or they can be passive because of feelings of helplessness. Although equivalent behaviors are shown, persons passive because of helplessness are far more emotionally disturbed. Thus, the reasons for behaviors are important to assess.

Finally, personality or adjustment measures frequently tap into situation-specific aspects of a person's behavior. For example, John may be quiet and shy in the classroom; in playing with friends, however, he may be quite assertive and dominant. Most persons behave differently according to situational factors. When we refer to personality, we usually discuss relatively stable and enduring characteristics. The problem is that different cultural groups may show differences in the stability of behaviors and in the degree to which the behaviors are situationally determined. Therefore, in personality assessment, one should determine how stable and global the personality attribute is and how one's sociocultural values may influence stability.

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Teaching Linguistic Minority Students

Because of the importance of sociocultural factors in the assessment of linguistic minorities, it should be apparent that these factors are also critical to consider in teaching. Moreover, the demographic and population changes in the public school system mean that teachers will be increasingly exposed to linguistic minority students. While administrators, parents, and society also play key roles in dealing with this issue, the focus of this section is on teachers. What can teachers do to facilitate the education and development of diverse students?

First, teaching approaches can vary from one extreme to another in trying to accommodate linguistic minority students. As mentioned earlier, one extreme position is that a standard instructional approach should be used and all students must adapt to the approach. This assimilationist perspective has failed and is responsible, to a large extent, for the differential achievement patterns experienced by linguistic minority groups. At the other extreme is the position that instructional approaches should be individualized so that education can match the cultural backgrounds of students. This extreme position also creates problems because it is impossible for 'eachers to provide each student with individualized instruction and because some common core of educational experience is necessary. An approach that incorporates a common core with sociocultural elements is likely to be beneficial.

Second, educational approaches should reflect the cultural diversity present in our society. Not only does this approach better represent our society, but it also allows linguistic minorities to relate to the educational system in a meaningful manner. Linguistic minority students often find the classroom strange, foreign, or "Anglo-oriented," since the content and practices of classes fail to relate to their own experiences. Teachers can develop more culturally diverse and responsive approaches in teaching. For example, teachers' lectures should include references and illustrations that cover different ethnic groups. Topics in social studies classes can include immigration and culture. Textbooks can also be selected on the basis of their multiculture nature. Those with illustrations showing different ethnic groups, discussions of ethic issues, and examples using various ethnic characters would be appropriate to select, among books of equal quality. Finally, guest speakers to present ethnic issues within American society and observance of ethnic holidays or milestones are important. Many of these elements are already included by some teachers. They need to be systematically considered in instructional planning.

Third, as suggested by McGroarty (1986), teachers need to understand their own cultural background as well as those of their students. Such knowledge and understanding can provide insight into the powerful influence of culture and can help to provide more effective instruction. This knowledge is usually acquired through interactions with people from different cultures, self-examination, reading literature, or participating in cross-cultural workshops or events.

Fourth, in interactions with individuals from various ethnic groups, care must be taken not to engage in stereotyping. Blacks are often characterized as being hostile, Hispanics as lazy, and Asians as shy. These stereotypes are demoralizing and may result in a self-fulfilling prophecy. How do we know when a characterization is accurate or not? For example, are the statements that Hispanics are family oriented and that Asian parents demand higher levels of achievement, also stereotypes? When contrasting cultures, it is appropriate to make general statements concerning cultural values or cultural characteristics of groups. The problem of stereotyping occurs when group statements are applied to individuals and cultural characteristics are assumed without adequate justification.

Fifth, teaching methods should take into account cultural learning styles of various groups. As noted by Kagan (1986), many persons from non-Western cultures are accustomed to learning in cooperative rather than competitive settings. If this is the case, teachers may want to experiment with different instructional approaches. All students—not just linguistic minorities—may benefit from the use of varied instructional approaches (Kagan, 1986).

Teachers must also deal with parents who frequently complain about educational practices or about their children's progress, as indicated in the following:

- A Chinese high school student was extremely distraught over receiving a "B" grade. He told the teacher that his parents found the grade unacceptable since he was expected to always achieve the highest grade.

- One parent criticized the teacher for bilingual and bicultural education. She felt that all children should learn to assimilate into mainstream society.

- A Black parent accused a teacher of racial discrimination for giving her daughter a failing grade. She said that her daughter noticed that the teacher was sarcastic and primitive to Blacks. The school was not helping her daughter to learn anything.

- The parents of two Puerto Rican children complained to school administrators that not enough was being done to teach their children to speak English and to maintain their ethnic heritage.

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These are but some of the complaints and expectations that parents have. The school system cannot be all things to all persons, and teachers are limited in their ability to deal with these complaints. What may be helpful is to openly communicate with parents, to set concrete and realistic goals for their children's progress, and to emphasize the important role that parents can play in the education of their children. Teachers can help interpret each parent's meaning of success (and this may differ according to one's cultural groups) and what kinds of steps are necessary in attaining success (McGroarty, 1986). Furthermore, parents can provide educational experiences, opportunities for developing English skills, (as well as maintaining their primary language) and practice of skills. The point is that *education is the responsibility not only of teachers but also students, parents, administrators, and the larger society.*

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Summary

Greater attention must be placed upon sociocultural factors in education. The public school system is increasingly composed of linguistic and ethnic minority students. In view of this development, the school system must meet certain challenges such as finding valid means to assess linguistic minority students and offering instructional approaches that can facilitate growth and development.

In assessment, general guidelines have been presented. These include:

- Know the referral question

- Select tests based upon reliability and validity

- Use caution in interpreting tests results and employing more than one measure

- Avoid making inferences not warranted by the tests

The guidelines are applicable whether or not the assessment tool involves observations, interviews, objective personality inventories, or projectives. Sociocultural influences are likely to have a major impact on the student's performance on intellectual assessment, on evaluations of learning disabilities, and on the measurement of socioemotional adjustment. Care must be taken so that assessment procedures truly and accurately measure the characteristic of interest rather than sociocultural factors.

Finally, teachers can provide an educational atmosphere that enhances the growth and development of all students. They can try experimenting with different forms of teaching and incorporate ethnically diverse teaching materials in class. Another important task is for teachers to understand their own as well as their students' cultural backgrounds. This may help to construct educational approaches that respond to different students. Teachers should also avoid ethnic stereotypes that can have a detrimental impact on students, strive to communicate openly with parents, and help parents to actively become involved with the education of their children. As argued by Hodgkinson (1983), because of the changing population in the United States, the interests of all are served by knowing how to work with different ethnic groups.

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