Critical issues at the interface between assessment and U.S. language education policy
Assessments are...

...not values-free technical procedures for measuring constructs in systematic and maximally valid ways, accountable only to standards of psychometric quality...

→ USED in a variety of ways by diverse individuals and groups for making decisions and taking actions (Norris, 2000, 2008)...

→ with a clearly SOCIAL dimension, leading to intended and unintended consequences for individuals and society (McNamara & Roever, 2006)...

→ and exerting an undeniable POWER in impacting communities, schools, teachers, and particularly learners (Shohamy, 2001, 2006).
The power of assessment

Teaching to the language test, for example:

ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1986, 1999), & OPI

- A “common yardstick”...
- An “organizing principle”...
- A “proficiency movement”...
- A “quiet revolution”!!!
A mandate to assess in the U.S.

- **NCLB**: English language development of ELLs “LEP to FEP”
- **NCLB**: K-12 school accountability in core academic subjects, “adequate yearly progress”
- **Title VI**: Evaluation of federally funded language assistance and research, “language proficiency”
- **NCATE**: Accreditation of teacher development programs, “highly qualified teachers”
- **CHEA**: Accreditation of higher education institutions, “student learning outcomes”
- **WIA**: Accountability of adult education programs “standardized assessment of outcomes”
A mandate to assess in the U.S.

**Critical assumption:** Mandated assessment leads efficiently to positive educational reform

**Critical questions:** Does it? What else does it do? How do we know?

Hamilton (2003): “Assessment as policy tool”

**NCLB:** English language development of ELLs

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Assessment as language education policy

“What we assess is what we value”
--Lauren Resnick

“How we choose to assess will determine what gets valued”
--Norris
→ U.S. does not have official language policy or language education policy (Crawford, 2000), though some states do.

→ U.S. does have official educational policies, operationalized in the form of assessment practices mandated in laws and by ‘authorized’ organizations.

→ These assessments impact educational practices, intentionally or otherwise (Cheng et al., 2004).

→ Assessment becomes language education policy when what gets assessed shapes whether, what, and how language gets taught, learned, and used (Shohamy, 2001, 2006).
Because of their high-stakes consequences, tests have become *de facto* language policy in schools, and shape the following:

- what content schools teach,
- how it is taught,
- by whom it is taught,
- in what language(s) it is taught.

Kate Menken (2008, p. 183):
Assessment as language education policy

Wayne Wright and Xiaoshi Li (2008, p. 262):

“The real failure here is on the part of U.S. federal policy. NCLB becomes a language policy as it fails to account for the language proficiency of newcomer ELLs and the time it takes to learn enough English in order to be able to meaningfully participate in the same state-wide tests as fluent English speakers. [...] Hence, a test which claims to measure students’ knowledge of math becomes instead a test of English language proficiency.”
Assessment as language education policy

**What gets assessed?**
- ‘Academic’ subjects
- English
- Other languages

**How do we assess?**
- Discrete point
- Performance
- Internal/external

**What do we do?**
- Punish/reward
- Inform learning
- Improve programs

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How do we teach ELLs, what, when?

What happens to indigenous languages and/or L1s?

Is there time for FLs in the schools?

Which standards do we target, and how?

What do qualified teachers have to learn?

How is language education perceived in higher education?

Whose needs take precedence in adult educational programs?
Assessment as policy: One example

**NCLB**: K-12 school accountability in core academic subjects, “adequate yearly progress”

What gets assessed?
- Language arts (reading/writing)
- Math
- Science

What isn’t assessed?
- ‘Artistic’ arts...
- Foreign languages...
- Other subjects

What happens to FL/WL teaching and learning? (Rosenbusch, 2005)

Chinese
Hebrew
Navajo
Arabic
Italian
Korean
German
Japanese
Latin
Russian
French
ASL
Assessment as policy: Another example

What about assessing in immersion education programs, where learners develop in a language other than English for the first several years of schooling (e.g., Hawaiian)?

Assessment options?
- Don’t assess...
- Translate...
- Accommodate...
- Create a new, authentic assessment

Hawaiian Aligned Portfolio Assessment
- Constructed-response, classroom-based tasks in language arts, math, science
- Parent, community involvement
- Curricular consistency
- Agreement on Hawaiian forms
- Respect for culture/language???
- Adapting assessments or values???
- Created by teachers, parents, researchers, community members

NCLB: K-12 school accountability in core academic subjects, “adequate yearly progress”
The colloquium: Presenters

Margo  Richard  Linda  John  Judy  Dorry

► *Note*: lots of people in the U.S. doing work on these issues, especially since 2000

► *This panel*: all working at the interface between mandated assessments and their impact on language learners, language education

► *Discussant*: Commentary on these issues from the language policy perspective

Mary
The colloquium: Framing questions

- How is language education policy in the U.S. being created, enforced, realized via language (and other) assessments?

- What are the consequences of current mandated assessment practices for how language is (or is not) taught and learned? To what extent do these assessment practices promote or inhibit what language educators consider to be “good” teaching practice?

- In what ways does mandated assessment practice shape public perceptions about the value of language education and language use in the U.S.?

- How might assessment practice, mandated or otherwise, enhance the value and effectiveness of language education in the U.S.?

- What actions should applied linguists, especially language testers, be taking now in light of current or future mandated assessment practices in the U.S., and to have a role in the formulation of meaningful (perhaps federal) language education policy?
8:30-9:00 Gottlieb: *The contribution of standards to assessment and language education policy*

9:00-9:30 Duran: *Limits of English proficiency assessments and sociocultural issues*

9:30-10:00 Forrest: *Mandate and reality in New Jersey K-8 world language education*

10:00-10:15 Break

10:15-10:45 Norris & Liskin-Gasparro: *The consequences of accreditation and outcomes assessment for college foreign language programs*

10:45-11:15 Kenyon: *Accountability and assessment in adult ESL education*

11:15-11:35 McGroarty: *Discussion*

11:35-11:55 Audience: *Insightful contributions*