

## CHAPTER

# 3

## Assessing the Writing of Spanish-Speaking Students

### Issues and Suggestions

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In Feb. 1995, a graduate student brought Lupe's writing sample (Figure 3.1) to our university seminar on teacher education. She collected the writing sample as a part of an assignment in the class. When she brought it to our class, she reported that she had shared it with Lupe's English teacher. The English teacher had the following comments about Lupe's writing:

The writing sample confirms every fear I have about Lupe. I think she may have a cognitive processing problem. She has poor vocabulary and grammar. She has a hard time expressing herself either orally or in writing. She has a hard time with logical sequencing. She has been here 7 months. She ought to be doing better. Maybe she needs a special program.

Lupe was in a school where there was limited support for second language learners. After discussing the Lupe sample in class, we asked the student to return to the school and collect a similar writing sample, this time in Spanish (Figure 3.2 A, B).

When Lupe's Spanish writing sample was discussed in our seminar, the students observed a stark contrast. Lupe did not have any of the "problems" with grammar, logical sequencing, or self-expression that she appeared to have when she was writing in English. Further, Lupe is a competent writer and thinker as evidenced by her ability to write about critical contemporary issues and relate them to her own personal experience.

There are many lessons to be learned from the story of the two Lupes. First, assessment practices that look at second language learners only in English often underestimate the cognitive and academic strengths of Spanish-speaking students. If we are truly going to develop bilingual and biliterate students in our schools, then we must assess Spanish-speaking students in both of their languages.

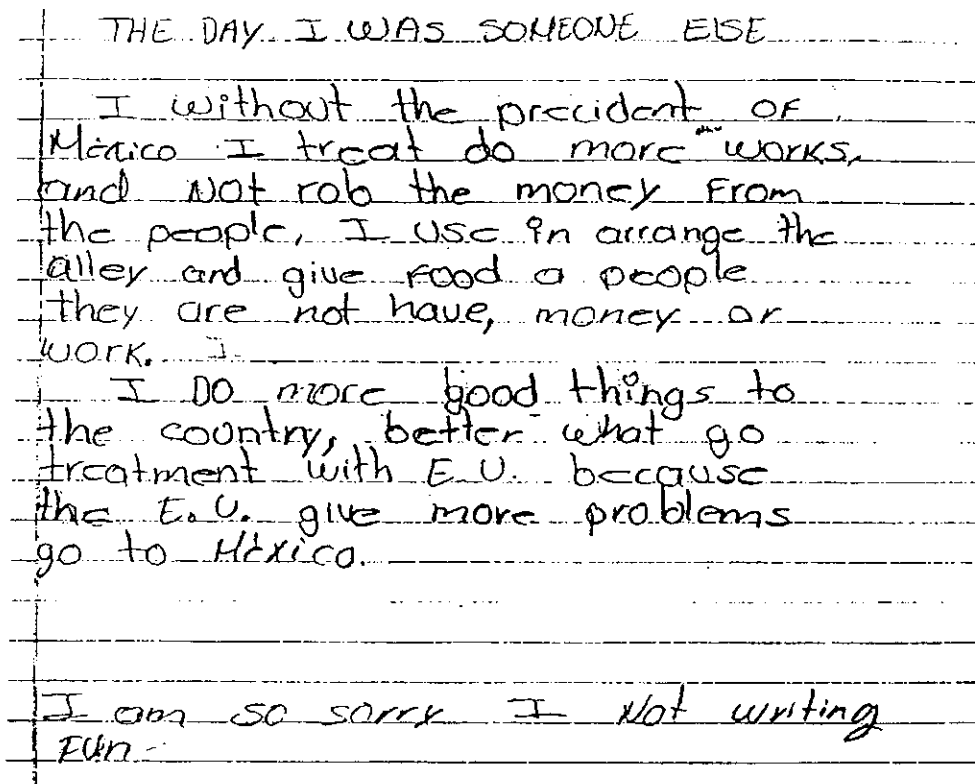


FIGURE 3.1 Lupe's English Writing Sample

Assessment in both Spanish and English is important for students who have had formal schooling experiences before their arrival in the United States, even if they are not in bilingual education programs. It is equally important for students who are in schools where they are learning to read and write in Spanish and English.

## Research Background

Holistic writing assessment that utilizes writing rubrics is thought to be a more reliable means of assessing student writing progress than the use of traditional standardized tests (Fredericks & Rasinski, 1997; Hunter, Jones, & Randhawa, 1996; Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993). Many school districts are now using some form of holistic writing assessment and rubrics as a part of their assessment programs. This type of assessment is being used to document student growth, to determine whether students are meeting district and state writing standards, and as a way to examine how to improve writing instruction.

Districts implementing bilingual programs often assess students in both English and Spanish; however, it is frequently the case that the Spanish assessment

THE DAY I WAS SCHEERRE ELSE

Si yo fuera el presidente de México  
 trataría de hacer más trabajos, no me  
 robaría el dinero de la gente sino  
 lo utilizaría en arreglar calles y en  
 dadas comida a las personas que  
 no tienen ni dinero ni trabajo.

Haría más cosas que beneficiarían  
 al país, en lugar de hacer  
 tratos con los E.U. que lo único  
 que logra es tener más proble-  
 mas y haría que los mexicanos  
 no se fueran a E.U. porque  
 allá es más lo que sufren que  
 el dinero que ganan.

FIGURE 3.2A Lupe's Spanish Writing Sample

If I were the President of Mexico I would try to make more jobs, I would not rob money from people. Instead I would use it to fix streets and give food to people who don't have food or work.

I would do more things that would benefit the country instead of making treaties with the United States the only thing that that achieves is having more problems and I would make it so that Mexicans did not go to the United States because there you suffer more than any money you earn.

FIGURE 3.2B Lupe's Spanish Writing Sample; English Translation

is not valued as highly as the English assessment. For example, many large city school districts regularly report the results of English assessments in newspapers and other popular media but not Spanish assessment data. Bilingual programs are judged based on student acquisition of English and not on the development of bilingualism or biliteracy. For assessment practices of Spanish and English students in bilingual programs to be more reliable, data presenting achievement in both languages must be gathered, analyzed, and reported. As seen in the case

of "two Lupes," too often, only English data is presented for these students, making them look less competent than they really are. Recent research in bilingualism (Muñoz-Sandoval, Cummins, Alvarado, & Ruef, 1998) asserts that the bilingual student brings to learning a linguistic repertoire that cannot be measured in a single language; therefore, developing adequate assessments, in Spanish, for Spanish speaking students, and in English, is crucial.

Current practice in writing assessment for Spanish-speaking students is patterned after writing assessment for monolingual English speakers (Carlisle, 1989). *There is an assumption that effective holistic writing assessment is universal and does not need to be modified when applied in languages other than English or when applied with students for whom English is a second language.* As school districts develop writing rubrics and other authentic assessments to improve their writing programs and assessment practices, rubrics are often developed first, in English, for English speakers. They are then often used with second language learners but rarely modified. Further, these rubrics are then often translated into Spanish without consideration as to how they may need to be modified for Spanish writers.

Gersten and Jiménez (1998) and Goldenberg (1998) state that these notions of universal assessment practices are based on the logic that English and Spanish are both alphabetic languages and, therefore, share many conventions and traditions. They go on to say, however, that aside from logic, there is little actual research to support the universal application of writing assessment practices from English to Spanish or from English for native speakers to English for second language speakers. Gersten and Jiménez (1998) call attention to the need to develop literacy programs and assessment in ways that consider both universal notions of literacy and specific features and functions of particular languages. In short, it is important for assessments, in Spanish, to consider the forms and functions of Spanish as well as the features of appropriate assessment.

Research by Kaplan (1970) and Luther (1997) has established that speakers of languages other than English use discourse styles and patterns that vary greatly from English. These researchers have established that discourse patterns in non-English languages (specifically Spanish and Native American languages) is non-linear. This is significant because it means that speakers of these languages are not likely to write narrative stories and other text that is linear in nature. Further, research by Montañó-Harmon (1991) has established that students writing in Spanish, as well as English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students writing in English, often use the discourse patterns of their native languages; therefore, a writing rubric that is based on the linear logic of English may have as a standard that good stories have a beginning, middle, and end. *Students writing in Spanish may not use this linear logic when writing and, thus, be judged as noncompetent writers.*

During the school year 1997 to 1998, research on writing assessment was conducted at an elementary school in the Denver area. This elementary school is

an inner-city school of approximately 650 students. The majority of the school population at this school is Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicano (85%), with 60% of the students being labeled as limited English proficient. Ninety-six percent of the students at the school are on free and reduced lunch, and the majority are considered to be at risk for school failure.

The research study collected writing samples from 409 students in grades K to 5 in October 1997 and 353 in March 1998. Writing samples were collected in Spanish from students who are learning to read and write in Spanish (n= 205 fall; n=167 spring); in English from students learning to read and write in English (n=204 fall; n=186 spring); and from students who had begun their schooling in Spanish but have subsequently made the transition to reading and writing in English (n=29 fall; n=13 spring). Writing sample data were collected by giving all students a common prompt in English and Spanish. Students were given 30 minutes to write.

Writing samples were scored holistically using the Escuela Brillante Spanish/English writing assessment (see this chapter's Appendix). The Escuela Brillante writing assessment is an adaptation of the Gross Pointe, Michigan writing assessment, and the Greeley-Weld County School District #6 writing assessment (Weld County School District #6 Writing Assessment, 1993). In this case, the Spanish assessment is an equivalent of the English assessment system, including the same scoring rubric. Through scoring and discussing these writing samples with teachers and others at the school and by comparing English to Spanish writing samples, we discovered that Spanish writers and ESL writers write quite differently than their native English counterparts. Significant differences were noted in the following areas:

1. Spanish speaking students writing in Spanish and English often did not use English linear logic (see writing samples of Leticia and Brenda below).
2. Spanish speaking students, overall, wrote stories that were as complex and interesting as English speaking students; however, they had more problems with spelling, punctuation, and use of other conventions such as accents than English speakers did (see writing samples of Alfredo and Francisco below).
3. Because it was taken directly from English, the rubric used to score writing samples did not provide good feedback to teachers in how to improve writing in Spanish. In this case, assessment could not help to drive instruction.

Results of this research, together with the dearth of research dealing specifically with the creation of assessment tools and procedures in Spanish, has led us to conclude that English language writing rubrics must be modified when they are used to assess Spanish writing samples and when they are used to assess the writing of ESL students.

## Implications/Applications for Practice

We suggest that writing rubrics for Spanish speaking students must be revised in both English and Spanish around three main considerations. Each consideration is presented and discussed here, and each includes samples of student writing to illustrate the issue in greater detail.

First, those writing rubrics in Spanish must consider the divergent rhetorical structures, discourse patterns, and learning styles used by Spanish speakers. The strict adherence to story structure that values the linear logic of English in which every story must have a beginning, middle, and end and not stray from that logic penalizes Spanish speaking students, both in their writing in Spanish and in English. Stories written using divergent discourse patterns are not less interesting or complex than those written using linear discourse patterns; however, because of the divergent patterns, they are often not judged to be good writing. Several examples, one in Spanish and one in English illustrate this point. (See Figures 3.3A and 3.3B)

*El Mejor cumpleaños  
de nunca*

Mi mejor cumpleaños fue cuando  
 venimos de El Salvador a Denver.  
 Y fue el mejor cumpleaños de  
 siempre. Yo tenía 4 años y mi  
 hermana 9 años. Fue un cumpleaños  
 maravilloso. Mi cumpleaños es en  
 enero 28, 1987 y mi mamá nos compra  
 globos para poner y luego compra  
 el pastel y era de hielo para  
 meterlo en el freezer. Y el siguiente  
 día ella era mi cumpleaños y  
 mi mamá y mi abuela fueron con  
 a comprar el regalo para mí y  
 mi hermana. El cumpleaños  
 de mi abuelita es el Enero 9,  
 pero no los celebraron juntos. Después  
 y el señor de la renta al que  
 debe el apartamento y nosotros nos  
 quedamos con dos que deben la  
 casa y ellas nos quedaron la casa.

FIGURE 3.3A Leticia's Spanish Writing Sample

Leticia's writing sample demonstrates clearly a divergent discourse pattern. Leticia's writing sample has several stories embedded within it, none of which are written in a linear way. She begins by setting the stage—talking about when her best birthday was and how her mother got ready for it (cake and balloons). She then tells us when her birthday is and that her mom and grandma went to buy presents for her that day. Then she switches topics to discuss her sister's birthday and that they celebrated their birthdays together. Then she switches to staying at the landlord's house while her mother and the landlord went to buy presents. She then switches back to the birthday party and what presents she received and what they ate.

While her story shows an ability to write in complete sentences using complex thoughts, it is not a linear accounting of her best birthday. Although reviewers of Leticia's story acknowledged her ability to write a story, they saw her story as disjointed and lacking in logical sequencing. Two raters (using the Escuela Bril-

Y el señor se fue con mi mamá  
a comprar los regalos. Yo y  
mi hermana nos quedamos con  
las niñas de la hermana y  
jugamos y ellas vinieron. Y tenían  
con los regalos. Y eran dos  
bicicletas una para mí y otra  
para mi hermana. Ahí era  
fionitas y las mías tenían  
dos rueditas atrás de la  
bicicleta. Y una era mediana  
para mi hermana y una chiquita  
para mí. Y ellos los de la renta  
se quedaron con nosotros  
y el pastel se derretió. Y así  
de comimos con socolos de  
coco. Y muchachos se enseñaron  
a mi hermana manejar la  
bicicleta y así también pero  
me todo más de 2 semanas  
para saber manejarla.

FIGURE 3.3A Continued

### My Best Birthday

My best birthday was when we came from El Salvador to Denver and it was the best birthday ever. I was 4 years old and my sister was 9 years old. it was a marvelous birthday. My birthday is on the 28th of January, 1987 and my mother bought us balloons to hang up and then she bought cake and it was an ice cream cake to put in the freezer. And the next day it was my birthday and my mom and my grandmother went to buy a present for me and my sister. My sister's birthday is the 9th of January, but we celebrated it together. Then, the landlord, the one that owns the apartment, and us we stayed with the ones that live in the house and the wife of the landlord took care of us. The landlord went with my mom to buy the presents. And my sister and I stayed and played with the girls and they came home. And they came with the presents. And they were two bicycles, one for me and one for my sister Ana and they were pretty and mine had two wheels on back of the bicycle. and one was medium for my sister and one was small for me. And the two landlords stayed with us and the cake melted. And that's how we ate it with coca-cola. And boys showed my sister how to ride her bike and me too but it took me two weeks to learn how to ride it.

FIGURE 3.3B Leticia's Writing Sample, English Translation

lante Writing Assessment Rubric in Appendix, model 4) gave her a score of 3 for this sample. A 3 score means that her writing is marginal and not competent.

We see a similar pattern in Brenda's writing (Figure 3.4). Brenda started school as a Spanish speaker and is now an English speaker and writer. She has been transitioned from Spanish reading to English reading, but her writing in English still reflects Spanish discourse patterns.

Brenda starts by telling us the story of Selena (the famous Mexican American singer who was murdered in 1995). In the middle of the story she starts to tell us about Selena's killer, a woman named Yolanda Saldivar, and then starts to tell Yolanda's story. In the end, she returns to the topic of Selena being a very popular singer. In Brenda's story we also see divergent discourse patterns. Raters of this writing sample also note that her story digressed from its original topic. Brenda was given a score of 3 on the English writing rubric (see Appendix, model 3) marking her as marginally competent in writing.

Using Kaplan's (1992) schema of Spanish discourse, we find that both Leticia and Brenda are really quite competent writers. Kaplan discusses Spanish discourse patterns as being divergent, often switching from one topic to another and then returning back to the first topic. Using Kaplan's schema, neither Leticia's nor Brenda's writing is disjointed and lacking in logical sequence. Instead, it is appropriate to the discourse style of Spanish speakers.



SELENA

Selena was very talented famuos and everybody liked her. One of the things is that everyone loved her music. Some of the fans would do anything just to see her. But when she died almost everybody cried for her or started hearing her music over and over again. Specially the mexican's were the ones that loved her and we still do. The way she got kille was horrible. One of Selenas fans Yolanda Saldivas was the one we killed her. Beacuse she was saying that Selenas father wanted to kill Yolanda Saldiva. But the father said that was a lie. Some other thing Yolanda Saldivas said that she had a secret of Selena, but she wont say nothing beacuse is a proms she did to Selena. Has you may know we all loved her and will always have her in are heart. She is the favorite singer of all mexicans.

SELENA

FIGURE 3.4 Brenda's Writing Sample

The second issue related to the wholesale adaptation of writing rubrics from English to Spanish has to do with the balance between mechanics and content. At the intermediate level, many writing rubrics give equal weight to mechanics and content. This equal weighting is true of the Escuela Brillante Writing Rubric in the Appendix (all models in both English and Spanish).

This equal weighting may also penalize Spanish speakers. The phonetic regularity of Spanish facilitates learning to read; however, it makes learning to write more difficult. In Spanish, many letters share the same sound (e.g., b/v;

ll/y; c,s,z). Spanish writers must gain control of rules around the use of accents, tildes, and the dieresis. None of these conventions exist in English. English writing rubrics obviously do not account for Spanish writing conventions (see Appendix, models 2 and 4); therefore, they provide no direction for a teacher as to when a student should have control over them. Equal weighting of content and mechanics, and lack of directions for which mechanical conventions students should master by certain grade levels may once again serve to underestimate the writing ability of Spanish speakers. The following examples illustrate this point.

### El Mejor Cumpleaños de Nunca

Comenzo cuando yo y mi mamá estábamos arreglando todo para mi cumpleaños. Ya estaba todo bien arreglado y vinieron toda la gente. Trajeron el pastel. "Ya se acabó el pastel" dijo mi mamá. Y luego era tiempo para que yo abriera los regalos. Me dieron dinero, ropa, zapatos. Luego llegó mi tío con una caja grande de ahí... y por sorpresa era un extraterrestre! El extraterrestre era bueno y me dejó volar en OVNI y estaba padre.

FIGURE 3.5A Francisco's Writing Sample, Spanish Version

### My Best Birthday

It started when my mom and I were getting everything ready for my birthday. Everything was ready and all of the people arrived. They brought a cake. "The cake is all gone" said my mom. Then it was time to open my presents. I got money, clothes, shoes. Then my uncle arrived with a big box. I opened it.....and what a surprise it was an alien from space. The extraterrestrial was great and it let me fly in his OVNI and it was awesome.

FIGURE 3.5B Francisco's Writing Sample, English Translation

Francisco's writing sample (Figure 3.5A, B) clearly shows mature thinking. He uses complicated sentences and builds the reader up with the suspense of wondering what the "best present" might be. He lists presents he received that were "ok" but not exciting (money, clothes, shoes), and then he says his uncle came with a big box. He further shows knowledge of literary language when he uses the ellipsis (.....) to indicate an incomplete sentence and to create more suspense. He then demonstrates great imagination when he talks about the best present being the alien and the ride in the space ship.

Francisco's score for this writing sample, using the writing rubric for intermediate students in the Appendix, was a 3\* (Appendix, model 4). This score, 3\*, represents a student who can compose a highly competent paper that is lacking in one or more basic skills. The raters said that his writing was competent from a content standpoint but had significant mechanical problems.

Francisco's writing demonstrated how mechanical issues in Spanish writing differ greatly from English. For example, Francisco does not yet apply the accent rule related to the third person preterite (e.g., *acabo* instead of *acabó* and *comenzo* instead of *comenzó*). In spelling he uses b when he should use v (e.g., *binieron* instead of *vinieron*), and uses h inappropriately (e.g., *habri* instead of *abri*).

The descriptors in the writing rubric (Appendix, model 4) say that competent writers (level 4) have spelling skills that are appropriate for the grade level; however, grade level spelling skills are different in Spanish than English. No direction is given to the rater as to what constitutes "good spelling" in Spanish for an intermediate student. When, for example, should students know the rule about accents as markers of the past tense? Or, when should a student have control over the use of h? H is a difficult letter to control in Spanish because it does not make a sound. Alfredo's writing sample further illustrates this issue.

Alfredo's writing sample (Figure 3.6A,B) illustrates some of the same issues as Francisco's. Alfredo demonstrates an ability to write an interesting and complex story about his best birthday. He skillfully uses foreshadowing to grab the reader's attention and to build up to his fabulous present. In terms of content, his story, on the Escuela Brillante writing rubric, is easily a level 5 or 6; however, Alfredo has some of the same mechanical problems that Francisco had. He uses descriptive vocabulary (e.g., *fábulo*, *fantástico*), and spells the words correctly, but he does not put accents on them. He does not use accent marks on verbs in the imperfect past tense (e.g., *quería*). Like Francisco, he does not know which words require h (e.g., he writes *echo* instead of *hecho* and *abía* instead of *había*). Alfredo's writing sample also received a score of 3\* because of mechanics (Appendix, model 4).

As stated above, English writing rubrics give equal weight to content and mechanics. Our research has led us to observe many Spanish writers who are very competent story writers. In many cases, however, their mechanical skills are such that their overall score drops below the range of competent. While this phenomena also occurs in English, it occurs much more frequently in Spanish. These data suggest a need for different weighting of content and mechanics for

El Mejor Cumpleaños  
de Nunca

Lo que me regalaron era algo fabuloso.  
Era el mejor regalo que me abigan regalado  
en toda mi vida. Era algo fantástico.  
Parecía un sueño echo realidad.  
no queria despertar de ese fantástico  
sueño. Lo que me abian regalado.  
nunca lo iba a olvidar hamas.  
Era grandioso era una computadora.

Cundo me lo regalaron fue el  
mejor dia de mi vida.

¡Era Fabuloso!

FIGURE 3.6A Alfredo's Writing Sample, Spanish Version

My Best Birthday

What they gave me was fabulous. It was the best present that they had given me in my whole life. It was something fantastic. It was like a dream come true. I didn't want to wake up from this fantastic dream. I will never forget what they gave me. It was grandiose, it was a computer.

When they gave it to me, it was the best day of my life.

It was fabulous!

FIGURE 3.6B Alfredo's Writing Sample, English Translation

Spanish writers. Spanish works differently than English, and these differences must be reflected on writing rubrics.

The third and perhaps the most important reason to use holistic writing assessment is to improve the teaching of writing. As was demonstrated above, however, Spanish writing rubrics developed directly from English cannot provide good feed-back to teachers in how to improve writing in Spanish. For assessment to drive instruction, Spanish writing assessments must help guide teachers so that they can help students become better writers.

Schools and teachers should develop Spanish writing rubrics that connect to writing instruction in Spanish. Both instructional practices and assessment must be developed from the standpoint of how the Spanish language works. This includes conventions such as punctuation and the use of accents, spelling issues and development, and the rhetorical structures of Spanish. Much can be learned by examining language arts texts in Spanish and studying methods used to teach reading and writing in Spanish-speaking countries (e.g., *Ficheros de Actividades Didácticas en Español* is the language arts program published by the Secretary of Education in Mexico). These books provide excellent guidance in how literacy in Spanish is developed and taught in Spanish-speaking countries.

When Spanish-speaking students are learning to write in English they must be explicitly taught English linear logic and the rhetorical and discourse patterns used in English writing. It is not enough to simply learn the mechanics of writing in English as a second language. Students must also learn how to “think” in English. The writing samples of Lupe (see Figure 3.1) and Brenda (see Figure 3.4) show us that this does not happen automatically.

## Final Thoughts

The best kinds of assessment support the learning of both students and teachers (Townsend, Fu, & Lamme, 1997). Writing assessment in both English and Spanish that considers each language on its own structure and discourse patterns can help teachers learn about the nature of developing bilinguals and be more reflective of what two-language learners do as they learn to write in two languages.

Study after study has cautioned against assessment practices that do not look at students as a whole (Camp, 1993; Townsend, Fu, & Lamme, 1997). The case of the two Lupes presented at the beginning of the chapter provide concrete support for this research. If we only view Lupe in English, we see a struggling second-language writer. Her lack of proficiency in English prevents a teacher from seeing her academic accomplishments. Assessment practices in bilingual classrooms or for two-language children with previous schooling that do not look at student literacy in two languages are, in effect, not looking at children as a whole.

Belcher and Braine (1995) state that academic literacy processes are never “neutral, value-free and nonexclusionary” (p. xiii). Delpit (1988) has further cautioned that the “culture of power,” which includes linguistic forms and communicative strategies, reinforces the power differential between participants of

linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. An extension of this is that assessment practices for Spanish-speaking students currently reflects and reinforces *this culture of power*. This is seen in the adaptation of English writing rubrics into Spanish with their emphases on linear logic and notions of balance between mechanics and content in writing assessment. Williamson (1993) acknowledges

Writing assessment currently serves to enforce the norms of a particular dialect of English and equates success with mastery of that dialect and with joining the cultural group for whom the use of that dialect is the norm. Changing the writing assessment to allow for a diversity of usage involves changing the rules for people who have previously enjoyed success. (p. 35)

This, then, is the challenge. For writing assessment to be authentic for Spanish speakers *who are developing biliteracy*, the rules need to change.

Many states are now using writing rubrics to determine which students have met state writing standards. Some states allow students to write in Spanish as a way of meeting the standard; however, if Spanish writing competence is judged by English writing standards, Spanish speakers are still less likely to meet state writing standards, even if assessed in Spanish. Bilingual programs, as well as their students, are once again assessed as being ineffective even when holistic assessment measures are used.

Montaño-Harmon (1991) and Delpit (1988) suggest that when students write in English they be explicitly taught and encouraged to use English discourse patterns. Further, when they are writing in Spanish, they need to be explicitly taught and encouraged to use the discourse patterns of Spanish. Only in this way can students *truly become biliterate*.

There is a very promising trend in some school district bilingual programs that emphasizes biliteracy as a program goal. Biliteracy is possible, and it is desirable; however, the assessment of progress toward biliteracy must include the development of authentic assessment practices that include forms, functions, and discourse patterns of each language. Teachers and directors of assessment must question the *simplicity of adaptation of English language assessments into Spanish and other languages*. Creation of authentic assessment requires looking at how individual languages work and how children develop when they learn to read and write in these languages and in second languages. One size does not fit all.

Writing rubrics can be very useful tools for helping teachers assess student progress, for aligning instruction and assessment, and for having conversations about the language arts curriculum. They can also be powerful tools for assessing emerging biliteracy or to assess students' knowledge of their first language. We encourage teachers and schools to use them and to make them authentic for use in English and Spanish.

Educators must use parallel structures when creating writing rubrics; however, the content of writing rubrics must represent accurately the language being

assessed. The rubrics included in this chapter's Appendix are appropriate for both English and Spanish writers because they do not demand English linear sequence. This logical sequence can vary from English to Spanish. Teachers, however, must understand how logical sequence in Spanish may differ from English. Similarly, for primary grades, the rubrics do not judge a student's mastery of writing conventions (spelling, punctuation, etc.), and therefore, Spanish speakers who primarily write using invented (or phonemic) spelling are not penalized.

In the case of the two rubrics in the Appendix, we suggest that the Spanish rubric be revised in the following ways. For intermediate students, schools and teachers should discuss exactly what Spanish conventions students are expected to control to be considered a competent writer. These need to be explicitly stated. Examples include if students are expected to use accent marks in commonly used words (e.g., *mamá, papá*) or in the third person singular in the preterite tense (e.g., *comenzó, hablé*). Other examples include spelling rules such as those for using *h, b/v, ll, and y*. Knowing exactly which conventions students are expected to control can help to inform instruction for teachers.

Finally, we end this article where we began, with a second look at Lupe. By creating authentic writing samples that look at student development in two languages, we no longer see Lupe as a student who is "struggling in writing," and having "problems putting ideas together." Assessing Lupe in two languages enables us to see her as a developing biliterate who is a competent and thoughtful writer in Spanish and who is using her literacy in Spanish as a bridge to English. Authentic two-language assessment enables us to observe Lupe's strengths and her instructional needs. In short, assessment in two languages helps us understand the whole student, not bits and pieces.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How might writing assessment in two languages be used by teachers who are not bilingual teachers or for students who do not receive instruction in two languages?
2. Do students learning to write in Spanish stay in invented spelling stages longer than students learning to write in English? If so, how should writing rubrics be revised to accommodate this difference across languages?
3. In assessing the writing of Spanish speaking and English speaking students in intermediate grades, should mechanics and content be given equal weight? Justify your answer.
4. Primary students are given a fictional prompt (a shy dragon), and intermediate students are asked to write about a real event (a favorite birthday). Would it be better for all students to write about real events? Justify your answer.
5. Discuss how writing assessments that utilize rubrics can be used to improve writing instruction.

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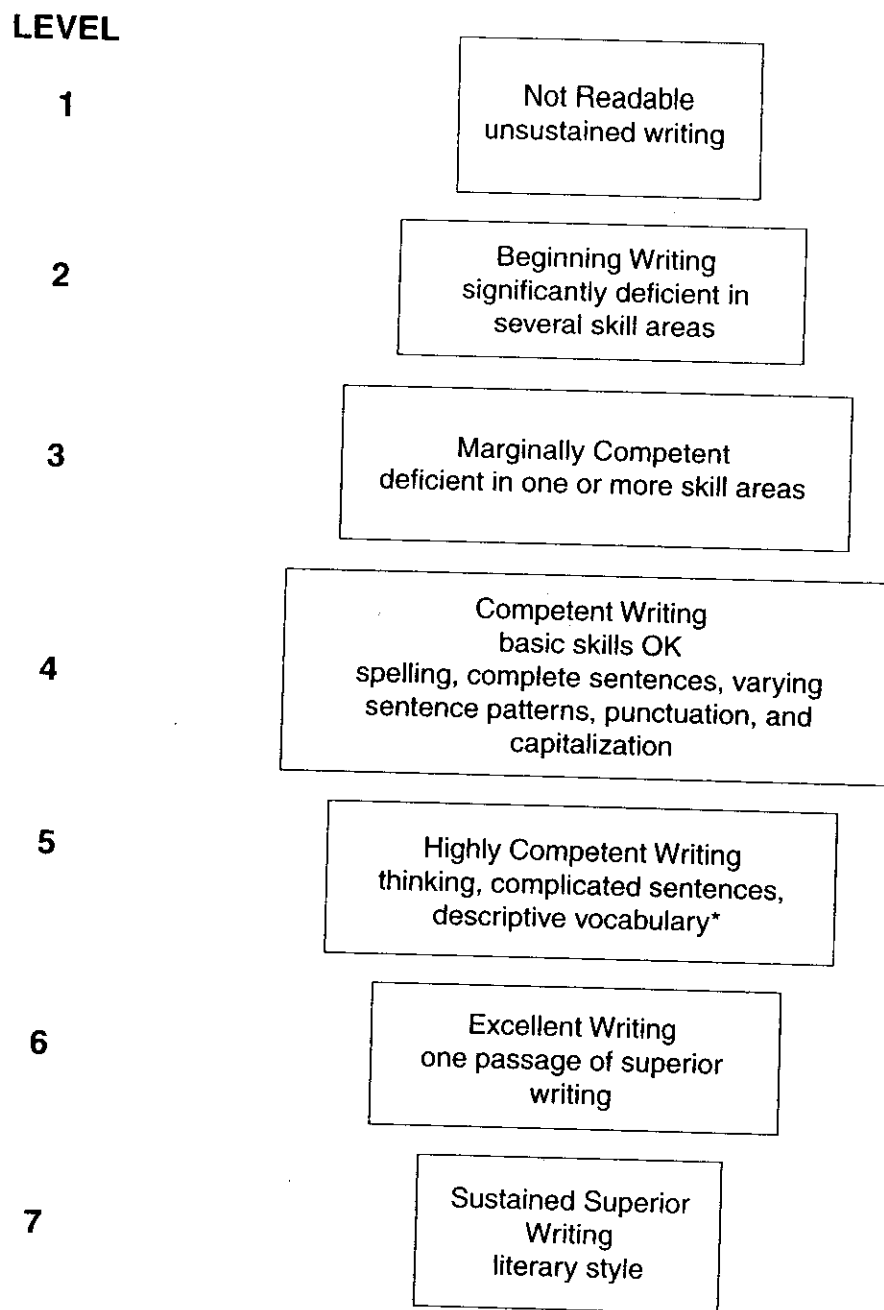
**A P P E N D I X**

**Models for Evaluating Writing  
English and Spanish**

**LEVEL****1**

Not Readable

**2**Beginning Writing  
one idea**3**Beginning Writing  
two ideas**4**Competent Writing  
several ideas in sequence  
not a complete story**5**Highly Competent Writing  
complete story**6**Excellent Writing  
varying sentence patterns**7**Superior Writing  
creativity  
reflection of children's  
literature**Model for Evaluating Writing: Primary Grades**



**Model for Evaluating Writing: Intermediate Grades**

\* The student can compose a highly competent paper with characteristics of level 6 or 7 writing. The paper, however, is not competent in one or more basic skills listed above for level 4.

**NIVEL****1**

Escritura Pre-inicial  
No se puede leer

**2**

Escritura Inicial  
Una idea

**3**

Escritura Inicial  
Dos ideas

**4**

Escritura Competente  
Varias ideas en un orden logico, pero no  
cuenta un cuento completo

**5**

Escritura Muy Competente  
Cuento completo

**6**

Escritura Excelente  
Oraciones que tienen diversas  
ideas y formas variadas

**7**

Escritura Superior  
Creatividad que  
refleja la literatura  
infantil

**Modelo Para Evaluar La Escritura: Grados K, 1, 2**

**NIVEL****1**

Escritura Pre-Inicial  
Escritura incompleta o  
que no se puede leer.

**2**

Escritura Inicial  
Tiene fuerte defectos en  
varias destrezas.

**3**

Competente Marginal  
Tiene defectos en una o mas  
destrezas.

**4**

Competente  
Destrezas basicas en un nivel aceptable,  
ortografia, oraciones completas, oraciones  
con pensamientos variados, puntuacion, el  
uso de mayusculas. Tal vez sea un cuento  
que no es interesante.

**5  
(3\*)**

Muy Competente  
Demuestra pensamientos con  
oraciones complicadas, vocabulario  
descriptivo, demuestra madurez.

**6**

Excelente  
Demuestra una habilidad  
superior en escritura. Un  
trozo de escritura excelente.

**7**

Superior  
Demuestra una  
habilidad superior de  
escritura sostenida.  
Usa un estilo literario.

**Modelo Para Evaluar Escritura Nivel Intermedio: Grados 3, 4, 5**

3\* El/la estudiante puede producir un trabajo muy competente con características de escritura al nivel 6 o 7. Sin embargo, el trabajo no demuestra competencia en una o más destrezas básicas necesarias para llegar al nivel 4.