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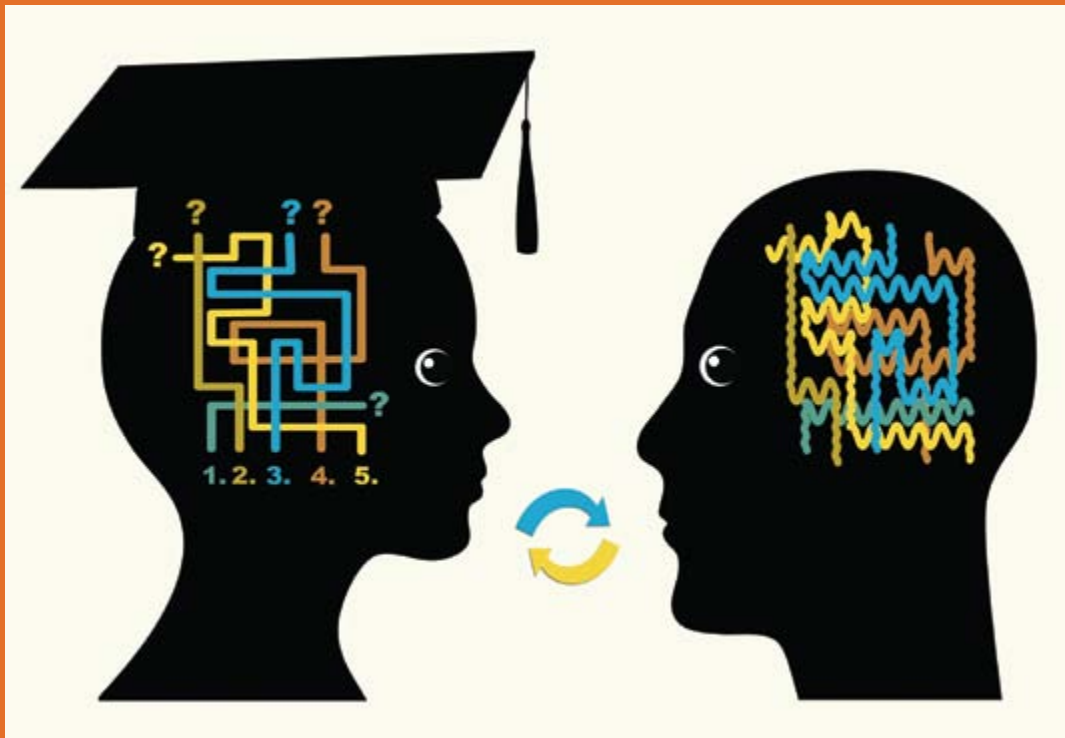
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# Beyond the Seal of Biliteracy: The Development of a Bilingual Counseling Proficiency at the University Level

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## Introduction and Background

The passage of California Assembly Bill 815 (Brownley, Chapter 618, Statutes of 2011) established in 2012 the State Seal of Biliteracy—an official marker on graduating seniors' high school diplomas, as evidence of high school graduates' attainment of a high level of proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing one or more languages, in addition to English. Since its inception, more than 100,000 high schoolers have earned the Seal of Biliteracy, which appears as a distinct addition in an academic transcript as a statement of accomplishment for future employers and college admissions. For counselors-in-training, however, initiatives that reward and promote bilingualism are highly uncommon (McAffrey & Moody, 2015). This is problematic because counselors work directly

with linguistically diverse school-aged individuals and their families in settings like mental health clinics and community-based agencies, in addition to primary and secondary schools. During college, counselors-in-training acquire the skills necessary to facilitate social and personal development across the age spectrum that research shows can foster academic achievement, professional success, and overall life satisfaction (Ivers, Ivers, & Duffy, 2013; Schmidt, 2014; Sue & Sue, 2016). Thusly, promoting the development of bilingualism among postsecondary students, like counseling trainees, can support the objectives of teachers,

<sup>1</sup> Californians Together is a statewide advocacy coalition of powerful organizations from all segments of the education community including teachers, administrators, board members, parents and civil rights non-profit groups. Our member organizations come together around the goal of better educating 1.3 million English Learners by improving California's schools and promoting equitable educational policy.

administrators, and other personnel who use collaborative-centered and integrated models of education (e.g., Gay, 2010). A group of community college and university faculty, convened by Californians Together<sup>1</sup> in 2016, discussed the issue of postsecondary bilingual education and, specifically, a set of recommendations and descriptions for implementation of a Post Secondary Badge of Biliteracy (PSBB). The group decided to create pilot projects, the first of which focuses on university graduate-level students and is described herein.

## Bilingual Education in Counseling

Trends in U.S. linguistic diversity (Shin & Kominski, 2010) point to an increasing need for competent bilingual counselors in schools and community agencies. In response, the Counseling Program in the School of Education at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) initiated a project inspired by the PSBB with the aim of recognizing and stimulating bilingualism among graduate students. The pilot project, which is a collaboration with LMU's Center for Equity for English Learners (CEEL), has the goal of instituting small and meaningful programmatic changes in counselor education that (1) reward and stimulate bilingualism among trainees, and (2) promote interdisciplinary collaboration and cross-pollination of ideas.

Consider that for a high school counselor to be able to properly work with a Spanish-dominant student, that professional must possess competencies in both counseling and Spanish language. Bilingual counseling, however, is insufficiently articulated in current standards of professional mental health practice (McAffrey & Moody, 2015), which makes establishing bilingual education in the discipline challenging. School psychologists recently mapped their professional standards onto bilingual proficiency markers (Olvera, 2015), but the vast majority of counseling programs continue to only minimally address the role of language and bilingual clients, or lack instructors who can teach or supervise in this area (Santiago-Rivera & Altarriba, 2002).

Despite an absence of state-sponsored programs and pathways in bilingual education and

certification for counselors, student trainees out on fieldwork and internship are still asked to conduct services in non-English languages, usually on-the-spot and with little preparation or supervision (Verdinelli & Biever, 2009). Bilingual counselors draw upon their existing skills in language switching and biculturalism when conducting their work in other languages (Peters, Sawyer, Guzman, & Graziani, 2014), and studies have found that compared to monolingual English-speaking counselors, bilingual counselors tend to be perceived by bilingual clients as more attuned, credible, and competent (Costa & Dewaele, 2014). Such mounting evidence points to the need for more shorter-term initiatives in bilingual education in counseling that are strengths-based and that recognize skills that students possess.

As a stepping stone towards ultimately providing bilingual training certification in counseling, LMU's Counseling Program has decided to offer a PSBB in counseling. To receive the badge, a student must first demonstrate sufficient proficiency or competency in delivering counseling services in a foreign language. Badges of professional competence are awarded in higher education in a variety of fields in the U.S. and internationally, and have become coveted credentials in the marketplace, especially in social services. Badges can assist students in gaining employment and also stimulate their interest to pursue additional learning (Raths, 2013).

## Operationalizing and Assessing Bilingual Proficiency

Bilingual counseling proficiency has to reflect standards of competency in professional counseling, in addition to standards set by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Current ACTFL proficiency descriptions, in fact, can be combined with mental health competencies to generate useful descriptors that can be further nested within a rubric to assess bilingual counseling proficiency (McAffrey & Moody, 2015). Rubrics are ideal tools to evaluate and identify an observable degree of proficiency in an area like bilingual counseling, particularly in applied courses, such as practicum or fieldwork.

## Defining Bilingual Proficiency in Fieldwork Course Study

A participatory-based course like fieldwork is suitable because it (a) requires the student to submit assignments in written and audio form that demonstrate knowledge integration and application, and thereby (b) adheres to the ACTFL standard of evaluating language in real-world, spontaneous, and non-rehearsed interactions. Granting a proficiency badge in fieldwork also helps with overall feasibility at this early phase in bilingual counseling program development.

First, new proficiency rubrics had to be created and piloted in order to gather preliminary data. Consequently, it was decided during this cycle to use the term certificate instead of badge, as in: Certificate of Bilingual Counseling in Fieldwork (CBC-F). Three proficiency rubrics were created for the pilot to be used with audio-video material to determine whether a student conducting counseling in Spanish with a client during fieldwork met minimum standards, defined as at least 'intermediate' proficiency for every evaluative component. An example is provided in Table 1 below for the Counseling Fieldwork Competency # 2: Demonstrates the ability to apply professional ethical and legal mandates to the practice of counseling.

## Implementation and Results of Pilot Certificate of Bilingual Counseling in Fieldwork

Five female trainees, all of them Latina and working in Spanish with actual clients at their site of fieldwork, volunteered to participate in the pilot. Three were pursuing a degree in School Counseling-Pupil Personnel Services (48 units) and the other two a degree in Counseling-Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor (60 units). All participants attended an orientation session at the start of the spring 2017 semester. Two bilingual (Spanish-English) mental health specialists (Ph.D. level) served as evaluators. Inspection of the results, using stacked bar graphs, showed that all five students met minimum proficiency standards across all areas of competency. Also required of participants was a 1-hour individual

clinical supervision session in Spanish with one of the two evaluators, during which rubric ratings and overall feedback were shared with the student. The director of the Counseling Program presented a certificate to the participants at graduation, and each received a survey comprised of a few open-ended questions asking them about their experience in the pilot program. Participants stated:

"I have a responsibility to be a culturally competent therapist... I am one step closer to providing the same quality of therapy to both my English- and Spanish-speaking clients."

"I feel motivated to learn more Spanish so that I can use it and not feel so nervous."

"This certificate advances my professional goals by providing me with the confidence to apply for bilingual therapist positions."

"I don't need to be given something for helping my community, but at the same time the recognition will hopefully help me get a job to help them even more!"

## Future Planning for Success in Postsecondary Bilingual Education

More bilingual counselors are needed in the workforce and based on preliminary data, the LMU Counseling Program is making small, but important, incremental steps towards filling that gap. Implementation of the Certificate in Bilingual Counseling in Fieldwork will resume after several rubrics are revised and additional resources are gathered, including a more comprehensive vocabulary of mental health-related terms. Additional student training is also planned, with a curriculum that addresses issues of vulnerable student populations, like Long-Term English Learners (LTELs) and their families.

Partnerships, like the one between LMU's Center for Equity for English Learners (CEEL) and the Counseling Program, serve as a working alliance, offering ongoing expertise and collaboration in several areas, including the creation of additional bilingual proficiency descriptors that can be used to assess skills across various stages of counselor development. Because bilingualism is not a substantial part of existing standards of practice

<b>Table 1: Sample ACTFL-aligned Rubric for Counseling Bilingual Proficiency</b>			
<i>Elements to be Evaluated</i>	<b>Developing 1</b>	<b>Intermediate 2</b>	<b>Advanced Intermediate 3</b>
<b>Language Control</b>	Produces memorized language or has limited control in relation to ethical and legal mandates. Insufficient control of syntax.	Control of Spanish language related to ethical and legal mandates is sufficient to be understood by the client. Shows sufficient control of syntax.	Control of Spanish language related to ethical and legal mandates is more than sufficient to be understood by the client. Shows confidence with control of syntax.
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Produces formulaic expressions or uses a limited variety of vocabulary on ethical and legal mandates.	Produces a sufficient range of vocabulary related to topics of ethical and legal mandates.	Easily produces a broad range of vocabulary related to topics of ethical and legal mandates.
<b>Communication Strategies</b>	Uses a limited range of strategies (clarify, offer examples) or relies on a practiced format that might make it difficult for client to comprehend ethical and legal mandates issues.	Uses a sufficient range of strategies (self-edit, restate, ask questions, clarify, offer examples) to sustain client interest and comprehension on ethical and legal mandate issues.	Consistently uses a broad range of strategies (self-edit, restate, ask questions, clarify, offer examples) to sustain client interest and comprehension on ethical and legal mandate issues.
<b>Cultural Awareness</b>	Cultural knowledge and perspectives are limited (memorized gestures, formulaic expressions) relevant to ethic and legal mandate issues.	Is able to use cultural knowledge and perspectives appropriate to the presentation of ethic and legal mandate issues.	Skillfully uses cultural knowledge and perspectives appropriate to the presentation of ethic and legal mandate issues.

in counseling, articulating and operationalizing additional proficiencies for professional competency will be an important task. Teacher preparation programs, like counselor education, also require fieldwork courses where trainees directly serve students and their families. Therefore, meaningful points of convergence in fieldwork, as well as other programmatic curricula, are being explored.

#### **Additional ideas include:**

- Expanding books and other resources on bilingual services.
- Evaluation tools for the client to rate the counselor.
- Formal evaluation and dissemination of assessment tools to be used within and across counseling programs.

- Formal recognition of bilingual proficiency in university transcripts/degrees.

#### **Conclusion**

There is an increased demand in our global economy for professionals who are multilingual, multiliterate, and who can communicate and interact with intercultural competence (Callahan & Gándara, 2014). Towards that end, we invite others to join the efforts in preparing and certifying professionals with the linguistic and cultural competencies at the postsecondary level of education.

*Note: References are available in the online version of this article at [www.gocabe.org](http://www.gocabe.org).*