

5-13-2014

# Teachers' Perceptions of Accent on Formative Reading Assessments

Meghan Pendergast

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This dissertation, TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ACCENT ON FORMATIVE READING ASSESSMENTS, by MEGHAN PENDERGAST, was prepared under the direction of the candidates Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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Meghan Pendergast

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## ABSTRACT

### TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ACCENT ON FORMATIVE READING ASSESSMENTS

by  
Meghan Pendergast

Spanish-speaking Dual Language Learners (DLLs) constitute the largest language minority subgroup and are the fastest growing school-age population in the United States (McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, & Leos, 2005). Despite the fact that the number of Latino children is increasing, the educational gains made by these children are not (Aud et al., 2011; Braswell, Daane, & Grigg, 2003; Reardon & Galindo, 2009). The current study investigates the influence a child's accent (i.e., Spanish accent, Southern American English accent, and 'standard' American English accent) has on teachers' reading assessments. Eighty-two elementary school teachers from a large city in the southeast participated in this study. Results indicate that teachers without a reading endorsement showed significant variation in their scoring of the child with the Spanish accent compared to the two European-American, native English-speaking children, suggesting that teachers' reading endorsements matter to their language and literacy practices. Additionally, teachers' attitudes were significantly higher for the child with the Spanish accent compared to the child with the 'standard' accent, regardless of the endorsements they held. Last, teachers' attitudes toward the child with the Spanish accent were significantly and moderately correlated with their reading scores. This finding indicates that teachers' language attitudes might be impacting the accuracy of their evaluations for Spanish speaking Dual Language Learners. Findings from this study provide insight into

how teachers' language attitudes may contribute to the reading achievement gap between DLLs and their European American, native English-speaking peers.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ACCENT ON FORMATIVE READING  
ASSESSMENTS

by  
Meghan Pendergast

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the  
Degree of  
Doctor in Philosophy  
in  
Early Childhood Education  
in  
the Department of Early Childhood Education  
in  
the College of Education  
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA

2014

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to acknowledge my committee for their patience, expertise, and encouragement in helping me grow as a scholar. I want to thank my Mom for always challenging and supporting me in taking that next step, my Dad for reminding me that above all, I must always keep my sense of humor, and my Gary for mentoring me in more ways than one could think possible. Thank you all for believing in me, putting up with some occasional tears, and providing me with much more laughter. I wouldn't have made it without you all, and if I had, it wouldn't have been nearly as much fun.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AAE	African American English
DLLS	Dual Language Learners
DRA2	Developmental Reading Assessment (2nd Edition)
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
LAS	Language Attitude Scale
SLI	Standard Language Ideology

## CHAPTER 1

STANDARD LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY: AN EXAMINATION OF TEACHERS'  
ATTITUDES AND LITERACY PRACTICES

Changing demographics of U.S. schools means more and more Spanish-speaking Dual Language Learners (DLLs), children who are simultaneously learning a home language (Spanish) and a second language (English), will be in classrooms with a teacher from a different cultural and linguistic background (specifically, European American and monolingual; Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012). These demographic differences create an opportunity for a cultural and linguistic mismatch between the student and the teacher (Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Farkas, 2003) as the teacher may (knowingly or unknowingly) teach in a way that is consistent with her cultural and linguistic background but ignore the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of her students (Fu, 1995; Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009; Heath, 2000). Considering the intricate relationship between language and literacy, this mismatch is a proposed contributing factor to Pre-K-12<sup>th</sup> grade Latino children not performing as well as their European American and Asian-American peers on standardized measures of reading proficiency (Braswell, Dane, & Grigg, 2003; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Reardon & Galindo, 2006). According to these assessments, Latino children make up 51% of children performing below the basic reading level (NAEP, 2011). Although a number of factors contribute to this cultural and linguistic mismatch, this paper proposes that a teacher's attitudes toward a child's language is an important component that should be considered when addressing this complex topic.

A substantial body of research suggests teachers' attitudes influence their evaluations of children's academic abilities, which in turn alter the learning opportunities

available to children (Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, & Carpenter, 2006; Pearson, Conner, & Jackson, 2013). Due to the overlapping nature of language and literacy, teachers' reading assessments might be particularly impacted by their language attitudes. This overlap is considerably relevant in light of increasing demands placed on teachers to provide frequent assessment and documentation of children's reading abilities (Calkins & Cunningham, 2001; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Stiggins, 1999). Often, teachers rely on formative reading assessments (i.e., assessments that are carried out throughout a unit or course to support learning) to provide documentation of children's reading abilities as well as plan future reading instruction and ability group students. Although a small body of research examines teachers' language attitudes, these studies vary widely across multiple domains (i.e. content areas) and research contexts (e.g., methodologies, age groups, etc.). To date, the influence of teachers' language attitudes as they directly relate to teachers' literacy practices, remain, for the most part, unknown.

Hence, the purpose of this review is to examine how teachers' language attitudes may impact teachers' literacy practices and subsequently contribute to the reading achievement gap between Spanish-speaking DLLs and their European-American, native English-speaking peers. Studies focusing on teachers' language attitudes as they relate to teachers' practices and evaluations of children's reading are reviewed. Because the influence of language attitudes is not confined to examinations of classroom teachers and what literature exists is limited, this review integrates extensive research from the social sciences to provide a more holistic view of how teachers' language attitudes can support or inhibit young DLLs' literacy learning. Understanding these factors is key to ensure

that teachers develop strategies that support the literacy and language learning and development of all students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Researchers have used a variety of frameworks to explore the way language influences society at large and classroom practices in particular. For the purpose of this paper, I draw upon two bodies of work: (1) sociocultural theory and (2) standard language ideology. Sociocultural theory posits that learning is a social process intricately tied to language and culture (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning and the language used within learning situations differs considerably based on the individual, his or her cultural background, and his or her past experiences (Cazden, 1970; Erickson, 2004). In the classroom, language is a tool used to construct meaning and make sense of one's thinking. Additionally, one's language is inherently tied to his or her identity (Matsuda, 1991; Zentella, 1997). Consequently, a teacher who restricts or admonishes a child's language not only limits the child's resources for meaning-making but also calls into question the legitimacy of the child's language and claim to citizenship (Gutiérrez, Gutiérrez, Asato, Santos, & Gotanda, 2002).

The idea that certain language varieties are not viewed as a resource but rather as something that needs to be changed, or eradicated, is tied to standard language ideology (SLI; Lippi-Green, 2012; Milroy & Milroy, 1985). SLI is a set of beliefs, established and reinforced by dominant institutions, that there is a 'correct' and 'non-accented' way of speaking (sometimes referred to as broadcast speak; Lippi-Green, 2006). Within SLI, speakers who are thought to deviate from this 'standard' are said to have accents (i.e.,

phonological features usually influenced by geography or social space; Derwing & Munro, 2009). ‘Non-accented’ speakers typically identify with groups that have non-stigmatized social and regional associations (e.g., European American, middle class; Milroy & Milroy, 1991). Therefore, negative attitudes toward a particular accent are not so much about the accent *per se*; rather, the negative attitudes are about stereotypes associated with the speakers. These accent/non-accent labels are ascribed to some, and not others, despite every speaker having some regional variation in speech sounds, intonation, and sound patterns. This notion of a ‘standard’ is so ingrained in American culture that it is accepted as truth and given power and legitimacy that is reflected in society (Ferguson & Heath, 2004; Lippi-Green, 1997; Winford, 2003).

For example, attempts to change or eradicate languages are carried out in schools and larger society by English-only policies that strive to ‘protect and guard’ the English language from outside influences (Lippi-Green, 1997). In fact, the English-only movement has been described as *Hispanophobic* in that it characterizes the Spanish language and its speakers as posing a threat to American values and the United States’ national identity (Zentella, 1997). English-only policies are particularly prevalent in today’s schools despite extensive empirical evidence suggesting that a child’s language and literacy development in a first language will support the development of language and literacy skills in a second language (Cummins, 1984; Wong Fillmore, 2005). Moreover, English-only policies ignore the child’s potential to become bilingual and discount the child’s home language and cultural competencies (Cummins, 2000; García & Kleifgen, 2010).

## **Defining Attitudes**

It is important to note that some language studies define attitudes in a multitude of ways, while other studies gloss over defining attitudes altogether. For the purpose of this paper, language attitudes are defined as evaluative reactions or feelings toward language use (Cooper & Fishman, 1974). Hence, the following would be considered examples of language attitudes: feelings toward a language (e.g., “Italian is more pleasant sounding than harsh German”); attitudes that a specific language variety is associated with a specific group (e.g., “Chinese is spoken by Communists”); and reactions toward using a particular language variety in a specific circumstance (e.g., response to hearing a national broadcaster deliver the news with a ‘strong’ Boston accent). Within this paradigm, attitudes are both socially constructed and socially structuring (Sherif, 1967). Thus, one’s attitudes may be influenced by a socially created stereotype, and the way one negotiates these attitudes, negatively or positively, continues to perpetuate or challenge societal stereotypes.

The following section reviews the substantial body of research in the social sciences that has investigated the language attitudes of a variety of peoples across a myriad of situations. This review provides insight into language attitude research, support for the notion that a listener’s language attitudes are mediated by cultural stereotypes, and examples of how these language attitudes can influence a listener’s actions (Maegaard, 2005; Shepherd, 2011; Williams, Whitehead, & Miller, 1972).

## Researching Language Attitudes

Given that language attitudes are an internal construct that is hard to measure, examinations of language attitudes can prove difficult (Karavas-Doukas, 1996; McMullen, Elicker, & Goetze, 2006; McMullen, 1999). One way researchers have addressed this challenge is to use indirect measures. Indirect measures attempt to have participants answer questions openly without being aware of the researchers' intent or succumbing to any social desirability bias. The use of indirect measures on language attitudes was pioneered by Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, and Fillenbaum's (1960) implementation of the matched-guise technique. Through this process, listeners typically hear a voice recording of one person reading the same text with different variations of accent, dialect, or language. After each recording, listeners are asked to rate each speaker on an attitude rating scale. A similar variation of this indirect procedure is the verbal-guise technique (Ryan & Carranza, 1975). This method uses listeners' evaluations of varying accent, dialect, or language based on language samples given by different people. The use of different speakers strives to limit the artificiality of the study by providing more authentic language samples since one speaker is not trying to imitate multiple language varieties (e.g. German accented English, Korean accented English, French accented English). The degree to which listeners rate speakers, more positively or more negatively, is believed to be indicative of their language attitudes. The findings generally support the idea that both power (dominant vs. subordinate group) and solidarity (in-group vs. out-group) play a role in stereotyping groups of speakers (Bailey, 2003).

Additionally, studies using indirect measures demonstrate that listeners' attitude-linked beliefs about a speaker can affect their perception and comprehension of the

speaker. For example, in a seminal study using the matched-guise technique, Rubin (1992) investigated the effect perceived ethnicity had on participants' scores on a recall test. Native English-speaking university students were given an audio recording of a lecture produced by a native English speaker. Listeners were shown either a photograph of an Asian woman or a European American woman said to be giving the lecture. Those who believed they were hearing an Asian woman scored lower on the recall test and perceived the lecturer to have more of a 'foreign' accent than those shown the picture of a European American woman. This study illustrates how listeners' expectations, in this case the speaker's appearance, can influence the listeners' processing and evaluation of the speech.

In another study demonstrating the influence of social information on the listeners' perception of accent, Niedzielski (1999) found Detroit area residents heard the same pronunciation differently depending on where they were told the speaker was from. Native English speakers in Detroit, who typically view their speech as 'standard,' listened to a recorded female voice identified as Canadian. The listeners were told to match the vowels produced in key words to synthesized vowels. The listeners identified the vowel correctly, as having the 'Canadian' vowel with the raised token in words like *house*, *about*, and *how*. However, when another group of listeners were told the speaker was from Michigan, the listeners inaccurately matched the vowel with the 'standard' and even 'hyperstandard' vowels. This study indicates the Detroit listeners were using social information in their evaluations since the speaker's perceived nationality was the only variation between the two listener groups.

Furthermore, in a study demonstrating that language attitudes can affect interactions and outcomes between the listener and the speaker, Lindemann (2002) investigated English native speakers' (NSs) interactions with Korean nonnative speakers of English (NNSs). Lindemann divided the English NSs into two groups based on their previous attitudinal ratings: those with (1) positive attitudes toward Koreans and those with (2) negative attitudes toward Koreans. A directional map task was given to each Korean NNS. The Korean NNS then worked with an English NS with a more positive attitude toward Koreans as well as an English NS with a more negative attitude toward Koreans. The results indicate communication strategies used by some of the English NSs with negative attitudes toward Koreans resulted in less successful completion of the map task. Because the same speaker was successful in the same task with a different partner, the success of the task could not simply be attributed to the Korean speaker's English proficiency. The results also demonstrated a connection between perception of success and the English NSs' attitude. Upon completion of the task, English NSs were asked to rate the success of their interaction during the task. All participants with positive attitudes toward Koreans rated their interaction as successful while all participants with negative attitudes toward Koreans rated their interaction as not successful. Findings from this study indicate that the perceived success of the task was unrelated to the Korean speakers' English proficiency; rather, the success of the task relied on the listeners' attitudes toward Koreans. The influence of attitudes on communication and comprehension strategies supports Lippi-Green's (1994, 1997) assertion that people with negative attitudes toward a particular language group might reject their responsibility in sharing the *communicative burden* (Perkins & Milroy, 1997). Thus, miscommunication

may be a result of negative language attitudes and communication strategies of the listeners rather than the nonnative speakers' language proficiency.

The above studies demonstrate the impact a listener's attitudes and perceptions about a speaker can have on the listener's evaluations and comprehension of that speaker. Given that education is "a cultural, social, and political process" (Bass & Elish-Piper, 2008, p. xix), one would expect standard language ideology to infiltrate the United States' school system in ways that mirror the larger U.S. society illustrated above. Due to the influential role of classroom teachers in children's literacy learning, a closer examination of teachers' language attitudes is warranted. The following section examines teachers' language attitudes as they relate to their evaluations of children's reading.

### **Examining Teachers' Language Attitudes**

An important body of research evidences that teachers' general attitudes (positive or negative) have powerful implications for children's academic achievement and perception of themselves as learners (Freeman & Freeman, 1994; Klassen et al., 2009; Richardson, 1996; Williams, 1976; Wolters & Daugherty, 2007). This achievement and self-perception can have a profound impact on a child's self-fulfilling prophecy, which asserts that no matter how erroneous teachers' expectations may be, students will perform at levels consistent with the teachers' expectations (see Jussim & Harber, 2005, for a review). Research demonstrates that a student's self-fulfilling prophecy is negotiated early on, continues throughout a child's schooling, and is particularly salient for children of color (Cazden & Beck, 1986; McKown & Weinstein, 2006). Not only do teachers' attitudes influence children's perceptions' of themselves as learners, but teachers'

attitudes also influence their evaluations and assessments of children's academic abilities (Cross, Devaney, & Jones, 2001; Taylor, 1983). Such a vulnerability is concerning as best practice research illustrates that for teachers to be successful, they must utilize assessments accurately (Pressley et al., 2001).

Historically, educational studies have investigated teachers' language attitudes and teaching practices primarily through self-reporting methods such as questionnaires and surveys (Pettit, 2011). Findings from this survey based research suggests that teachers' attitudes are important to the way they approach teaching DLLs and are influenced by such factors as teachers' experience, contact with DLLs, place of employment, and educational backgrounds (Byrnes Kiger, & Manning, 1997; Karabenick & Noday, 2004). While survey style research provides insight into teachers' attitudes and practices, the use of self-reporting attitudinal surveys that often utilize direct questioning for eliciting attitudes is fraught with methodological flaws. Direct questioning may lead to bias in teachers' reflections of their own attitudes when asked to self-report their attitudes toward language varieties. Moreover, teachers may succumb to social-desirability bias as they attempt to give socially appropriate responses they believe will appear unbiased (Garrett, Coupland, & Williams, 2003). Another important limitation is that direct questioning measures generally use surveys or questionnaires to report attitudes that rarely provide respondents with an authentic speech sample as a prompt. Consequently, teachers' self-reports might elicit inaccurate or exaggerated representations of a specific language variety (Garrett, 2010).

In addition to these methodological challenges, direct questioning through surveys and questionnaires does not attempt to examine the actions that arise from teachers'

attitudes, a considerable limitation in the current research since self-reported attitudes toward particular language practices might not be indicative of teachers' actions (Karavas-Doukas, 1996; McMullen, Elicker, & Goetze, 2006; McMullen, 1999). According to Bandura (1986), beliefs are the principal indicator for the way people behave in their everyday lives. However, even people who report seemingly egalitarian attitudes exhibit actions indicative of biases and stereotypes (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), and these attitudes and actions are shown to affect teachers' practices in considerable ways.

Research demonstrates that teachers' language attitudes matter (Cummins, 2000; Flores & Smith, 2009; Shepherd, 2011). Due to the overlapping nature of language and literacy, it is proposed that teachers' language attitudes might be particularly influential in their assessments of children's reading (Genishi & Dyson, 2009). Despite this overlap, relatively little is known about how teachers' language attitudes influence their literacy assessments. The limited research examining teachers' language attitudes as they relate to teachers' literacy evaluations illustrates that some teachers may assess children's literacy abilities differently based on a child's language and the teacher's attitudes.

### **Indirect Measures of Teachers' Attitudes and Evaluations**

Contrary to the extensive language attitude research in applied linguistics and psychology, relatively little attention has been given to indirect techniques in the field of education, particularly as they relate to teachers' reading evaluations. This lack of research is concerning considering federal educational legislation passed over the last few decades prioritizes both reading and data-driven accountability (Elementary and

Secondary Education Act of 1965; No Child Left Behind, 2001), resulting in teachers conducting frequent assessment and documentation of children's reading abilities (Ross, 2004). Furthermore, the findings from a few key studies showing that some teachers evaluate children differently based on the children's language (Cross, DeVaney, & Jones, 2001; Taylor, 1983; Williams, 1976), and teachers' evaluations can have a profound impact on the way a child situates him/herself as a learner (Blackwell et al., 2001; McKown & Weinstein, 2008) support this call for more research.

An example of one key study is Williams, Whitehead, and Miller's (1972) work. Williams and colleagues played video-clips of African American, European American, and Latino children responding to open-ended questions for 175 classroom teachers. The teachers were asked to rate each child on "confidence-eagerness" traits (e.g., enthusiastic and confident) as well as "ethnicity-nonstandardness" (e.g., the language of this child is nonstandard). Next, the teachers placed the children in remedial, below average, average, above average, or far above average classes. The teachers' results indicated that students who spoke a 'nonstandard' dialect were expected to achieve at levels below speakers of 'standard' dialect. Teachers' language attitudes, as measured by their ethnicity/standardness ratings, were predictive of their expectations of children's performance. These predictions increased when the subject matter was directly related to language arts, supporting the hypothesis that the integrated relationship of language and literacy would influence teachers' reading evaluations.

Beyond influencing evaluations, teachers' language attitudes are shown to impact children's reading achievement. This influence is evidenced in Ramírez's (1981) study that examined teachers' language attitudes toward Spanish/English 'code-switching' (i.e.,

children's intermixing of Spanish and English in a controlled manner) on DLLs' reading achievement. Ramírez found that teachers were more likely to exhibit disapproval of Spanish-dominant students than English-dominant, Spanish-speaking students. Additionally teachers were more likely to attribute negative characteristics to DLLs whose English included more Spanish features. When Ramírez correlated teachers' language attitudes with the achievement of Spanish-speaking DLLs in the teachers' classrooms, he found teachers exhibiting more negative attitudes toward Spanish-dominant English were related to lower reading scores and gains in DLLs' reading.

While this study linked teachers' language attitudes to children's reading, relatively little research has explored the direct relationship between teachers' language attitudes and children's reading assessments. In fact, after a thorough review of the literature, only one study (Taylor, 1983) was found pertaining to teachers' language attitudes as they relate to teachers' formative reading assessments. While the high-stakes criterion-based reading assessments have received the bulk of the attention in the media and educational literature, it is important to recognize that the role of formative assessments has also increased in prominence (Guisbond & Neill, 2004).

In this one study illustrating the relationship between teachers' language attitudes and reading assessments, Taylor (1983) recorded samples of two second grade males, an African American child and a European American child, reading a short passage. In order to select children that were reading on the same level, the Reading Miscue Inventory (RMI; Goodman & Burke, 1972) was used to evaluate the children. The RMI evaluates the comprehension recall of the child by examining the types of deviations made during the reading and how these deviations might affect children's comprehension of text

meaning. In addition to examining miscues, the RMI also rates the child's ability to recall parts of the story (e.g., details and facts, main ideas, sequence of events). Taylor then collected feedback and input from practicing teachers to create a similar scale to rate the children's reading. Seventy-two teachers were randomly assigned to one of two groups receiving either the African American child's audio-recording or the European American child's audio-recording. After the recording was played, the teachers were asked to rate the comprehension of the child by examining the types of miscues made. Upon completion of their reading assessments, the teachers filled out the Language Attitude Scale (LAS; Taylor, 1973) survey assessing their language attitudes toward African American English (AAE). This verbal guise task demonstrated that teachers with negative attitudes toward AAE, as categorized by responses to the LAS questionnaire, rated the African American readers lower than the teachers with positive attitudes toward AAE.

While this study provides support for the argument that teachers' attitudes can predict their assessments of children's reading, gaps in the literature remain. First, more than one study is needed in order to provide insight into how teachers' language attitudes influence their reading assessments. Second, while this study administered the LAS questionnaire after the teachers' reading assessments so it would not impact the teachers' assessments, it still asked teachers to directly report their feelings toward AAE. Therefore, teachers' self-reports might not have been indicative of their attitudes toward AAE. Third, this study did not consider reactions to Spanish-accented English. While past research has identified cultural linguistic differences, educational expectations, and assessment practices as variables that might impact educational outcomes of children

speaking AAE (Terry, 2008; Washington, 2001), nonnative accent (i.e., Spanish-accented English) is fundamentally different from dialect. Accent, which is identified by phonological variation, might influence teachers' assessments differently than children who are speaking AAE, which follows specific grammatical patterns (Labov, 2012). Considering people's language attitudes are often mediated by stereotypes, one would expect bias toward a specific ethnic group (e.g., Hispanics) might influence judgments about that group but might not affect judgments about a different group (African Americans).

Perhaps more importantly, both the socio-political climate and demographics have changed greatly since this 1983 study. Past research demonstrates the socio-political climate is a principal component in shaping language attitudes (Dailey et al., 2005). Just as the visibility and influence of Hispanic culture have increased in the United States, so have the deep-rooted stereotypes and resistance toward the Spanish language (Hill, 2011). While formative reading assessments are more frequently relied upon by teachers, these teachers now find themselves in classrooms with increased numbers of Spanish-speaking DLL children. Therefore, it is important to examine teachers' perceptions of Spanish accent when using formative reading assessments. If teachers are inaccurately assessing children's reading, then these children might not receive the challenging and developmentally appropriate reading experiences they warrant (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006) and run the risk of not reaching their full potential (Rueda & Garcia, 1996).

## Conclusion

This review provides a unique perspective on how teachers' language attitudes may influence their assessment practices. This perspective takes into account the different ways people are culturally socialized in their use and interpretation of language, and how teachers' language attitudes may impact their classroom practices. Specifically, this paper proposes that teachers' language attitudes toward DLL children might influence teachers' literacy evaluations.

## Implications for Teacher Educators and Schools

The current review has important implications for teachers and teacher educators. Past research demonstrates teachers' language attitudes matter (Ramírez 1981; Smitherman & Villanueva, 2000). Teachers' attitudes have the potential to shape the expectations they hold for their students, which in turn, affect the support and opportunities teachers give to their students. Because teachers' language attitudes may play an important role in their interactions with and evaluations of children's reading, it is essential that teacher education programs prepare teachers to not only have the tools to create sound literacy practices but also to be aware of their language attitudes as possible influences on their practices. By acquiring appropriate pedagogical, theoretical and cultural knowledge, teachers can create effective teaching strategies that positively impact student achievement (Flores et al., 2007). This knowledge is needed by both future (e.g., preservice) and practicing (inservice) teachers.

**Preservice teachers.** Despite calls from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2007) and the National Council of Teachers of English (2006)

articulating standards for addressing best practices for DLLs, many teacher preparation programs do not have defined standards and specific ways to educate teachers to work with DLL children (Garcia, Arias, Murri, & Serna, 2010), even though statistics demonstrate that most teachers will have DLL children in their classrooms (Duhon-Ross & Battle, 2001). In fact, only one sixth of higher education programs require teacher educator programs to include coursework for mainstream elementary school and secondary teachers to work with DLLs (Ballantyne, 2008; Menken, 2001). This fact is troubling since teacher knowledge is intricately related to teacher efficacy (i.e., the feeling that one has the capacity to be an effective teacher and that effective teaching can bring about a desired outcome in students' learning despite differences in students' environments (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007). The relationship between teacher knowledge and teacher efficacy is pertinent since teacher efficacy can be a major determinant of teacher motivation (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) and instructional practices (Klassen et al., 2009; Sparks, 1988). Of particular importance to this review, are the findings that teacher knowledge and efficacy is linked to teachers' attitudes toward teaching DLL students (Karabenick & Noda, 2004). In a review of language-arts teachers' attitudes toward cultural and linguistic diversity, Smitherman and Villanueva (2000) found teachers' training (i.e., years and content in college courses) was the most influential factor on teachers' attitudes, while teachers' race had little influence on teachers' attitudes. Additionally, teachers receiving ESOL coursework and certification demonstrated more positive attitudes toward cultural and linguistic diversity than teachers who had not received ESOL training. Teachers need a working knowledge of children's language development, their own language attitudes, and the impact these constructs have

on children's literacy learning to provide DLLs with the support necessary for long-term academic success (Freeman & Freeman, 2007).

This working knowledge can be developed through coursework on linguistic diversity, cultural awareness, and the process of language acquisition (Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Pendergast, May, Bingham, & Kurumada, in press). While preservice teacher education programs often include courses on cultural awareness, comparatively few programs include courses with sociolinguistic components that help provide a more accurate and respectful portrayal of DLL learners (Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, & Carpenter, 2006). By merging the fields of sociolinguistics and teacher education, teacher preparation programs can provide teachers with a more holistic, yet concrete, view of the dynamic process of language development as well as create a space for discussion and reflection about one's own language attitudes and how these attitudes might be influencing classroom practices (Flores, 2001).

**Inservice teachers.** In addition to preparing preservice teachers to work with DLLs, practicing teachers can benefit from ongoing support and professional development. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1999), the majority of classroom teachers report that they do not feel prepared to teach DLL children. These perceived limitations are concerning since the limited state and federal funds, coupled with political and logistical issues, mean most DLL children will spend the bulk of their school day with their general classroom teacher rather than an endorsed bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor (Barker & Giles, 2004; Byrnes, Kiger, & Lee Manning, 1997; Crawford, 2004). Furthermore, even certified ESL teachers report feeling they are not prepared to competently teach DLLs (Gandara,

Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005), a troublesome finding considering the link between teachers' efficacy and teachers' attitudes discussed above. These certified teachers cited needs for 1) more paraprofessional assistance; 2) more time to teach students; 3) additional time for collaboration with colleagues; and 4) better DLL teaching materials (Gandara et al., 2005). However, not all professional development is created equal. Effective professional development should extend beyond one-time workshops in order to take into account how teachers learn and the context within which they work every day (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). In order to alter teaching practice, teacher knowledge should be developed over time. Such professional development may include self-examination of experiences in the classroom, co-teaching, study groups, mentoring, and observer evaluations of a teacher's practice (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, Desimone, 2009). Ensuring teachers feel prepared and adopt positive attitudes and beliefs is only part of the battle. Teacher educator programs need to equip teachers with strong pedagogical knowledge for assessing children's language and literacy learning and strategies to use this information effectively in the classroom.

### **Call for Research**

In addition to evaluating and restructuring teacher education programs, future research examining the relationship between teachers' language attitudes and literacy practice is needed. While some research has focused on teachers' self-reported attitudes toward teaching DLLs, relatively little research directly connects teachers' language attitudes to teachers' assessment practices. This gap in the literature is problematic since teachers' assessments often drive their instructional practices and influence the learning

opportunities available to children (August & Hakuta, 1997; Cummins, 2000; Flores & Smith, 2009).

Although the importance of eliminating the achievement gap for Latino DLL children has been addressed at length (Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010), this article offers a new lens for viewing this achievement gap by stressing the importance of examining the interplay of teachers' language attitudes and practices within the context of literacy instruction in elementary school settings. Changing demographics, new Common Core standards, the considerable and increasing emphasis placed on reading assessments, and findings supporting the assertion that some teachers do assess children differently based on a child's language (Shepherd, 2011; Taylor, 1983; Williams, 1976) lend credibility and urgency to understanding the association among teachers' language attitudes and their assessment practices. Given the instrumental role teachers have in the lives of their students, it is essential that researchers examine how possible cultural conflicts that may arise as a result of teachers' language attitudes may influence teachers' pedagogical and assessment practices and, in turn, DLL children's language and literacy learning.

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## CHAPTER 2

### TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ACCENT ON FORMATIVE READING ASSESSMENTS

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2013), children who are Dual Language Learners (DLL; i.e., children who are simultaneously learning a home language and a second language) represent one of the fastest growing school-aged populations in the United States. Of these DLL children, the majority speak Spanish as their native language (Aud & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2013). As the number of Latino children is increasing, there still exists a well-documented literacy achievement gap between Spanish-speaking DLLs and their European American, native English-speaking peers on state and national tests (Fry & Center, 2007; The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2010). Although a number of factors contribute to these statistics (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Planty, Hussar, & Snyder, 2009), research continually demonstrates that teachers have a profound influence on children's literacy learning (Au, 1980; Braunger & Lewis, 1998; Heath, 2000; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2007). In fact, some researchers argue that the classroom teacher impacts children's literacy learning above and beyond any specific approach or method (Schmoker, 2011; Slavin & Cheung, 2005; Yoon, 2008).

The way a teacher negotiates her role in the literacy teaching of DLL children is multifarious and dynamic (Freeman & Freeman, 1994; Genishi & Dyson, 2009). This role is influenced by the teacher's background and experiences (Polat, 2010; Youngs & Youngs, 2001), content and pedagogical knowledge (Menken & Antunez, 2001), and attitudes (Brisk, 1998). Since learning takes place in a social environment where the

student and the teacher each bring their own expectations to the event (Rosenblatt, 1994), a teacher's attitudes (positive or negative) can have powerful implications for children's academic achievement and perception of themselves as learners (Freeman & Freeman, 1994; Klassen et al., 2009; Richardson, 1996; Williams, 1976; Wolters & Daugherty, 2007). Specifically, a teacher's attitudes impact his or her assessments of children's academic abilities which influence children's learning opportunities (August & Hakuta, 1997; Cummins, 2000; Flores & Smith, 2009).

Due to the complex and multifaceted relationship between language and literacy teaching, this study proposes that a teacher's *language* attitudes (i.e., evaluative reactions or feelings toward a language use; Cooper & Fishman, 1974) are influential to a teacher's literacy assessments. While past investigations have connected teachers' language attitudes to their teaching practices (Cross, DeVaney, & Jones, 2001; Crowl & MacGinitie, 1974; Seligman, Tucker, & Lambert, 1972; Taylor, 1983) this research varies considerably across content areas (e.g., math, science) and contexts (i.e., age group, methodologies, etc.). Questions remain regarding the way teachers' language attitudes influence their literacy assessments. These questions are concerning given that teachers' reading assessments are often used to measure children's reading, create instructional groups, and evaluate instruction (Calkins & Cunningham, 2001; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Stiggins, 1999). Therefore, if teachers' language attitudes are affecting the accuracy of DLLs' reading assessments, the literacy achievement gap will only continue to increase (De Jong & Harper, 2005).

Further examination of how these dimensions overlap is warranted in light of the rapidly changing demographics in United States' classrooms coupled with the prominent and increasing role literacy assessments play in teachers' decision making and classroom practices (Calkins & Cunningham, 2001). Thus, the purpose of the present study is to build upon and extend current educational and sociolinguistic research by examining how teachers' reading assessments and language attitudes vary as a function of a child's accent.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Multiple frameworks are proposed to examine the role of language within the classroom (Atkinson, 2011; de Jong & Harper, 2007; Genishi & Dyson, 2009) and peoples' language attitudes within society (for a review see Ryan & Giles, 1982). However, frameworks for understanding the influential role of teachers' language attitudes within the classroom are fledgling. In order to provide a more holistic lens for examining teachers' language attitudes, two interrelated bodies of work guided this study: (1) sociocultural theory and (2) research on the standard language ideology. While extensive literature exists on examining language attitudes in the classroom, many theorists ground their work in Vygotsky's influential work on sociocultural theory (Moll, 2013). Sociocultural theory asserts that the learning process is overwhelmingly social and mediated by cultural knowledge, symbols, tools, and artifacts (Vygotsky, 1978). In the classroom, language is an important tool used to construct and express meaning of one's thinking. Beyond conveying meaning, language constructs one's identity and is used to position others as social beings (Gutiérrez, Gutiérrez, Asato, Santos, & Gotanda, 2002;

Halliday, 1975, Matsuda, 1991). Therefore, a teacher's attitudes toward a language may inadvertently influence her interactions with speakers of that language variety.

Consequently, a teacher's negative attitude may not only call into question the legitimacy of the child's language and claim to citizenship but also limits the child's resources for constructing and expressing meaning (Gutiérrez, Gutiérrez, Asato, Santos, & Gotanda, 2002).

In the United States, negative language attitudes are indoctrinated through standard language ideology (SLI; Lippi-Green, 1997; Milroy & Milroy, 1985). SLI is a set of beliefs including "a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, non-varying spoken language" (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 64) that is generally described as European American, upper-middle class, and 'unaccented' (Ferguson & Heath, 2004; Winford, 2003). Within SLI, accents (i.e., differences primarily in phonology) or dialects (i.e., differences in morphological structure, syntax, lexicon, and semantics) are only attributed to certain people despite the fact that all speakers operate within a dialect and have some regional accent (Lippi-Green, 1997). Typically, speakers are labeled 'non-accented' and 'standard' because their accent or dialect is also affiliated with a non-stigmatized group. Belief in those labels can affect the way one communicates with others (Perkins & Milroy, 1997). According to Clark & Schafer (1987; 1989), communication is a shared process where a speaker and a listener work together to make sure comprehension is achieved with both parties sharing in the responsibility of comprehension. However, drawing upon Perkins and Milroy's (1997) work, Lippi-Green argues that negative attitudes toward a speaker might cause the listener to reject his or her share of the *communicative burden*, placing the responsibility of communication solely on the speaker

to make sure comprehension is achieved. Within SLI, those believed to be speaking ‘standard’ English are given prestige and legitimacy over ‘nonstandard’ alternatives (e.g., African American English (AAE), Spanish-accented English, Appalachian English). ‘Standard’ speakers are more likely to reject their share of responsibility in the communication process (Lippi-Green, 1994) when conversing with speakers of ‘stigmatized’ varieties of English.

Since schools operate within a larger society and cultural context, it is not surprising that the United States’ education system is identified as a proponent of standard language ideology (Lippi-Green, 1997; Winford, 2003). One factor influencing SLI in schools is the classroom teacher. Classroom interactions are shaped and influenced by the ways people are socialized into using language (Au, 1980; Heath, 1983; Philips, 2001). Considering that the U.S. school system operates within a European American, monolingual linguistic culture, a teacher socialized into this culture may unwittingly operate within a discourse that is consistent with his or her cultural background, but does not take into account the language background of the children (Fu, 1995; Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009). The workings of SLI are particularly salient during literacy events, as teachers often believe it is their responsibility to help students use ‘correct’ English, despite the fact that this ‘correct’ English is often narrowly defined and hegemonic (Milroy, 2001). In spite of the research demonstrating that effective teaching instruction must take into account each learner’s system of meaning and understanding (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Gutiérrez, et al., 2009), this one-size-fits-all approach is still common in schools where DLL pedagogy is thought of as ‘just good teaching’ (de Jong & Harper, 2007).

Language attitudes play a powerful role in the learning process, and this role is proposed to increase when the subject matter directly relates to literacy. The following section reviews the small, but important, body of research on teachers' language attitudes and the subsequent impact teachers' attitudes have on teachers' evaluations and perceptions of their students.

### **Teachers' Attitudes Toward Language Use**

Research demonstrates teachers' language attitudes matter. Teachers' attitudes have the ability to shape the expectations they hold for children, and these expectations alter the opportunities and support that teachers give to their students (August & Hakuta, 1997; Cummins, 2000; Flores & Smith, 2009). Past research suggests teachers' language attitudes are influenced by such factors as teaching experience, contact with DLLs, place of employment, and educational background (Byrnes, Kiger, & Lee Manning, 1997). In Smitherman and Villanueva's (2000) examination of language-arts teachers' attitudes toward issues of cultural and linguistic diversity, they found teachers' academic preparation (i.e., years of college) was the most important influence on teachers' attitudes, while teachers' race had little influence. Additionally, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) coursework and certification influences teachers' attitudes. Research illustrates that teachers who have taken ESOL coursework demonstrate more positive attitudes toward teaching DLLs than those without the coursework or training (Byrnes et al., 1997; Flores & Smith, 2009; Youngs & Youngs, 2001).

It is hypothesized that ESOL coursework, which often contains pedagogy relating to: language, culture, assessment, planning and implementing instruction, and professionalism, helps teachers develop sound literacy practices as well as learn to be reflective about their own attitudes and beliefs in the classroom (Wright, 2010).

While the aforementioned findings illustrate that teachers' language attitudes are important, many existing studies relating teachers' language attitudes to their practices are limited in their methodological approach. Historically, teachers' language attitudes have primarily been examined through self-report methods such as surveys and questionnaires (see Pettit, 2011, for a review). While surveys and questionnaires provide insight into the way teachers view languages, the inherent limitation of these methods fail to link teachers' attitudes to their practices. Teachers who self-report their own language attitudes may succumb to social-desirability bias as they attempt to give socially appropriate responses believed to appear unbiased (Garrett, Coupland, & Williams, 2003; Sapsford, 2006). A further limitation of this approach is that surveys and questionnaires used to report language attitudes or biases generally do not provide a speech sample as a prompt; thus, teachers' self-reports might elicit inaccurate or exaggerated representations of a specific language variety (Garrett, 2010). Finally, examinations of teachers' covert attitudes is important because unconscious biases can undermine perceived conscious behaviors (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). In other words, asking teachers to report their attitudes may not capture teachers' actual attitudes as teachers may not be consciously aware of the biases they hold. In order to prevent teachers from acting on their covert biases, it is essential that teachers develop awareness of them (Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004).

**Indirect measures of language attitudes.** Other approaches to self-report methods exist and may provide a more accurate picture of teachers' language attitudes. An alternative approach to survey style methodology is the use of indirect measures, which are employed to evoke the subconscious language attitudes of listeners without the listeners becoming aware of the researchers' intent. The use of indirect measures on language attitudes was pioneered by Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, and Fillenbaum's (1960) implementation of the matched-guise technique. Through this process, listeners typically hear a voice recording of one person reading the same text with different variations of accent, dialect, or language. After each recording, listeners are asked to rate each speaker on an attitude rating scale. Another variation of this procedure is the verbal-guise technique (Ryan & Carranza, 1975). This technique uses listeners' evaluations toward varying accent, dialect, or language based on language samples given by different people. The evaluations are examined by comparing the way listeners over- or underrate the different speakers. The language cues in these studies are thought to trigger listeners' attitudes toward speakers of that variety. To put it another way, language attitudes are not really about language *per se*; rather, these attitudes are mediated by cultural stereotypes and are a reflection of a biased culture in the United States (Hill, 2001; Maegaard, 2005; Shepherd, 2011; Williams, Whitehead, & Miller, 1972).

When used in the field of education, these studies demonstrate that some teachers negatively evaluate children based on different children's language varieties (Cross, DeVaney, & Jones, 2001; Taylor, 1983; Williams, 1976; Williams, Whitehead, & Miller, 1972). For example, in a study of 175 teachers, Williams Whitehead, and Miller (1972) examined the relationship between teachers' language attitudes and teachers' experience

and to what degree teachers' attitudes toward children's speech influenced their expectations of students' academic performance. In this study, teachers watched video-clips of an African American, European American, and Latino child responding to an open-ended question. The teachers rated the children's speech samples on a language attitude scale comprised of two factors: "ethnicity-nonstandardness" (e.g., this child's language sounds incorrect, of a particular socioeconomic status) and "confidence eagerness" traits (e.g., this child's language sounds enthusiastic, confident). Next, the teachers were asked to place the children in ability-leveled classes: remedial, below average, above average, or far above average. Results showed that teachers with negative language attitudes toward a child (i.e., child categorized as speaking a 'nonstandard dialect') expected the child to achieve at levels below a child they held more positive language attitudes toward (i.e., children categorized as speaking a 'standard dialect'). While this study did not find teachers' expectations were impacted by teacher experience, it demonstrated that teachers' attitudes toward the child's language were predictive of their expectations of the child's performance. Moreover, the strength of the predictions increased when the subject matter was directly related to language arts instruction.

Due to the interrelated nature of language and literacy (Clay, 1966, 2001; Genishi & Dyson, 2009), it is not surprising that the strength of predictions increased when the subject matter was directly related to language arts. Williams and colleagues (1972) hypothesize that the teachers in their study might be confusing children's language differences with language deficits. In other words, the teachers' lower evaluations of the children might be due to the fact that the children's language was different from the teachers rather than indicative of the children's true academic abilities. The idea that

negative language attitudes influence teachers' language and literacy evaluations is further supported in Ramírez's (1981) study examining teachers' language attitudes toward the achievement of 279 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade bilingual students attending a monolingual English school. Using the matched-guise technique, 18 teachers were asked to rate four different speech guises with each guise containing more Spanish influences than the next: Guise I – 'standard' English; Guise II – 'standard' English with Spanish phonological and morphological influences; Guise III – 'standard' English with Spanish phonological, morphological, and syntactical influences; Guise IV- English/Spanish "code-switching" (i.e., children's intermixing of Spanish and English in a controlled manner). The teachers listened to each speech sample and rated the passages' (1) appropriateness for school, (2) correctness, and (3) the speaker's likelihood of achievement in school on a predetermined scale. The 279 students' reading achievement was measured by using the grades the classroom teachers assigned as well as the relative gain score in reading from the previous year. The findings indicate that, overall, the teachers were more likely to exhibit disapproval toward the code-switching guise than toward the English-dominant guise on the likelihood of achievement evaluation. When Ramírez correlated teachers' attitudes toward children's "likelihood-of-achievement" with the reading achievement of the children in their classroom, they found teachers' negative attitudes were associated with lower student gains in reading for Spanish dominant students. Ramírez surmised that teachers' negative attitudes toward code-switching resulted in lower assessments of children's reading.

While Ramírez's (1981) work linked teachers' language attitudes to children's reading outcomes, relatively little research has examined the direct relationship between teachers' language attitudes and teachers' reading assessments. The following section illustrates the need for more research by discussing the considerable and increasing emphasis placed on reading assessments in elementary school settings (Fawson, 2006) and the small body of research supporting the notion that teachers' language attitudes may influence their reading assessments of Spanish-speaking DLL children.

**Teachers' language attitudes and reading assessments.** With the adoption of the Common Core Standards, there has been an increased call for the use of reliable and valid assessments to document student learning. Specifically, an emphasis has been placed on using formative assessments (i.e., assessments that are carried out throughout a unit or course to support learning) as progress benchmarks in the classroom (Council of Chief State Schools Officers & National Governors Association, 2010). The use of formative reading assessments is backed by research indicating that such progress monitoring is a contributor to children's successful reading achievement (Hoffman, 1991; Vacca & Vacca, 2008). Consequently, many teachers rely on formative reading assessments, such as running records (Clay, 1993) and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2; Beaver, 2006) to evaluate students' performance, diagnose student needs, create instructional groups, and evaluate instruction (Calkins & Cunningham, 2001; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Stiggins, 1999). Running records and DRA2 both consist of the same practice of teachers marking errors as a child orally reads a short passage from a book. The teacher records the errors (e.g., insertions, deletions, omissions) that each child makes to determine a percentage representing the child's oral reading fluency.

The DRA2 differs from running records in that it includes a formal interview about the story's meaning in addition to the oral fluency component. The DRA2 is recommended for annual, or semiannual, use while the fluency portion can be used for day-to-day formative assessments (Burgin & Hughes, 2009).

While extensive literature exists on the reliability, validity, and subsequent testing bias on standardized assessments, very little information exists concerning formative assessments (Carpenter & Paris, 2005), rendering claims that formative assessments are subjective or biased (Madaus, 1994) with questionable reliability (Shavelson, Baxter, & Gao, 1993). Since the little psychometric data that does exist on the reliability of formative reading assessments is inconsistent (Ross, 2004), the hostility that exists between research-based standardized assessments versus teachers' formative assessments has been coined a "validity dilemma" (MacGinitie, 1993, p. 558). While some studies suggest adequate test-retest reliability (Clay, 1993; Paris, Pearson, Carpenter, Siebenthal, & Laier, 2002), strong construct validity (McCarthy & Christ, 2010; Pinnell, Lyons, Deford, Bryk, & Seltzer, 1994), and good to fair inter-rater reliability (i.e., variability among the raters; Williams, 1999), critics argue that more studies, particularly focusing on inter-rater reliability, are needed (Fawson, Ludlow, Reutzler, Sudweeks, & Smith, 2006; Rathvon, 2004). The issue of inter-rater reliability is particularly pressing given that inter-rater variance is more common with assessments that involve quick and accurate scoring of responses (Reynolds, 1990), a primary component of running records and the DRA2.

In one examination of formative reading assessment reliability, Fawson and colleagues (2006) examined the influence passage difficulty and rater variability had on the administration of running records. In this study, 10 first grade teachers, who had all received some formal training in Running Records, administered running records using ten video-taped children reading two different level-14 texts. Each teacher completed a running record on each of the ten children's readings resulting in 20 running records per teacher. The findings indicate that while teachers in this study varied slightly in their running records score, the assessments were deemed reliable when the student was tested with a minimum of three passages by three teachers with these scores being averaged to create a final score. Although this study provides insight into how reading assessments vary as a function of rater and passage, this study did not examine rater variability in terms of speaker or listener characteristics. Fawson et al. (2006) postulate that while not accounting for significant variation in their study, inter-rater variance may be a factor in formative reading assessments for teachers with different levels of assessment training. This hypothesis is supported by past formative assessment literature demonstrating the more experience and knowledge teachers have about reading assessments the more confident they are in their ability to conduct the assessment (Paris, Paris, & Carpenter, 2002), and teachers' confidence is linked to teachers' effectiveness (Klassen et al., 2009; Sparks, 1988).

When used appropriately, formative assessments are shown to be accurate, efficient, and reliable indicators of reading proficiency (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, & Jenkins, 2001; Pressley et al., 2001). Teachers use the information gained from these assessments to provide children with appropriate reading materials and to inform their teaching

strategies (e.g., this child is making semantic errors and instruction should focus on using textual cues to determine the meaning of the text). Conversely, these assessments can act in a stratifying way if children are given an ability label that does not take into account certain developmental or cultural competencies (Chapman, Tunmer, & Prochnow, 2001; Kontovourki, 2012). For example, a teacher's language attitudes might influence what the teacher counts as an error. According to the *DRA2 Teacher's Guide*, "[w]ords mispronounced due to a speech or dialect may be coded but are not counted as errors" (Beaver, 2006, p. 8). Therefore, a teacher who codes words due to accent or dialect as 'mispronounced' errors is not only inaccurately capturing the child's reading behaviors, but this teacher also runs the risk of assigning the child an inaccurate ability label (e.g., struggling reader). Consequently, this ability label has the potential to continue throughout a child's schooling (Hinnant, O'Brien, & Ghazarian, 2009). In light of the research demonstrating that teachers' literacy evaluations are influenced by teachers' language attitudes, coupled with the substantial and increasing role these assessments play in teachers' classroom practices, examinations of the way these dimensions overlap is pressing. However, few researchers have studied potential influences of teachers' language attitudes on their reading assessments. In fact, after a thorough review of the literature, only one study was found investigating teachers' language attitudes in relation to their formative reading assessments (Taylor, 1983).

In this above-mentioned study, Taylor (1983) examined the relationship between teachers' language attitudes toward African American English (AAE) and teachers' formative reading assessments. Taylor randomly assigned 72 European American teachers to hear an audio-recorded reading sample of an African American or a European

American boy. Two reading specialists had scored the children's recording using the *Reading Miscue Inventory* (RMI; Goodman & Burke, 1972) to obtain a standardized score for the children in order to control for quality of the child's reading. Similar to Running Records and the DRA2, the RMI examines the types of miscues (e.g., insertions, omissions, deletions) made during the reading and involves a retelling portion that assesses the child's ability to recall facts, main ideas, and sequence of events related to the story. For the purpose of her study, Taylor used teachers' feedback to create a new measure with face validity that mirrored the types of analyses required in the RMI. Next, Taylor played the recordings for the teachers and asked them to fill out the new reading assessment scale. After the reading, Taylor had each teacher fill out the Language Attitude Scale (LAS; Taylor, 1973) that measures one's attitude toward AAE. Results from this verbal guise task indicated that teachers with negative attitudes toward AAE rated the African American child's reading lower than teachers with more positive attitudes toward AAE.

While these findings support the argument that teachers' attitudes can influence teachers' formative reading assessments, gaps in the literature remain. First, more studies are needed to better understand the way classroom teachers conduct reading assessments with children from different language backgrounds. With respect to the present study, Taylor (1983) did not use an assessment regularly utilized by classroom teachers. Teachers may have been unfamiliar with the procedures required in the assessment, and consequently the assessments might not reflect teachers' actual assessment practices. Furthermore, the *Language Attitude Scale*, used to measure teachers' attitudes, is a direct self-reporting attitudinal measure. As previously mentioned, self-reporting methods are

limited in their ability to assess a teacher's attitude without the teacher becoming aware of the researcher's intent. Additionally, this study did not consider reactions to Spanish-accented English. Non-native accent, which is identified by specific phonological features influenced by one's first language, is fundamentally different from dialect, which has specific grammatical features (Labov, 2012). Considering the notion that people's language attitudes are mediated by cultural stereotypes and that these language samples are thought to evoke attitudes toward a particular group rather than the actual language, teachers might evaluate children speaking with a Spanish accent differently from children speaking AAE. Hence, investigations of Spanish-accented English are necessary to see if teachers' attitudes vary as a function of this type of language diversity.

The current investigation is also particularly relevant considering the changes that have taken place since this 1983 study. Past research demonstrates the influential role that the socio-political climate plays in shaping language attitudes (Dailey et al., 2005). Not only has there been a shift in accountability and assessments in classrooms, but these classrooms have grown exponentially more diverse over the past thirty years. Meanwhile, Spanish speaking DLL children are not achieving at levels comparable to their native English speaking European American peers, a result that may be due to inaccurate scoring of children's reading assessments. Given that teachers are assuming responsibility for educating DLLs, it is necessary to see how teachers' language attitudes might be influencing their formative reading assessments.

The purpose of this study is to extend previous research on teachers' language attitudes beyond that of self-reporting questionnaires to see if teachers' formative reading assessments might be contributing to the widening achievement gap between DLL

students and their European American native English speaking peers. Specifically, this article aims to address the following questions.

1. How do teachers' formative reading assessments (DRA2) and attitudes vary as a function of a child's accent?
2. How do teachers' formative reading assessments and attitudes vary as a function of a child's accent and teachers' educational endorsements (reading and ESOL)?
3. How are teachers' attitudes related to teachers' formative reading assessments?

## Method

### Participants

**Teachers.** Eighty-five 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3rd grade teachers working in a large public school district in the southeast were recruited to participate in a study examining teachers' use of the DRA2 during the fall of the 2013-2014 academic year. Teachers were from seventeen different schools, with varying numbers of DLL students. This district was chosen since it requires classroom teachers to use the DRA2 as a means for assessing children's reading levels. Only 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3rd grade classroom teachers and specialists (i.e., ESOL and special education) who reported regularly using the DRA2 were recruited since familiarity with this assessment tool is necessary in order to answer the research questions, and these teachers usually perform DRA2s with children of similar reading levels as the recorded children. Thirty-seven percent of the teachers reported giving each child in their class the DRA2 on a biannual basis, 35% reported giving it to each child quarterly, 8 % annually, and 2% monthly. While past research has examined teacher demographics such as race, years teaching, and location of the teacher as contributing

factors for evaluating children with mixed results (Radmacher & Martin, 2001; Frederick Williams et al., 1972), this study did not base teacher selection on any specific demographic factors. However, due to the large population of elementary school teachers across the U.S. being white, middle-class, and female (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012), the majority of the participants fell into these categories.

Of the 85 participating teachers, the majority self-identified as non-Hispanic White ( $N = 80$ , 94%), followed by African American, ( $N = 4$ , 4.8%) and Asian ( $N = 1$ , 1.2%), for a total of 82 women and 3 men. The median range was 45 to 55 years old. All participants had taught for at least 1 year; the majority of teachers had taught for more than ten years (70%). Twenty-seven teachers reported teaching 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 24 teachers taught 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, 28 taught 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and 6 teachers reported teaching multiple grade levels (ESOL and special education). All of the participants spoke English as their native language with 6 teachers reporting oral fluency in an additional language.

## **Measures**

**Formative reading assessment.** The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2; Beaver, 2006) was used to provide a standardized reading fluency score for each child. The DRA2, a reputable and commonly used reading assessment (Fawson, 2006), is frequently used by classroom teachers to assess children's reading level, place children in ability based reading groups, and determine if intervention for children's reading is needed (Paris, 2002). The DRA2 was the assessment adopted by the school district for teachers to use as progress benchmarks. The DRA2 assesses a child's reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and reading comprehension through the reading of

stories that become progressively more difficult as the child's reading abilities progress. Since this study was interested in the impact a child's language has on the total number of errors coded by the teachers, only the oral fluency component was utilized.

For the DRA2, teachers were given a transcript of the story that was being read. As the child read, the teacher marked on the transcript in order to record the total number of miscues (errors) the child made. Miscues include word substitutions, attempts, omissions, insertions, and self-corrections (Beaver, 2006). According to the DRA2 *Teacher's Guide* (Beaver, 2006), "[w]ords mispronounced due to a speech or dialect may be coded but are not counted as errors." Upon completion of the child's oral reading, the number of miscues that were not self-corrected were divided by the total number of words to produce a percentage accurate score for the oral reading fluency score. The words per minute was calculated by dividing the total number of words in the story by the time it took the child to read the story. Children's scores for level-14 are: 99-100% (advanced), 95-98% (independent), 94% (instructional) and scores less than 93% accuracy (intervention/emerging). Children scoring in the emergent to instructional category are typically reassessed with a lower level text.

**Audio recordings.** Oral readings are often used by elementary school teachers to assess a child's reading (Calkins & Cunningham, 2001). To provide teachers with a prompt similar to what they would hear in their own classrooms, four tapes of children performing an oral reading were used. Previous research indicates teachers rate females higher than males on spoken oral response tasks (Shepherd, 2011). Thus, to control for possible gender bias, all recordings were of first grade males.

*Selection process.* In order to best match the children on reading ability, voice quality, and similar assessment scores, approximately 40 reading samples were collected from 25 1<sup>st</sup> grade children (10 Spanish-accented speakers, 5 Southern-accented speakers, and 9 speakers with ‘standard’ accents) from a local school or community center. All recordings were conducted one-on-one with the researcher in a quiet setting using a Sony ICD-UX53 digital voice recorder. Any outside comments made by the children or the researcher were omitted from the recording using PRAAT computer software (Boersma & Weenink, 2010). All children were reported by their classroom teacher or center director as reading on a first grade reading level. The children were asked to read a short passage that would be recorded for classroom teachers. From these recordings, the researcher gave an independent assessment of the children’s miscues using the protocol described in the DRA2 as well as noted major differences in children’s voices (e.g., prosody or raspy voice due to illness) and recording quality. The researcher omitted any recordings of outliers (i.e., children who did not complete the task, children who completed the task with more than 15 miscues, or children who completed the task with fewer than 7 miscues). Next, outside evaluators (two university professors and two graduate students) helped select children with similar voice qualities and children who would most likely match the correct language variety. From these recordings, four children were selected. The four children were given pseudonyms: Child 1 (Seth) and Child 2 (Andrew) were both European American, native English-speakers whose accents were not associated with belonging to a particular region (i.e., ‘standard’ accent), Child 3: Blake (European American, identified as speaking English with features associated with the regional South; southern accent), and Child 4: (Jose: Latino, identified as speaking

English with Spanish features; Spanish accent). Seth, with a ‘standard’ accent, was selected to be the practice audio recording, and was not used in the subsequent analysis.

Next, 8 new raters (all graduate students who were currently teaching in elementary schools) listened to the four recordings. The graduate students were given a sheet of paper with the child’s pseudonym and age and asked to identify the ethnicity of the child, and the region of the world the child has lived for the majority of his life. All teachers correctly identified Jose as having some sort of Hispanic origin and Blake as being from the south, while Andrew and Seth were not characterized as coming from an area associated with a stigmatized accent or as belonging to an ethnic minority group by the majority of the teachers.

The readings (*George the Porcupine*, *The Wagon*, *Something at the Door*, *A New School*; 1997) were all level-14 texts and were chosen based on the independent readability level of the children, as determined by the DRA2, and selected from the DRA2 library (Beaver & Carter, 2006) or Running Record equivalent (Clay, 2010). According to the DRA2, the child’s independent reading level should allow the child to read the majority of the text without the help of an adult. The readings contained 8-10 miscues in order to have opportunity for variability within the teachers’ assessments.

To determine and ensure reliability for the children’s *official* reading fluency scores, each child’s reading was independently transcribed by three evaluators (the researcher, one professor and one graduate student) with expertise in transcription. One instance occurred where all three transcriptions deviated on miscues, thus, a fourth evaluator provided a transcription that was consistent with one of the transcriptions. If

deviations existed between the transcriptions, a fourth evaluator (graduate student) provided an additional transcription. Next, two reading specialists with expertise in the DRA2 independently scored the reading fluency using the transcription provided and the procedures described in the DRA2. As shown in Table 1, all of the children scored 95% with regards to reading accuracy.

Table 1

*Reader Miscues by Category with Accuracy Percentiles*

Category	Reader					
	'Standard' Accent		Spanish Accent		Southern Accent	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Omission	2		3		7	
Insertion	1		0		0	
Substitution	5		7		3	
Total Miscue	8	95	10	95	10	95

Note: % correct denotes the child's accuracy score for the reading

**Attitudinal survey.** A 10-item survey was used to gauge teachers' attitudes toward the different children's reading (see Appendix A). This scale was designed to assess teachers' attitudes in a less conspicuous manner by asking teachers to respond to questions that were not directly asking them to report their attitudes toward native Spanish speakers. To create this scale, a number of steps were taken. First, the researcher selected items that are frequently used to assess language attitudes (Zahn & Hopper, 1985) and that most pertain to teachers (e.g., the blue collar vs. white collar dimension was discarded). Second, in order to construct an instrument with face validity that closely aligned with the criteria teachers might use in their daily subjective evaluations, five

practicing teachers were solicited to give open-ended feedback about what comes to mind when listening to a child read. During the pilot of the survey, the researcher played a recording of an eight-year-old boy reading a short passage from the DRA2. The teachers were asked to provide descriptions about the child (i.e., “If this child were coming into your classroom, and you had nothing but the reading sample to provide information about a child, what questions or assumptions would you have about the child?”). The traits most frequently listed were selected and a 12 item survey was piloted with a new group of 8 teachers. These teachers were asked to listen to the recorded reading and rate the extent to which they agreed with a statement (e.g., “This child sounds confident.”) on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = *strongly agree* and 1 = *strongly disagree*). It was necessary to include both positive and negatively stated traits in order to ensure the teachers did not just mark the same value on the scale without reading individual descriptors. During this pilot, the teachers reported feeling uncomfortable and unable to answer questions about the child’s reading when the negative terms (e.g., ‘lazy’ and ‘unintelligent’) were the descriptors.

Due to the necessity to include both positively and negatively stated traits, the survey was transformed into a semantic differential scale. Semantic differential scales use a descriptor word and the word’s bipolar opposite (e.g., *lazy – hardworking*; *unintelligent – intelligent*) on a continuum. The difference between where the teachers mark along the continuum for each child implies a more positive or negative attitude toward the child’s language. This semantic differential scale was piloted on a new group of 8 practicing teachers. Teachers completed the attitudinal survey as they listened to the child read. When using this scale, the teachers felt comfortable rating the child on the listed

characteristics with the exception of two items. The two items “This child’s parents read with him at home” and “This child would get along well with children in my class” were thrown out based on the teachers’ feedback. Altogether, the survey contained 10 questions, on a 5-point semantic-differential scale (5 = *strongly agree* and 1 = *strongly disagree*). Congruent with past research using rating scales in the social sciences, the items were randomly positioned so that sometimes the most ‘socially desirable’ trait was positioned on the right and sometimes on the left to avoid any right-left bias (Dornyei, 2003). The total score was combined and reverse coding was used for questions that were negatively stated; thus, the higher the scores, the more representative of a positive attitude toward the child’s language.

**Teacher questionnaire.** A self-reported demographic questionnaire was used to provide information on teachers’ age, race/ethnicity, education level, years teaching, classroom demographics, language background, and school demographics since previous research suggests some of these variables may influence a listeners’ evaluations (Kenney & Wissoker, 1994; Vrij & Winkel, 1994). Additionally, teachers’ educational background and endorsements were of interest. Specifically, attitudinal differences have been found with teachers’ language attitudes based on whether or not teachers had ESOL training (Sehlaoui, Sehlaoui, & Shinge, 2013), and differences in reading practices are evidenced for teachers with extra literacy training (Paris et al., 2002). Therefore, questions pertaining to teachers’ ESOL and reading endorsements were included in the questionnaire.

## **Design and Procedures**

Data was collected in one of the participating teacher's classrooms after school and consisted of four DRA2 fluency assessments, four attitudinal surveys, and a teacher demographics survey. While all participating teachers from each school met in one classroom, the protocols were completed individually. Eighty-five teachers were assigned an identification number for use in place of their name to maintain confidentiality. Teachers were randomly assigned to one of six groups. The groups were counterbalanced so that an equal number of teachers heard the recordings of children in six different orders, with the exception of the first recording of Seth, who acted as a practice/filler effect. This recording was intended to give the teachers practice and better understand what would be required in the task (Derwing et al., 2004). The teachers' evaluations of the second, third, and fourth child were examined in the subsequent analysis. Teachers were told that they would spend approximately forty-five minutes listening to four first grade males reading a short, level-14 story in order to provide information about how teachers evaluate children's reading through the DRA2.

First, the teachers were given a fluency assessment packet, headphones, and an iPad Mini with the four audio recordings preloaded in the correct order. The assessment packet contained each child's reading passage and corresponding DRA2 fluency form. Teachers were instructed to listen to each child's reading one time, while completing the DRA2 assessment in the same manner that they do in their everyday teaching. Teachers were asked to record the total number of errors that they would use when creating a DRA2 fluency score. Teachers were told they did not need to calculate the words per

minute nor percentage accurate score. The researcher collected the assessment packet after each teacher finished all four of their reading fluency assessments.

Next, the teachers listened to the recordings a second time in the original order that they were received. During this round, teachers filled out the attitudinal survey for each child while the recording played. This attitudinal survey was given after the DRA2 as to not clue the teachers in on the attitudinal underpinnings of the study. Upon completion and collection of the attitudinal surveys, teachers completed a demographics questionnaire and were given \$20.00 as a thank you for their participation in the study.

### **Data analyses**

All statistical analyses were run using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) 20.0 for Windows with the preselected .05 level of confidence. Prior to data analysis, three decisions were made. First, the data was scanned for missingness, normality, and outliers. One teacher was deemed an outlier as her scores on all three of the children's assessments were greater than 2 standard deviations above the mean (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). This teacher's scores were not included in additional analyses. Additionally, two cases had incomplete data on the attitudinal measure. This data was deemed missing completely at random. Following Tabachnick and Fidell's (2007) procedure for missing data, these two cases were subsequently deleted. After deletion of these cases, the data showed normal distribution, as assessed by skewness and kurtosis values, respectively (Cutting, 2005). After deletion of missing data cases and outliers, 82 teachers were included in the analysis.

Second, the teachers' attitude score was created. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the factor structure of the attitudinal measure using theory from previous research (Ryan & Carranza, 1975; Brennan & Brennan, 1981) suggesting that language attitude traits could be divided into two domains: status (e.g., smart, successful) and solidarity (e.g., friendly, pleasant). Although the two factors were hypothesized as independent, the two factors were allowed to correlate. The correlations between the two factors was high ( $r = 0.79$ ) and not significant, indicating the two factors were not independent. The chi-square value for the overall model fit was significant,  $X^2(253) = 563.21, p < .001$  suggesting a lack of fit between the hypothesized model and the data. Due to issues of multicollinearity and the model's lack of fit, the notion of separating the attitudinal evaluation into two distinct factors was rejected. Further item analysis indicated that all of the items were highly correlated with the exception of item 6 "this child sounds advantaged" and item 10 "this child is nice to listen to." Based upon these findings, these two items were deleted. The remaining items showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.89$ ). Thus, the attitudinal measure was treated as a single factor and composite scores were created by summing the scores for each speaker together (Segrest Purkiss, Perrewé, Gillespie, Mayes, & Ferris, 2006).

Third, to determine if teachers varied significantly in their reading assessments to warrant further analysis, three one sample t-tests were generated to compare each child's official reading score with the teachers' mean score for the three readings. Results indicate teachers' fluency assessment scores and the official fluency assessment scores differed significantly for all three children (see Table 3 for means and standard deviations).

Overall, teachers were finding fewer errors for each child's recording than the official DRA2 score, and the difference between the official score and the teachers' scores were statically significant for all three children.

The teachers displayed the least variation in their assessment of the child who was considered 'standard.' Compared to the official score of 8 miscues, the teachers' scores were significantly different for the child with the 'standard' accent ( $M = 6.60$ ,  $SD = 1.94$ );  $t(82) = 30.752$ ,  $p < .001$ . The teachers showed slightly more variation assessing the child with the southern accent. Compared to the official score of 10 miscues, there was a significant difference in the teachers' scores for the southern accented child ( $M = 8.49$ ,  $SD = 2.01$ );  $t(82) = 38.17$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The greatest variation for teachers' miscues was demonstrated in teachers' evaluations of the child with the Spanish accent. Compared to the official score of 10 miscues, there was a significant difference in the teachers' score for the child with the Spanish accent ( $M = 7.78$ ,  $SD = 2.46$ );  $t(82) = 28.59$ ,  $p < 0.001$  (See Table 2).

Table 2

*Descriptive Summary of Teachers' Fluency Score by Speaker with Noted Differences from Speaker's Official Fluency Score*

Speaker	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
'Standard' Accent	6.60*	1.92	2-12
Spanish Accent	7.81*	2.46	3-14
Southern Accent	8.52*	2.00	4-13

$N = 82$ ,  $*p < 0.01$

Next, teachers' *reading variation* scores were created for each child to determine the variation between the official fluency score and the teachers' oral fluency score. To create these reading variation scores each teacher's fluency score was subtracted from the official fluency score for the three children resulting in three new *reading variation* scores given by each teacher (one per child).

Last, prior to continuing further, the possible influence of presentation order differences of the recordings was examined through a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA). Keeping the difference scores (dependent variables) and the grouping factor constant, the data was analyzed by incorporating the different recording order groups into the trial factor.

The results indicate there was not a significant influence of order effect ( $p = 0.99$ ; see Table 3 for study components).

Table 3

*Study Components*

Research Question	Data Source	Analysis
1. How do teachers' formative reading assessments (DRA2) and attitudes vary as a function of a child's accent?	3 recordings (IV) Within-subjects factor Teachers' Reading Variation Scores (DV) Teachers' Attitude Scores (DV) Reading Endorsement (Between-Subjects Factor) ESOL Endorsement (Between-Subjects Factor)	Doubly Multivariate Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance
2. How do teachers' formative reading assessments and attitudes vary as a function of a child's accent and teachers' reading and ESOL endorsements?	3 recordings (IV) Within-subjects factor Teachers' Reading Variation Scores (DV) Teachers' Attitude Scores (DV) Reading Endorsement (Between-Subject Factor) ESOL Endorsement (Between-Subjects Factor)	Doubly Multivariate Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance
3. How are teachers' attitudes related to their reading score variation?	Teachers' Reading Variation Score Teachers' Comparison Attitude Score	Pearson's R Correlation

## Results

In order to gain a greater understanding about how teachers conduct fluency reading assessments, teachers' reading assessments and attitudes were explored as a function of teachers' endorsements and child's accent. A doubly-multivariate repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on teachers' reading variation scores and attitude scores as a function of child's accent. Reading endorsement and ESOL endorsement were the between-subjects factor; (a) those with reading endorsements ( $N = 15$ ), and (b) those without reading endorsements ( $N = 67$ ); and (a) those with ESOL endorsements ( $N = 17$ ) and (b) those without ESOL endorsements ( $N = 65$ ). The within-subjects factor was child's accent: (a) child with a Spanish accent, (b) child with a southern accent, and (c) child with a 'standard' accent. This analysis is appropriate when comparing the same participants on two different dependent variables (i.e., reading assessments and attitudes) under different conditions (child's accent; Tavachnick & Fidell, 2007). In the current study, each teacher has a reading variation score (i.e., the difference between the official reading score and the teacher's reading score) and an attitude score for each child. As suggested, partial eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ), an effect size estimate that gives the measure of variability accounted for by an effect while controlling for subjects' effect that is unaccounted for by the model (i.e. individual differences and errors) was used. In other words, partial eta squared is the variance explained by a given variable once the variance explained by other predictors is excluded.

An advantage of partial  $\eta^2$  is that it is not dependent on the number or magnitude of other effects. Using guidelines derived from previous studies and the literature, effect sizes of .01 are considered small; effect sizes of .06 are considered medium; and effect sizes of .14 are considered large (Kline, 2004; Cross, Devaney, & Jones, 2001).

The assumption of normality for all variables for all group combinations was satisfied, as assessed by visual inspection of their histograms and Normal Q-Q Plots. Mauchly's test of sphericity for the overall model indicated that the assumption of sphericity had not been violated for teachers' reading variation,  $\chi^2(2) = 3.05, p = .22$  or for teachers' attitude  $\chi^2(2) = 2.40, p = .30$ . This model involved only the main effects for the between-subject factors and the main effects and two-way interactions for the within-subject factors. Univariate repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted as follow-up analyses in order to further examine significant results from multivariate tests, significant main effects, and significant interactions. The following results are organized to address the three research questions. Each research question is identified and followed by the findings.

*How do teachers' formative reading assessments and attitudes vary as a function of a child's accent?*

Analysis of the multivariate tests demonstrate there was not a statistically significant effect for a child's accent on teachers' overall scores,  $F(4,76) = 2.22, p = .075$ , Wilks'  $\Lambda = .90$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .11$ . However, univariate tests revealed a significant and medium effect for a child's accent on teachers' attitudes  $F(2,158) = 4.152, p = .017$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ . Follow-up tests, using Bonferoni adjustments to control for Type I error,

indicate that, on average, teachers' attitude scores for the child with the Spanish accent were 1.63 points higher than the child with the 'standard' accent ( $p = .023$ ). There was not a significant difference between teachers' attitudes for the two native English speaking children ( $p = .98$ ). This finding suggests that, overall, teachers' attitudes varied as a function of child's accent with teachers rating the child with the Spanish accent significantly higher than the child with the 'standard' accent.

*How do teachers' formative reading assessments and attitudes vary as a function of child's accent and teachers' reading endorsements and ESOL endorsements?*

Since teachers' education may play an important role in the way teachers conduct assessments, it was of interest to see if teachers' endorsements (i.e., reading or ESOL endorsements) influence teachers' scores. Analyses of the multivariate tests revealed there was not a statistically significant interaction between ESOL endorsement and child's accent on teachers' scores,  $F(4, 76) = 2.22$ ,  $p = .47$ , Wilks'  $\Lambda = .95$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .046$ , indicating that teachers' attitudes and reading score variation did not differ significantly based on ESOL endorsements. However, the multivariate tests demonstrated a statistically significant and moderately strong interaction between teachers' reading endorsements and child's accent,  $F(4, 76) = 2.58$ ,  $p = .044$ , Wilks'  $\Lambda = .88$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .12$  on teachers' scores for the combined dependent variables. For this study, this interaction was compelling, supporting the hypothesis that reading endorsements would affect the variation in teachers' assessments. Given the significance of the overall multivariate test, a follow-up univariate repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. Analysis of Mauchly's test of sphericity suggest that the assumption of sphericity had not been violated for teachers with a reading endorsement on their reading score variation,

$\chi^2(2) = .12, p = .94$ , and attitude scores,  $\chi^2(2) = .44, p = .80$ . Similarly, the assumption of sphericity was not violated for teachers without a reading endorsement for their reading score variation,  $\chi^2(2) = 2.42, p = .092$ , and their attitude score  $\chi^2(2) = 4.77, p = .30$ . The follow-up tests demonstrate that teachers with a reading endorsement did not evaluate children differently based on the child's accent  $F(4, 54) = 1.14, p = .35$ , Wilks'  $\Lambda = .85$  partial  $\eta^2 = .078$ . Specifically, a child's accent did not impact teachers' variation in reading scores ( $p = .263$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .091$ ) or teachers' attitude scores ( $p = .37$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .069$ ). In other words, teachers with a reading endorsement showed similar score variation in reading scores and similar attitudes toward the children regardless of the child's accent.

However, teachers without a reading endorsement had statistically significant and large differences based on child's accent  $F(4, 262) = 10.24, p < .001$ , Wilks'  $\Lambda = .75$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .14$ . When examining the two dependent variables separately, teachers' reading score variation was large and statistically significant based on child's accent,  $F(2, 132) = 9.24, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .12$ . Bonferroni corrected post-hoc tests showed that teachers without a reading endorsement found 1.25 ( $p = .001$ ) fewer errors for the child with the Spanish accent in comparison to the child with the 'standard' accent, and 0.99 fewer errors ( $p = .006$ ) than the child with the southern accent. There was not a significant difference between the errors found for the two native English speaking children ( $p = .98$ ). Therefore, teachers were finding statistically significantly fewer errors for the child with the Spanish accent compared to the two native English-speaking children.

Similar to the previous findings, a child's accent had a statistically significant and strong effect on teachers' attitudes,  $F(2, 132) = 15.80$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .19$ . On average, teachers without a reading endorsement rated the Spanish child 2.39 points higher than the child with the 'standard' accent ( $p < .001$ ) and 2.12 points higher than the child with the southern accent ( $p < .001$ ). There was not a significant difference between the attitude scores for the two native English speaking children ( $p = 1.00$ ). These findings demonstrate that teachers without a reading endorsement had higher attitude and reading scores in relation to the child with the Spanish accent compared to the two native English-speaking children. While contrary to the original hypothesis that teachers would rate the child with the Spanish accent lower on these dimensions, these findings are in line with the idea that teachers would rate and assess children differently based on the child's accent (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Average Reading Variation and Attitude Scores as a Function of Child's Accent and Reading Endorsements (with Standard Deviations in Parentheses)*

	Teachers with Reading Endorsement (N = 15)	Teachers Without Endorsement (N = 67)
<b>Difference Score</b>		
Spanish Accent Difference Score	0.73 (2.91)**	2.55 (2.24)**
'Standard' Accent Difference Score	1.86 (1.60)	1.30 (2.00)
Southern Accent Difference Score	1.27 (2.43)	1.57 (1.92)
<b>Attitude Score</b>		
Spanish Accent Attitude Score	33.13 (4.27)	32.79 (4.04)
'Standard' Accent Attitude Score	32.07 (4.48)	30.40 (4.25)
Southern Accent Attitude Score	32.07 (4.04)	30.67 (4.89)

\*\* $p < 0.01$

*How are teachers' (without a reading endorsement) attitudes related to their reading score variations?*

Since there was a significant effect for teachers without a reading endorsements' reading variation and attitude scores for the child with the Spanish accent, it was of interest to see if there was a relationship between these two outcome variables. In order to examine teachers' attitudes as they relate to the child with the Spanish accent, it was first

necessary to create a comparison score from the teachers' attitude scores. To compare the teacher's attitude toward the child with the Spanish accent with the child with the 'standard' accent, a comparison score was computed for each teacher. This score was created by subtracting teachers' evaluations of the child with the Spanish accent from their evaluation of the child with the 'standard'. This method has been used in previous research where the child with the 'standard' accent serves as a hypothesized baseline (Ramirez et al., 1978). This new score is assumed to be the relative difference between a teacher's attitude toward the child with the Spanish accent relative to the child with the 'standard' accent. For example, a teacher's evaluation of the child with the 'standard' accent with an attitude score of 40 and an attitude score of 30 for the child with the Spanish accent would have an attitude comparison score of 10. Thus, the magnitude of the difference score on each teacher's attitude score can be interpreted as measuring the degree to which one guise is preferred/valued over another.

These attitude comparison scores were then used to examine the relationship between teachers' attitudes toward the child with the Spanish accent and teachers' reading score variations for this child. To examine this relationship, a Pearson's product-moment correlation for teachers' reading variation scores and teachers' attitude scores for the child with the Spanish accent were run for teachers without a reading endorsement. The correlation between the teachers' attitude scores was statistically significant  $r(65) = -0.33, p < .01$ . This moderate, negative correlation between teachers' difference scores and teachers' attitude comparison scores indicates that the more positive a teacher's attitude toward the child with the Spanish accent, the more highly the teachers rated the reading of the Spanish-accented child in comparison to the 'standard'-accented

child. This moderate negative correlation indicates that teachers with more positive attitudes toward the child with the Spanish accent tended to rate this child as having higher reading scores.

### **Discussion**

This study examined elementary school teachers' use of the DRA2 fluency assessments with attention to a child's accent, teachers' attitudes, and teachers' reading and ESOL endorsements. Given the limited research on formative reading assessments and even more limited research on how teachers' attitudes and education endorsements relate to these assessments, this study provides important insight into how teachers' literacy assessments vary. The four major findings are as follows and discussed below:

- 1) Teachers showed great variation in their reading assessment scores with a significant effect of child accent on teachers' scores for teachers who did not have a reading endorsement.
- 2) Teachers' attitudes were overall higher for the child with the Spanish accent, and teachers not holding a reading endorsement showing significantly more positive attitudes toward this child when compared to the native English-speaking children.
- 3) For those teachers without a reading endorsement, their language attitudes were related to their assessment variation for the child with the Spanish accent.
- 4) ESOL endorsement did not significantly impact teachers' variations in reading assessments or attitudes.

Overall, the teachers' reading scores varied significantly from the official reading scores, regardless of the child's accent. In general, teachers found significantly fewer mistakes for each recording. Similar findings were illustrated in Burgin and Hughes (2009) study where classroom teachers' DRA assessments were significantly higher for teachers during the school year compared to teachers working in a summer program. The summer program teachers surmised that the classroom teachers' subconscious biases (high-stakes pressure, and prior knowledge about the students) influenced the accuracy of these assessments. Since these factors did not play a role in the current study, variability in teachers' scores are most likely a result of teachers not having adequate training to administer the assessments. While the teachers in this study all reported using the assessment on a regular basis, many of them mentioned that they had never received any formal training on the assessment.

The fact that teachers with a reading endorsement did not differ significantly on their reading assessments based on a child's accent is of note. This finding provides support for the idea that reading assessments matter to teachers' practices, and the variation in teachers' reading assessments might be mitigated through additional education. Reading endorsements require extra coursework on literacy theories, methods, and assessments (Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2011), and teachers need adequate time and training to learn how to conduct formative assessments reliably (Allington, 2009; Paris & Carpenter, 2003). Additionally, given the integrated nature of language and literacy, these teachers frequently take courses that include sociolinguistic components requiring the teachers to examine their own attitudes and beliefs about the role language plays in their classroom (Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2011). Thus, it was not surprising that these

teachers' reading assessments showed less variability based on a child's accent and more egalitarian attitudes toward the children overall.

The finding that teachers without a reading endorsement exhibited greater variation in the opposite direction hypothesized for the child's reading was surprising in light of past research demonstrating teachers tend to evaluate the literacy skills of Latino children lower than their European-American peers (Ramírez, 1981; Ready & Wright, 2011; F. Williams, Whitehead, & Miller, 1972). The divergent findings may be due to a number of important factors. First, the method by which the data were collected might have influenced the types of responses the teachers gave. For example, in Ready and Wright's (2011) study, ethnicity was the focus of the study rather than language cues. Participants in Ready and Wright's study were given visual and audio cues when evaluating the children. Language cues might influence teachers' evaluations differently than visual cues. Additionally, contrary to Ramírez (1981) and Williams et al. (1972) work, this study used a standardized protocol requiring teachers to follow certain procedures. These procedures might have kept the teachers from giving more subjective assessments of the child's literacy skills.

Second, teachers might have been overcompensating for the child with the Spanish accent. Given previous research illustrating that teachers expect Spanish-speaking DLLs to be 'low achieving' (Ramírez 1981; Ready & Wright, 2011), the teachers in this study might have been surprised that this child was reading on a targeted grade level. Thus, when hearing the child with the Spanish accent read, teachers might assume this child has overcome more obstacles than the native English-speaking children. Another factor to consider is the DRA2's instructions in the *Teacher's Guide* (Beaver,

2006) that “[w]ords mispronounced due to a speech or dialect may be coded but are not counted as errors.” Teachers might be overcompensating given that the DRA2 says to not take into account accent when marking errors, which could make the teachers more timid about marking errors. Additionally, teachers might have been succumbing to a social desirability bias if they were aware of the true underpinnings of the study. Therefore, teachers may have been assessing the child with the Spanish accent with less restriction than the native English speakers.

Last, attempts were made to control for the types of miscues each child made. However, in order to create a reading that resembled a child’s day-to-day reading, this was not always possible. For example, the child with the Spanish accent substituted the word *hamster* for *hammer*. This substitution (e.g., “the boy removed the dents (on the wagon) with a rag and a hamster.”) occurred twice in the reading and elicited laughter from the teachers. When hearing this substitution, one of the evaluators commented “poor hamster 😊.” This error, while seemingly innocuous at the time, resulted in laughter by the teachers and teachers commenting on how cute this child sounded. Teachers’ perceptions of children’s reading might be related to the types of miscues the children make. Therefore, future research should take into account the types of miscues made by children and how these miscues might affect the attitude scores and reading evaluation of the children.

**Teachers’ attitudes.** The current study revealed that overall, teachers exhibited significantly more positive attitudes toward the child with the Spanish accent compared to the child with the ‘standard’ accent, and teachers without a reading endorsement evaluated this child significantly higher than the child with a southern accent as well.

Considering previous research demonstrating that people tend to hold more negative attitudes toward native Spanish speakers compared to native English speakers (Ramírez, 1981; Williams et al., 1972), it was surprising that teachers in this study had significantly more positive attitudes toward the child with the Spanish accent than the child with the ‘standard’ accent. However, similar to findings in this study, a study by Chan, Lan, & Covault (2009) found that European American preservice teachers rated the positive behavior of hypothetical Latino students higher than the European American students in an identical situation. Although the findings of the current study could be due to the overcompensating argument discussed above, it is important to note that considerable social change has occurred in U.S. schools since the Ramírez (1981) and Williams et al., (1972) studies. The increasing number of Spanish speaking DLL children in the United States’ schools might not conjure up the same negative evaluations of these thirty-year-old studies.

The fact that the teachers’ positive attitudes corresponded with higher ratings of the reading for the child with the Spanish accent is in line with previous studies demonstrating one’s attitudes are related to evaluations of those speakers (Ramírez, 1981; Williams et al., 1972). However, it was surprising that the child with the Spanish accent was rated significantly higher than the other two children. This finding suggests that a more positive attitude toward the child with the Spanish accent is related to higher assessment scores for the child’s reading. In other words, teachers in this study appeared to have more positive attitudes toward the child with the Spanish accent, and in turn, were not finding as many errors in this child’s reading.

**ESOL endorsement.** The finding that ESOL endorsements did not impact the accuracy of teachers' reading variation or attitudes is contrary to previous research demonstrating the significant and positive differences ESOL coursework can have on teachers' language and literacy teaching compared to those without ESOL coursework (Sehlaoui et al., 2013). For example, in a study comparing teachers in K-12 schools licensed as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) teachers to those without the certification, it was found that teachers who are ESOL licensed and have had ESOL coursework are more knowledgeable in applied linguistics than those who are not licensed or do not have ESOL training (Sehlaoui et al., 2013). The lack of significance in the current study could be due to the varying requirements necessary to obtain an ESOL endorsement. In order to meet the needs of growing DLL populations, some states give ESOL endorsements based on passing a pencil-and-paper test of applied linguistics and second language teach pedagogy. Thus, teachers in this study might not have had the coursework necessary to significantly affect their practices. Additionally, the lack of significant differences between attitude scores could be because all teachers rated the child with the Spanish accent highly. Since all teachers rated this child significantly more positively than the child with the 'standard' accent, differences between those with and without an ESOL endorsement might be hard to find.

### **Limitations**

Given the limited sample size and homogenous (i.e., European American, female, monolingual) teacher characteristics with a limited number of teachers with ESOL endorsements ( $N = 17$ ) and reading endorsements ( $N = 15$ ), interpretation of these results should be made with caution. This study utilized a nonprobability convenient sample,

which limits the generalizability of the findings. It would be interesting to see how teachers' ethnicity might be related to teachers' attitudes and reading assessments since past research has examined listener characteristics such as race and ethnicity with mixed results (Byrnes et al., 1997; Shepherd, 2011). Additionally, examining classroom demographics of these teachers (i.e., language background of their students) might provide further insight into teachers' attitudes and practices. Additionally, while some teachers reported only using the fluency portion of the DRA2, this question was not asked in the demographics questionnaire. Therefore, the results of this study might have greater salience for teachers that use the fluency portion as a stand-alone assessment compared to teachers who use this component in addition to the comprehension section. Given these limitations, additional studies that take into account other teacher demographics and assessment practices in relation to their language attitudes and reading assessment practices are clearly needed.

Another limitation of this study is that the teachers were only given one speech sample for each language variety. While the child's reading was controlled for as much as possible (e.g., intonation, rate, prosody, pitch), there is still the possibility that teachers were influenced by the child's voice rather than the child's language.

In addition to this limitation, this study used an attitudinal measure that was not divided into different attitudinal traits (e.g., status and solidarity) due to the interrelatedness of the data (all teachers were rating three children on the same 8 characteristics). Future studies, using a measure that is easily divided into separate traits such as solidarity and status might distinguish between the different ways teachers

evaluate children. Previous research indicates that different attitudinal dimensions affect listeners' evaluations in various ways (for a review see Giles & Billings, 2004).

### **Implications and Conclusion**

The current study has important implications for teachers and teacher educators. The overall finding that some teachers' formative reading assessments significantly differ based on a child's accent is concerning. Inaccurate use of formative assessments might result in DLL children not receiving the literacy instruction that is in line with their existing or emerging literacy skills. A child not receiving accurate literacy instruction is of note considering several decades of research demonstrating that early intervention is important to prevent young children's reading failure (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). It is necessary to create programs that provide teachers with extensive training and professional development that integrates reading instruction with literacy assessments to provide inservice and preservice teachers the support that they need to develop sound literacy practices (Paris & Hoffman, 2004).

Since teachers without a reading endorsement showed significant attitude and reading assessment accuracy variation, additional training may help teachers develop an awareness of how their language attitudes might be influencing their literacy assessments. However, due to demands in the curriculum and budgeting, many teachers do not receive the adequate training needed to conduct these reading assessments in valid or reliable ways (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005). With regards to literacy assessments, there was no relation between how frequently teachers conducted the DRA2 and the accuracy of the teachers' assessments. In other words, just conducting the assessment on

a more regular basis did not make the teachers more reliable. While information about the types of training the teachers' received with the tool was not collected, the current findings support the idea that teachers need specific and targeted instruction and training to aid in accurate use of formative assessments. This postulation is further supported by Paris and Carpenter's study (2003) that found inservice teachers needed sustained professional development and school wide implementation of reading assessments to use them accurately, consistently, and uniformly. Moreover, teachers need help in selecting the appropriate texts, administering assessments, interpreting them, and using the knowledge gained to create effective literacy practices. In addition to ongoing professional development, literacy coaches can support practicing teachers by providing ongoing observations followed by conferencing, modeling lessons, and administering and interpreting assessment results. This collaboration between literacy coaches and teachers can help teachers enhance their literacy environment (De Alba-Johnson et al., 2004), use best practices in their literacy instruction (Blachowicz, Obrochta, & Fogelberg, 2005; Salzman, Rosemary, Newman, Clay, & Lenhart, 2008), and create positive change for teachers (Symonds, 2003) which, in turn, can enhance students' reading gains (Bembry, Jordan, Gomez, Anderson, & Mendro, 1998).

The finding that teachers' attitudes were related to their reading assessment accuracy for the child with the Spanish accent supports previous research demonstrating teachers' expectations can impact teachers' evaluations of students' work (Shepherd, 2012). The relationship between teachers' attitudes and evaluations illustrates the need for professional development that would include support and information for teachers about the ways their language attitudes might be influencing their classroom practices

and assessments. Additionally, teachers may benefit from strategies tailored toward creating a classroom environment that is supportive for all children. Previous studies indicate that this classroom environment can be created by providing inservice teachers multilingual literacy materials, translating software, and support in order to create a positive community for DLLs (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010 p. 128).

**Conclusion.** Findings from this study demonstrate that teachers' formative reading assessments may not accurately represent children's reading ability, an important finding considering that all of the teachers report using the DRA2 to inform their classroom decision making. Furthermore, teachers without a reading endorsement illustrated greater inaccuracy for children with a Spanish accent compared to the two native English-speaking children. According to Clay (1966), "We have to be concerned with whether our assessments are reliable because we do not want to alter our teaching, or decide on a child's placement on the basis of a flawed judgment" (p. 8). Considering that teachers are expected to conduct formative reading assessments with children on a regular basis, and some teachers only utilize formative reading assessments in their classrooms to document student progress (Moats, 2009), this inaccuracy is concerning, and schools and teachers who use these assessments as a standardized and summative assessment need to exercise caution to avoid over interpreting the results (Paris & Hoffman, 2004). In order to combat reliability and potential bias it is suggested that teachers utilize multiple formative assessments when assessing a child's reading (Dennis, 2012; Paris et al., 2002).

In addition to providing inservice and preservice teachers with the knowledge and continued support to provide effective literacy education for all children, further

exploration of teachers' language attitudes as they relate to their literacy assessment practices is needed. Although the need to eliminate the achievement gap for Latino DLL children has been addressed at length (Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010), this gap must be examined beyond DLL's standardized test scores (Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006). Changing demographics, the considerable and increasing emphasis placed on reading assessments, and findings from the current study demonstrating that some teachers do assess children differently based on a child's accent support this call for more research.

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## APPENDIXES

## APPENDIX A

## SEMANTIC SCALE

**Child: Jose****Teacher ID \_\_\_\_\_**

Please mark the corresponding circle that aligns with the child reading.

- |                                      |                                  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                                       |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. sounds intelligent                | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | sounds unintelligent                  |
| 2. sounds unfriendly                 | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | sounds friendly                       |
| 3. sounds hard working               | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | sounds lazy                           |
| 4. sounds confident                  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | sounds insecure                       |
| 5. sounds disadvantaged              | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Sounds advantaged                     |
| 6. sounds successful                 | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | sounds unsuccessful                   |
| 7. sounds trustworthy                | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | sounds untrustworthy                  |
| 8. sounds unkind                     | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | sounds kind                           |
| 9. would want this child in my class | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | would not want this child in my class |
| 10. is nice to listen to             | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | is not nice to listen to              |

## APPENDIX B

## TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

Teacher ID \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher Demographics Questionnaire**

Please fill out this questionnaire by circling the appropriate answer.

1) Current grade teaching

1<sup>st</sup>                      2<sup>nd</sup>                      3<sup>rd</sup>                      Other  
 \_\_\_\_\_

2) Grades previously taught: (Please circle all grades)

Pre-K      K      1<sup>st</sup>      2<sup>nd</sup>      3<sup>rd</sup>      4<sup>th</sup>      5<sup>th</sup>      Other  
 \_\_\_\_\_

3) Total number of years taught:

1-2 years                      3-5 years                      5-10 years                      More than 10 years

4) My ethnic background is:

White      African American      Latino/Hispanic      Asian American      Other \_\_\_\_\_

5) My age is:

20-25                      26-35                      36-45                      45-55                      55-65                      Other  
 \_\_\_\_\_

6) How often do you use the DRA2 in your classroom?

Weekly      Monthly      Once a quarter      Twice a Year      Once a Year  
 Never

7) On average, how often does each child receive the DRA2 in your classroom by you?

Weekly      Monthly      Once a quarter      Twice a year      Once a year  
 Never

8) What is your main purpose for using the DRA2? (Circle all that apply)

Assessment                      Ability Grouping Reading levels                      Other  
 \_\_\_\_\_

9) What is the highest level of education you have received?

Associates      Bachelor's      Master's      Specialist      PhD

10) Do you have any reading endorsements?

Yes (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_ In the Process      No

11) Do you have an ESOL endorsement?

Yes      In the Process      No

12) Approximately how many children in your class are English Language Learners?

0      1-3      4-6      7-10      10-13      more than half      almost all

13) Approximately, how many children are native Spanish speakers?

0      1-3      4-6      7-10      10-13      more than half      almost all

14) What is your first language?

English      Spanish      French      German      Other

\_\_\_\_\_

15) Do you speak another/other language(s) fluently? If so, what language(s)?

Spanish      French      German      Other \_\_\_\_\_

16) Where have you lived the majority of your life?

Southeast      Northeast      Midwest      West Coast      Southwest      Other

\_\_\_\_\_