CHAPTER 1: *Introduction*

> *Myth:* We can't assess a child who comes from a different cultural background and does not speak our language. We don't have appropriate standardized tests and qualified staff, plus the child is struggling because the parents do not use our language at home; therefore we won't do an assessment (special education administrator).
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> *Fact:* Current research provides a solid guide to strategies for collecting information that allows psychologists to diagnose learning, behavioral, social and emotional difficulties in children and adolescents who come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. We meet some of these children and adolescents below.

*A*my is a 6-year-old girl whose family immigrated to Canada from China prior to her birth. Her teacher referred her because she has not spoken at school or at the child care center attached to the school since she enrolled 3 years earlier. Her parents speak Mandarin and a Chinese dialect fluently, and some conversational English. Boris is a 9-year-old boy in Grade 4 whose mother initiated an assessment due to Boris's academic and social difficulties. Boris was born in Russia, and immigrated to Canada while in kindergarten. Russian is spoken at home, but both parents speak conversational English. Diego, who was referred due to severe academic challenges and attention difficulties, is an 11-year-old boy in Grade 6 from a Latin American country where there is considerable violence associated with the drug trade. His father is deceased. His family came to Canada as refugees when he was 8 years old. His mother speaks Spanish and is not literate. Khalil is a 14-year-old boy in Grade 9 who was born in Canada to parents who emigrated from Iran a year earlier. Since then he has lived for various periods of time in Canada and Iran. A counselor at his private boarding school in Toronto referred him due to problems with reading, writing, and completing work. She indicated that his father was deceased and his mother lives in Iran. Changgun, who prefers to be called Brandon, was referred by his mother when he was 15 years old due to poor and declining school performance and oppositional behavior at home. He was born in Canada shortly after his parents

emigrated from Korea. His mother speaks fluent English. Aisha was referred by a support worker at a community agency due to severe problems with acquiring reading and language skills after she had been in Canada for 4 years. She attends an intensive program for English-language learners at a large vocational secondary school. Aisha was born in a refugee camp in Africa, and immigrated to Canada with her parents at the age of 13 years. Aisha's parents speak French and Kirundi and are learning English.

Children like Amy, Boris, Diego, Khalil, Changgun, and Aisha are challenging for psychologists to assess because it is difficult to tease out the relative contributions of having to learn and function in a second language, poverty, the need to adapt to a new society and culture, and possible maltreatment and trauma in their countries of origin. Their parents may not speak the language of the immigrant-receiving country, and may be struggling to survive financially. Due to cultural differences, their perspectives on their children's functioning may differ from parents born and educated in the immigrant-receiving country and from teachers and psychologists in their new country.

In this guidebook, we discuss the linguistic and cultural issues to consider when assessing children and adolescents from diverse backgrounds, with a major focus on immigrants and refugees. Notably, while the research population on which this book is based is mainly English-language learners who are, or whose parents are, immigrants or refugees, the principles extend to immigrants in countries where the official language is not English, indigenous peoples, marginalized cultural groups, and emerging bilingual learners. The assessment strategies we propose are informed by research on the following: typical developmental trajectories of children who are learning a second language; the relative contributions of second-language learning and learning disabilities to academic achievement; cultural differences in perspectives on academic achievement and mental health; the impact of culture and immigration-related experiences on cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional development; and culturally sensitive practice with children, adolescents, and families.

This guidebook is important for several reasons. Various recent reports from international and public interest bodies such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) indicate that the proportion of immigrants and refugees around the world whose children need to develop their language and literacy skills in the societal language of their country of residence is increasing. Some of these children and adolescents are successful in accommodating to the school environment and achieve academically; many of them, however, are struggling. Their struggles have been attributed to a dearth of policies and programs that support their educational and social needs in their adopted countries. Some of the culturally and linguistically diverse children and adolescents who struggle are those who, in addition to being second-language learners and culturally

different, have significant learning, behavioral, social, and emotional difficulties and require the services of psychologists and other mental health professionals. Traditional psychological assessment methods may not be valid for many of these children. Finally, according to national policy papers (e.g., *Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services to Ethnic, Linguistic, and Culturally Diverse Populations* [American Psychological Association, 1990]), international policy papers (e.g., UNICEF documents such as Promoting the Rights of Children With Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child), and laws pertaining to children, diversity, and special needs in many OECD countries (e.g., the Individuals With Disabilities Act and the Civil Rights Act in the United States; Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms [Government of Canada, 1982]), culturally and linguistically diverse children and adolescents are entitled to the services they might access if their needs were appropriately identified by an assessment.

The 10 chapters of this book are intended to provide psychologists, and in some jurisdictions special educators and other mental health practitioners, with research-based strategies for assessing culturally and linguistically diverse children and adolescents. We begin with a discussion of demographic, socioeconomic, policy-related, and educational contexts of cultural and linguistic diversity that pertain to the academic achievement of children of immigrants and refugees and other marginalized groups in countries that have high levels of immigration, and a description of key issues involved in providing for children and adolescents with special educational needs (Chapter 2). We next address research on the typical developmental trajectory of language and literacy of children and adolescents who must learn in a language that is not the language of their home, and the implications of that research for distinguishing whether their learning difficulties are due to inadequate proficiency in the societal language or due to a learning disability (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 is devoted to the issues to consider and strategies to use for acquiring an understanding of families' perspectives on their children's development and difficulties. In Chapter 5, we describe methods for assessing children and adolescents' oral language proficiency (OLP) in their first and second languages. We then discuss the issues involved and methods for assessing intelligence (Chapter 6); academic achievement (Chapter 7); and behavioral, social, and emotional functioning (Chapter 8). In Chapter 9, we describe strategies for communicating assessment results to culturally and linguistically diverse children and adolescents, as well as to their parents, teachers, physicians, and other professionals who work with them. We specifically address consultation, advocacy, and report writing. Chapter 10, the final chapter of the book, presents a developmental systems approach for diagnostic formulation and clinical decision making. We also discuss linking assessment with instructional and psychosocial intervention. The Appendix is devoted to the assessments of the six children and adolescents described briefly

above. These case studies describe the methods we used for obtaining assessment data, the reasons we used these methods, our diagnostic formulations and the reasons for our clinical decision making, and recommendations for intervention. Throughout the book, we refer the reader to the specific case studies that illustrate the issues and methods discussed.

We use some terminology and acronyms in this guidebook that some psychologists may not be familiar with. Table 1.1 provides definitions of these terms.

Table 1.1 *Definitions of Terms*

Term	Acronym	Definition
Culture and Immigration		
Aboriginal		Original inhabitants; people who inhabited a region from the beginning or before the arrival of colonists. Related terms: Native Americans; First Nations; indigenous
Culturally and linguistically diverse	CLD	An umbrella term referring to children and adolescents whose families belong to cultural or linguistic groups that are distinct from the culture and/or language of the majority culture. CLD refers to immigrants, refugees, aboriginal people, and marginalized groups who do not speak the language or share cultural values of the dominant group in the society.
Cultural differences		Differences among groups of people defined by nationality, ethnicity, or religion that involve beliefs, attitudes, practices, behaviors, and expectations of one another.
Immigrant		A person who leaves one country to settle permanently in another country.
Immigrant-receiving country		The country where immigrants and refugees settle.
Minority		A racial, religious, political, national, or other group thought to be different from the larger group of which it is part. Often subjected to differential treatment.
Refugee		A person who has been forced to leave his or her country in order to escape war, persecution, discrimination, or natural disaster.

Table 1.1 *Definitions of Terms (continued)*

Term	Acronym	Definition
Linguistic Diversity		
English-language learner	ELL	Someone whose first language is not English and is continuing to develop his/her command of the English language.
English as a second language	ESL	The term ELL (see above) has replaced English as a second language/ESL; ESL is currently used primarily in reference to instructional programs designed to support ELLs, and the teachers who deliver these programs.
English as a first language	EL1	Refers to those whose home and native language is English.
First language	L1	One's native language; often one's home language and the first language acquired.
Heritage language		A language that children who belong to an ethnic or linguistic minority or to an immigrant group learn at home; a heritage language is different from the societal/school language.
Home language		The language used at home.
Language of instruction		The language used at school to deliver the curriculum; in public schools often the societal or official language.
Second language	L2	Typically the language learned after one's first language.
Language Concepts		
Basic interpersonal communication skills	BICS	Everyday L2 oral communication skills that are acquired rather quickly.
Bilingual		A person who is fluent in two languages.
Cognitive academic language proficiency	CALP	Academic L2 language skills needed to cope with academic demands. CALP takes a long time to develop.
Listening comprehension		The ability to comprehend and recall information presented orally.
Monolingual		A person who is fluent in only one language.

Table 1.1 *Definitions of Terms (continued)*

Term	Acronym	Definition
Morphology		Description of how words are formed and patterns of word formation in a language.
Morphosyntax		The study of grammatical categories and linguistic units that have both morphological and syntactic properties.
Multilingual		A person who is fluent in more than two languages.
Morpheme		The smallest meaningful linguistic unit.
Oral language proficiency	OLP	A cluster of language skills that work together to enable communication and comprehension. These language skills include the ability to recognize and produce the phonemes of a given language, vocabulary, morphology, grammar, and discourse features.
Phoneme		The smallest unit of speech in a given language that can be used to make one word different from another word.
Pragmatics		The ways language users overcome ambiguity in meaning. Drawing inferences about the intent of an utterance involves relying on the context of an utterance, familiarity with the speaker, and so on.
Semantic		Meaning or the interpretation of the meaning of words. The focus is on conventional meaning coded in a given language.
Syntax		Description of the rules that govern how words are put together into sentences.
Vocabulary		The words that exist in a language.
Literacy-Related Concepts		
Cross-linguistic		Relationships across two languages (see *transfer*).
Learning disabilities	LD	Children with LD have severe difficulty in learning to read, write, or do arithmetic, and these difficulties cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, motor, emotional, or behavioral debilitating conditions, nor are they due to poverty, cultural and linguistic diversity, or lack of opportunities to learn. The definition of LD is contentious but it is agreed that LDs are brain-based and heritable conditions that are associated with low achievement in certain academic domains.

Table 1.1 *Definitions of Terms (continued)*

Term	Acronym	Definition
Specific learning disorder	SLD	*DSM-5* term for learning disabilities
Nonword decoding		See pseudoword decoding.
Orthography		The aspect of spelling that focuses on letters and conventions of letter sequences in words in a given language.
Orthographic depth		The degree of transparency (or consistency) between spelling and phonology in different orthographies. In "shallow" orthographies such as Spanish the degree of transparency is larger than in "deep" orthographies such as English.
Phonological awareness		Phonological awareness involves awareness of the phonological or sound structure of spoken words. It is the awareness that one can detect sounds in words and can manipulate them through operations such as identifying, comparing, separating, and combining.
Phonological memory		The ability to hold in short-term memory phonological information such as sequences of phonemes and unfamiliar words.
Pseudoword decoding		Applying orthographic and phonological skills in order to sound out nonsense words that comply with the orthography of a given language.
Rapid automatized naming	RAN	The ability to name, with accuracy and fluency, highly familiar items such as letters or digits; is believed to evaluate speed of access to lexical items.
Reading comprehension		The act of extracting meaning from printed text. It involves the orchestration of a variety of word-level reading skills, text-level reading skills, language comprehension, strategic knowledge, and executive function.
Reading comprehension strategies		Methods that readers can use to improve their reading comprehension. Examples include identifying unfamiliar words, rereading, relating prior knowledge to the new information in the text, asking and answering questions about the text, highlighting the main idea in each paragraph, and comprehension monitoring.

Table 1.1 *Definitions of Terms (continued)*

Term	Acronym	Definition
Reading fluency		Reading with accuracy and speed.
Text-level reading		The processes involved in reading text.
Text reading fluency		Reading text with accuracy and speed; it is dependent on accurate word reading and on language skills.
Transfer		The relationships between L1 and L2 reading, language, and underlying cognitive processing skills.
Typology		The classification of languages and writing systems on the basis of similarity or distance in structural features.
Word-level reading		The processes involved in reading isolated words.
Word recognition		The ability to read previously encountered printed words.
Word reading fluency		Reading isolated words effortlessly, with accuracy and speed; word reading accuracy is a prerequisite.
Education and Policy		
Bilingual Program		A program designed to foster the concurrent development of language and literacy skills in two languages.
Heritage Language Program		A program designed to maintain familiarity with the language and cultural heritage of a given linguistic group.
Immersion Program		A program designed to foster the development of an L2 by immersing learners in the language and literacy skills of the L2.
Inclusion		The policy of including children with special educational needs in a regular classroom.
Special Education or Special Needs Education		Programs designed to help learners with special educational needs to learn through direct instruction and program accommodation and adaptation. Depending on policy, severity, and the nature of the problem, special (needs) education may be delivered by regular teachers in regular classrooms, or teachers with specialized training, in pullout formats or segregated classes.

Table 1.1 *Definitions of Terms (continued)*

Term	Acronym	Definition
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development	OECD	A forum where the governments of 34 democracies work together to address the economic, social, and environmental challenges of globalization.
Programme for International Student Assessment	PISA	Under the auspices of the OECD, PISA conducts evaluations of reading, math, and science skills of 15-year olds in OECD countries every 3 years. The intent of these international comparisons is to inform policy development and reforms.
The United Nations Children's Fund	UNICEF	An agency of the United Nations that administers programs to aid education and child and maternal health in developing countries.