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Assessing Narrative Performance
Using a Translanguaging Perspective
in Bilingual Children

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Structured Abstract

Clinical Question: Would the performance on a narrative task (O) differ for a bilingual child with a potential language disability[1] (P) when using a translanguaging approach to narrative language sample analysis (I) compared to restricting narratives to one language per task (C)?

Method: Systematic Review

Study Sources: Google Scholar

Search Terms: ("developmental language disorder" OR "specific language impairment") AND "translanguag*" AND "assessment"

Number of Included Studies: 1

Primary Results: When assessing narrative language measures of microstructure and macrostructure, a translanguaging approach coupled with dynamic assessment yields growth for children without a disability compared with monolingual qualitative reports. Children who do not show modifiability when encouraged to use all their linguistic features may need a referral for a full evaluation.

Conclusions: There is a dearth of peer-reviewed research that focuses on translanguaging approaches to assessment of children with language-based disabilities. Although we only found one study focusing on the assessment of narratives for children with potential language disabilities, results are promising in the affordances a different approach to bilingual assessment can honor the entirety of a child's linguistic repertoire over approaches that attempt to separate languages through socially constructed linguistic barriers.

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[1] Instead of impairment, we opt to use disability to honor the requests of the disabled community to be acknowledged as such. Disability is sociopolitical in nature and forces us to recognize and be accountable for the ways in which as a society we have invented disabilities and in doing so, actively othered individuals with disability(s). Through this decision, we push back against the medical model of "diagnosing" and categorizing individuals with disability and stand in solidarity with the community.

Assessing Narrative Performance Using a Translanguaging Perspective in Bilingual Children

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Clinical Scenario

Sol is a bilingual speech-language pathologist (SLP) working in a public school in New Jersey for the past 3 years. Marito is an 8-year-old child who recently entered the third grade. In the parent interview, Marito's family indicated that Marito is a second-generation child from a Honduran cultural background. The official language of instruction of Marito's elementary school is monolingual English only. At this school, some of the teachers and classroom aides are bilingual Spanish/English users, but most of the school personnel are monolingual English speakers. Marito's teacher is a monolingual English speaker, and the classroom aide is a Spanish/English bilingual speaker. Marito interacts with both the classroom aide and peers in Spanish during breaks, recess, and in the classroom. Marito's classroom instruction and interactions with the teacher are all in English, except during the times when Marito is assisted by the aide in Spanish, which amounts to approximately 20 minutes, one to two times a week.

At home, Marito's family uses Spanish throughout the day and in all daily living activities. Because their parents are beginning to learn English, they occasionally exchange short phrases or words in English, accounting minimally for the linguistic environment in the home. Marito's community activities are all in Spanish (e.g., their service in *misa, las compras en el supermercado y el swap-meet*). Recently, Marito was referred to the speech-language pathologist because of concerns about their English language development. The teacher reported, "Marito does not seem to be learning English as quickly as their classroom peers. Maybe there is something wrong, like a learning difficulty." Contrastively, Marito's parents have indicated that at home, *"¡Uy! Marito en la casa parece perico, habla bastante"* (translation: "Wow! At home Marito is like a parakeet, they talk a lot!").

In their evaluation, Sol has recently come across the translanguaging theoretical framework that has been used in bilingual education to assess a variety of language skills with multilingual students, one of which includes narrative assessment. This framework deviates from traditional bilingual language assessment where each language the child uses is assessed separately and individually. In translanguaging, the child is given freedom to use their entire linguistic repertoire and their communication is assessed in a unitary way that acknowledges that a bilingual child is "not two monolinguals in one" (Grosjean, 1989) but rather a child with a single, more expansive, and fluid linguistic system. Sol is planning to collect a narrative language sample to assess Marito's language skills as part of the prereferral process. Sol wonders which paradigm would afford Marito full credit for the skills they possess and how they leverage these skills to communicate and make sense and meaning of their linguistic environment.

Background Information

To generate goals that adequately support the communication needs of the multilingual student, the gold standard for language assessment is to evaluate skills in each of their home and community languages; this is a traditional bilingual approach to language assessment (Bedore & Peña, 2008; Peña & Bedore, 2011). Narrative assessment through this lens is manifested by telling the child a story in the home language and then having the child retell it back to you in the same language you shared it. The same process is repeated in the language of instruction. The traditional microstructure measures (i.e., mean length of utterance [MLU], total number of words, different number of words, grammaticality) and macrostructure measures (i.e., story structure, initiating event, character/plot, goal/outcome,

and conclusion) are measured in each distinct narrative language. Any case of codeswitching is omitted from the measures to preserve the separation of languages for the assessment analysis for each language (Rojas & Iglesias, 2009). Assessment practices have focused on this double monolingual (García, 2009a) approach because of practical reasons, such as the assumption for languages to be kept separate so computer programs (e.g., Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts Software [SALT]; Miller & Iglesias, 2012) can run computerized analyses on language samples in each language separately. Additionally, traditional assessment practices have been carried out through a double monolingual approach because many clinicians and researchers view language through a monolingual lens that filters bilingualism through monolingualism yielding an overly simplified double monolingualism perspective where a bilingual equals two monolinguals (García, 2009a).

Although this practice leans closer to understanding the linguistic repertoire of a multilingual client than assessment focusing on only the majoritized language, it falls short in honoring the robust language and communication skills of multilingual clients. In evaluating each language separately, we fail to capture the interactive, dynamic, and fluid language practices that multilinguals engage in to make meaning of their world and communicate effectively, given their social-political contexts (García, 2009a). Assessing skills in each language as separate entities from one another ignores how languages interact and gives birth to new linguistic forms. Additionally, using a double monolingual approach does not acknowledge the gymnastics that multilingual individuals enact to navigate their sociolinguistic and sociopolitical milieu. In other words, multilingual individuals constantly utilize all their linguistic resources across languages in their dynamic social environments and make stylistic decisions that push against linguistically oppressive norms. Finally, using a bilingual assessment approach assumes that the socially constructed concept of "normal" is in fact true and that anyone who performs outside of the bell-shaped curve or the "norm" is "atypical" (Annamma et al., 2013).

In this brief, we invite readers to shift from the current double monolingual paradigm of a bilingual language assessment and reimagine language assessment through a translanguaging lens. Although research in translanguaging as it relates to the speech and language field is only in its infancy, there is a robust body of literature in the bilingual education field that can inform our practice. The

translanguaging paradigm is radical in nature because it offers an alternative framework that credits multilingual children for the entirety of the linguistic skills that they possess, and it allows practitioners to consider the child's social-political positionalities and how these inform their language practices. For multilingual children, crediting the full extent of their skills is imperative given that, often, multilingual individuals are racialized and their language practices are deemed to be in deficit (García, 2009b; Soto-Boykin et al., 2023). Specifically, a common claim is that their home language is "atrophying," and the school language is "underdeveloped."

We want to clarify that in envisioning what narrative language assessment looks like through a translanguaging lens we are not designing this assessment with a diagnostic purpose, but rather one that enhances clinical decision-making and informs the referral process. That is, this assessment approach seeks to gain a more authentic understanding of the child's language skills within the context of their varying environments and how they leverage language and their resources (e.g., technology, teachers, peers) to successfully navigate the spaces they exist in. In doing so, we can better determine if the child needs support, where they can be independently successful, and how we can be of support if it is needed. Alternatively, assessment for the sake of diagnosing assumes a commitment to the construct of normality and standardized language norms. However, multilinguals are not a monolith. Standardization of language is an invented social construct and, therefore, it would be difficult to come up with norms that fully capture and honor the diversity and variability inherent to multilingualism.

For this brief, we will first define translanguaging through its theoretical framework, then we will operationalize it in the context of narrative language assessment. Finally, we will use a case study to make tangible the ways in which we can place it in our clinical praxis.

Translanguaging

Translanguaging first emerged from Cen Williams's (1994) research on high school students in Wales. In this study, Williams observed that students made higher gains in academic achievement when they were allowed to use both English and Welsh in the classroom setting. García (2009a) further developed translanguaging through dynamic bilingualism. Rather than thinking about a bilingual's two languages as discrete additions, García conceptualized bilingual individuals as using all their linguistic resources

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fluidly to communicate and make meaning across various contexts. García further describes bilinguals as, "having *one linguistic repertoire* from which they select features *strategically* to communicate effectively. That is, translanguaging takes as its starting point the *language practices of bilingual people as the norm,* and not the language of monolinguals, as described by traditional usage books and grammars" (p. 1, emphasis in original).

For many SLPs, translanguaging may sound similar to code-switching, which is a bilingual phenomenon that SLPs may be more familiar with. Some have conflated translanguaging with code-switching, so it is important to clarify the distinctions between the two. Code-switching is the "switching back and forth between language codes that are regarded as separate and autonomous" (García et al., 2016, p. 20). García et al. emphasize that code-switching considers language from an outsider's perspective that situates bilinguals as two monolinguals in one, which, as previously discussed, is not the case (Grosjean, 1989). A "switch" occurs only if one named language is positioned as the default that an individual switches in and out of. En cambio, translanguaging focuses on a bilingual's internal perspective of their linguistic repertoire, irrespective of bound national or standardized languages. In other words, there is no "switching" that occurs through a translanguaging approach, because individuals utilize features from their entire unitary linguistic repertoire to interact with their communicative environments.

Clinical Question

Using the PICO (population, intervention, comparison, outcome; Straus et al., 2018) framework, Sol's question is: Would the performance on a narrative task (O) differ for a bilingual child with a potential language disability (P) when using a translanguaging approach to narrative language sample analysis (I) compared to restricting narratives to one language per task (C)?

Search for the Evidence

Before conducting their search, Sol established inclusion and exclusion criteria for articles they would use to make a clinical decision:

- Participants were Spanish-English bilingual children

- Children with potential language disabilities

- Studies using narrative elicitations

- Studies compared performance on tasks restricted to one language per task to tasks where children were encouraged to use features of their entire linguistic repertoire

- Studies must have been peer reviewed

Search Strategy

Sol began with a Google Scholar search using the keywords ("developmental language disorder" OR "specific language impairment") AND "translanguag*" AND "assessment." The search results totaled 27 studies. After reviewing the abstracts, they narrowed them down to only one that fit their criteria. See Figure 1 for a visualization of the search.

Evaluating the Evidence

Sol found one study that fit their criteria. This study promotes the use of dynamic assessment and translanguaging to measure learning modifiability—a child's capacity to learn when given the opportunity through a mediated learning experience (Peña, 2000)— to identify students who need specialized academic instruction (Przymus & Alvarado, 2019). Dynamic assessment is known as the test-teach-retest model where mediated learning experiences are modeled (Gutiérrez-Clellen & Peña, 2001). Here, qualitative teacher reports on the English language abilities of their students were compared to the students' performance on narrative tasks after participating in dynamic assessment mediated through a translanguaging approach. Six seventh-grade multilingual adolescents were recruited for this study where the teacher delivered their instruction, collected language samples, and analyzed them using a translanguaging approach. The participants in this study were emergent bilinguals from diverse racial-ethnic and language backgrounds. They were also newcomers to the United States and had recently been identified as children who might need special education services because of teacher concerns with their English language learning development. In this study, the teacher created mathematical content-based stories. The stories were presented as wordless picture-based narratives. For the pretest, participants told the story depicted in the pictures. Participants were invited to translanguage for the pretest language sample. The pretest assessed mathematical content knowledge and language productivity (i.e., MLU-words and morphemes,

total number of words, number of different words, grammaticality, subordination index, and translanguaging events within and between sentences). The participants then engaged in instruction that targeted the mathematical content. The teacher translanguaged as they delivered the instruction to normalize translanguaging in the classroom and amongst the participants. The participants were retested using the same narrative language sample structure and reminded that they could translanguage during the posttest assessment procedures. The results showed that five out of six participants demonstrated modifiability in both mathematical content and language productivity across three "test-teach-retest" rounds. Additionally, participants showed that they leveraged their entire linguistic repertoire to express content knowledge. One participant *did not* demonstrate modifiability in either content or language productivity; they were referred for a comprehensive assessment for special education services. Although using a monolingual approach in the prereferral process masked the participant's language modifiability and content development (recall that the teachers made referrals based on participants' English language development), utilizing a translanguaging approach to assessment gave way to the visibilization of the participants' ample skills and growth. It also prevented these participants from being misidentified into unwarranted special education services. Przymus & Alvarado (2019) determined that in the prereferral process, dynamic assessment and a translanguaging approach can be used to observe modifiability, which functions as an indicator to distinguish between individuals who may need more specialized instruction and those who do not. See Table 1 for a summary of the research article in the review.

It is important to note that this study focused on middle school adolescents and not elementary-age children, like Marito. Additionally, the Przymus & Alvarado (2019) study had a small sample size (*n* = 6). Although a small sample size may not be generalizable, translanguaging is contextualized within dynamic assessment, which is backed up by a robust body of evidence (Orellana et al., 2019). Given Sol's question about the use of translanguaging in narrative assessment, this singular study from a peer-reviewed journal gives Sol a possible starting point in exploring translanguaging in speech-language assessment.

The Evidence-Based Decision

After reviewing the evidence, Sol opted for a holistic assessment of Marito's entire linguistic repertoire. To supplement their search for evidence, Sol searched the general applied translanguaging research. García et al. (2016) outline the following principles for translanguaging in assessment:

1. Assessment needs to consider many angles: Assessment for bilingual students needs to include many voices—families as well as teachers—and of course, the bilingual students themselves and their peers who generate the translanguaging corriente.

2. Bilingual students' performances in assessment must include opportunities to use all their interpersonal and intrapersonal resources, as well as external material resources, to show what they know and can do.

3. Assessment of what bilingual students know and can do must be on authentic, performance-based tasks.

4. Assessment of bilingual students' language use must distinguish between general linguistic and language-specific performances. (pp. 81–82)

See Table 2 for a sample of implementation. Here, we borrow a tool from *The Translanguaging Classroom* which was originally intended for teachers but is also usable for SLPs (García et al., 2016). In this table, we contrastively illustrate how a language sample analysis would be conducted using a traditional bilingual approach (e.g., Spanish and English separately) versus a translanguaging approach and how these can be used in combination to better capture the students' linguistic assets.

Sol utilized their linguistic features associated with Spanish and English while building rapport with Marito to encourage them to use the entirety of their linguistic repertoire as well. Sol elicited a story tell as a baseline while encouraging Marito to use their home language if they needed to. Sol used SALT (Miller & Iglesias, 2012) to transcribe and code the child's narrative. Clinicians should note that for Spanish and English, one can specify both languages in SALT when creating a new transcript. This allows the clinician to analyze a translanguaging language sample using traditional SALT conventions for English and Spanish in a single language sample (R. Rojas, personal communication, November 28, 2023). See Table 3 for instructions.

Following the test-teach-retest model, Sol planned a mediated learning experience where translanguaging was

again modeled for Marito to set the precedent that using linguistic features associated with different languages is acceptable to undertake linguistic tasks. After the mediated learning experience, Sol elicited another narrative sample, again emphasizing that Marito can use their home language in addition to English. After looking at the Standard Measures Report, Sol noted that Marito demonstrated language modifiability as shown by an increased MLU in words and morphemes and subordination index. Sol noted that Marito also included more content information in the posttest, such as more inclusion of character goals and internal states.

In Sol's meeting with the teacher, they explained that Marito does not appear to demonstrate a learning difficulty, given their modifiability in language and content performance. Sol further explained that when Marito is allowed to recruit all his linguistic resources, they demonstrate linguistic and content knowledge that can be hidden when they are constrained to only using English. So, Sol collaborates with the teacher to include principles of translanguaging in the classroom that will support Marito in accessing the curriculum and demonstrating their learning. Given the emerging nature of the evidence, Sol, Marito's family, and the teacher agree to have Sol check in weekly about Marito's progress to ensure adequate academic progress.

It should be noted that this is an evolving matter. Given that we only found one study on adolescents with potential language learning difficulties, more research is needed that breaks linguistic binaries and assesses language performance from a lens of translanguaging. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that as it currently stands, there are limited tools for language sample analysis that allow for multiple languages to be analyzed from the same transcript in an automated way. This certainly presents challenges in translanguaging sample analysis; however, these can be overcome through various strategies that include hand calculating and parent/guardian involvement in the process of analysis.

Given that translanguaging focuses on the internal linguistic features of the individual rather than external labels based on historically, politically, and socially defined languages, a translanguaging approach to narrative sample analysis allows clinicians to see what individuals can do when allowed to access their entire linguistic repertoire. As Sol was evaluating the evidence, they thought of the following metaphor: Imagine someone is tasked with building a house. That person is assessed in their house building with their left arm tied behind their back and then again with their right hand tied behind their back. In both tasks, the individual succeeds in building a house, albeit through a laborious and lengthy process, when one analyzes their actions in the separate tasks together. En cambio, if the person building a house is allowed to utilize both arms, they may use one arm more than the other, but the individual may demonstrate skills when allowed to use both arms that an evaluator may not see when looking at each arm independently. This reminds Sol of the adage, "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

Authors' Note

Alejandro Granados Vargas, MA, CCC-SLP is a bilingual speech-language therapist and doctoral student in education at the University of California, Irvine. His research interests include translanguaging and decolonial applications to research at the intersections of bilingualism and disability.

Cecilia Perez is a speech-language therapist and doctoral candidate at the University of California, Irvine. Her research interests include highlighting the language practices of racialized adolescents through a translanguaging lens.

Betty Yu is a professor in the Department of Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences. Her research and clinical interests are in how communication access among racially minoritized, disabled children in multilingual communities are shaped by institutional practices/policies, family socialization, and dominant ideologies about race/language/disability.

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Table 1. Summary of Research Article Included in the Review

Article	Participants	Assessment procedure	Results	Implications
Przymus & Alvarado (2019)	Six recently arrived middle school students for whom teachers expressed concern regarding language development and academics	Test-teach-retest Three story retell tasks using picture prompts Translanguaging was modeled and encouraged for retells.	When assessing narrative language measures of microstructure and macrostructure, a translanguaging approach coupled with dynamic assessment yields growth for children without a disability compared with monolingual qualitative reports. Children who do not show modifiability when encouraged to use all their linguistic features may need referral for a full evaluation.	Modeling and encouraging children to use the entirety of their linguistic repertoire will yield a more productive performance on narrative tasks compared to monolingual qualitative data.

Table 2. Case Scenario Assessment Using an Adapted Language Assessment Tool for Translanguaging Narratives

Name of student: Marito Yaxcal			

Instructions:
 • Indicate the type of linguistic performance (general linguistic or language specific) that the student demonstrates in performing each task by indicating whether the student can do each task *with assistance or independently* (Bodrova & Leong, 2006).
 • Indicate in the appropriate box:
  • **PMA:** Performance with moderate assistance (can do task with assistance from other people, such as peers/teachers, or resources, such as technology)
  • **IP:** Independent performance (can do task without assistance)
  • **NP:** Novice performance. Only beginning to emerge even with assistance.			

	Translanguaging approach	Traditional bilingual assessment approach (double monolingual lens)	
	General linguistic performance	Language specific: English	Language specific: Languages other than English (LOTE)
Translanguaging design for assessment	Using all language resources	Using features from English only	Using features from LOTE
Listening and speaking	Marito's classroom aide was asked to support the SLP in the prereferral assessment process. For this, the aide selected a familiar story line from a popular Latinx character, El Chapulin Colorado. She was asked to speak to Marito about this story found in a book, using their home language and to report back on how Marito engaged in listening and responding. For this, the classroom aide expressed that Marito attentively listened to the oral narrative and even asked questions about the character and why he had gotten in trouble. This indicates that Marito earns an **IP** for listening and speaking.	In this scenario, Marito is presented with the *Frog, Where Are You?* book by Mercer Mayer. Marito is asked to listen to the story in English and retell it back. This book is not culturally or linguistically familiar to Marito, so they attend only to the pictures to make sense of the story. Here, their listening and speaking skills cannot be assessed because they cannot engage with the story on a multimodal level. The SLP might be inclined to rate Marito as **NP** or **PMA,** which inaccurately depicts Marito's listening and speaking skills.	In this scenario, Marito is presented with the *Frog, Where Are You?* book by Mercer Mayer. Marito is asked to listen to the story in Spanish and retell it back. This book is not culturally familiar to Marito, but it is translated to standardized Spanish. Here, Marito's listening and speaking skills can surface more authentically, but the SLP *must* be aware that Latinx people, and certainly people from Honduras, use different dialectal variations of Spanish; thus, vocabulary, phonology, and morphosyntactic differences may affect the results of how Marito interprets the story. If the SLP evaluates Marito based on standardized Spanish, they might be inclined to rate Marito as **NP** or **PMA,** which inaccurately depicts Marito's listening and speaking skills.

Table 2. Case Scenario Assessment Using an Adapted Language Assessment Tool for Translanguaging Narratives (continued)

	Translanguaging approach	Traditional bilingual assessment approach (double monolingual lens)	
Narrative microstructure (NTW, NDW, MLU-w, SI, %G)	Grammatical features across all languages the child speaks are included in all analyses. That is, Marito is asked to retell the story of El Chapulin Colorado and even though they mostly use Spanish, some of the verbs and nouns used are in English. Through this approach, both Spanish and English words are counted in NTW, NDW, SI, and MLU-w. Clauses that use features of both languages are also counted and overall grammaticality considers if Marito uses these features in a manner to their home linguistic communities.	Marito is asked to retell the *Frog, Where Are You?* story as best they can in English. Through this approach, any instance of using Spanish is omitted from the analysis and only English words are counted in NTW, NDW, SI, and MLU-w. Clauses that mix both languages are not analyzed, and overall grammaticality is assessed only in the English productions. Marito used grammatical features associated with Spanish many times because their English skills are still emerging. The robust productions in Spanish were ignored in the analysis and thus the clinician graded Marito's performance as **NP.**	Marito is asked to retell the *Frog, Where Are You?* story as best they can in Spanish. Through this approach, any instance of using English is omitted from the analysis and only Spanish words are counted in NTW, NDW, SI, and MLU-w. Clauses that mix both languages are not analyzed, and overall grammaticality is assessed only in the Spanish productions. Furthermore, this approach binds us to the practice of only accepting "grammatically correct productions" where different linguistic communities might have alternative views on what is "correct" or "incorrect." Here, Marito's performance is underrepresented and may sway the clinician to grade their performance as less developed than is true for Marito.
Narrative macrostructure (characters, setting, initiating event, internal response, plan, attempt, consequence, and resolution of a story)	Here, Marito's macrostructure skills are evaluated on whether they included the story element or not—it does not matter if they used Spanish, English, or both. Additionally, through a translanguaging approach, the SLP recognizes that Honduran families might narrate and learn to tell stories differently than families born and conditioned in the United States; thus, the SLP consults with family members and Honduran community members to inform themselves on the traditional narrative practices of the community and possibly ones Marito has adopted.	Here, Marito's macrostructure skills are evaluated on whether they included the story element or not in English. Marito uses more Spanish than English but still uses both. Because of the nature of this approach, only evidence of story elements in English are recognized.	Here, Marito's macrostructure skills are evaluated on whether they included the story element or not in standardized Spanish. Marito uses more Spanish than English but still uses both. Because of the nature of this approach, only evidence of story elements in standardized Spanish are recognized. The clinician uses standardized narrative practices to evaluate Marito's macrostructure skills without consulting with family/the Honduran community to learn about their narrative practices. Marito might be retelling story elements in the ways that their community has taught them and thus the clinician misses the opportunity to credit Marito for their macrostructure skills.

Note. LOTE = languages other than English; NTW = number of total words; NDW = number of different words; MLU-w = mean length of utterance at the word level; SI = subordination index; %G = percent grammaticality.

Table 3. Setting up SALT for a Translanguaging Analysis

There are two options for setting up SALT to analyze two languages simultaneously. For this, use the following header lines; either one works.	
Option A	**Option B**
+ Language: Spanish + Language: English	+ Language: Spanish, English
The "+ Language" header lines include the (a) contents of the standard word lists in both languages; (b) root identification files of both languages; and (c) availability of grammatical categories (only for English), grammatical category lists (only for English), and bound clitics tables (only for Spanish).	

Figure 1. Flow Chart of Search Strategy and Article Selection

Step 1: Initial keyword search
27 resulting articles

Step 2: Abstract review
1 narrative assessment study
1 narrative assessment study (not peer reviewed)

Step 3: Full text analysis (1 article)
1 narrative assessment study with middle school students

Step 4: Article selection (1 article)
1 article included despite not meeting age criteria