

Assessing Young English Learners Across Purposes and Domains: Promises and Pitfalls

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Language Minority Children Roundtable

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Bilingual Children are Different from Monolingual Children

- Process of Language Acquisition: Simultaneous or Successive/Sequential
- Uneven Development: Depends on Child & Environment Characteristics
- Brain Research on Effects of Early Bilingualism

Characteristics of Early Bilingualism

- Stages of Sequential/Successive Bilingualism (Tabors & Snow, 1994)
 1. Home Language use
 2. Non-Verbal/Observational Period
 3. Telegraphic/Formulaic Speech
 4. Productive Language

Young Dual Language Learners are Highly Variable-- Significant Implications for Accurate Assessment

Additional Features of Young ELL Children

- Degree of Bilingualism: Balanced vs. Unbalanced; Language Dominance
- Context of Development: Family, Community, Exposure, Cultural Values
- Individual Child: Personality, Risk-Taker, Outgoing, etc.

Fair and Accurate Assessment



- ✓ Reflect and Be Sensitive to Characteristics of Dual Language Learners
- ✓ Capture Overall Language Competence with Attention to L1 and L2

Must Be Clear About Goals, Purposes, and Progress

- What are the program/classroom goals for:
bilingualism, biliteracy,
biculturalism?????

What are your Purposes for Assessment?

! Goals of Program Need to be
Reflected in Assessment Methods

and

! Procedures Need to Match
Purpose

Four Broad Purposes for Early Childhood Assessments

(National Educational Goals Panel; Shepard, Kagan, & Wurtz, 1998).

1. To promote learning and development of individual children.
2. To identify children with special needs and health conditions for intervention purposes.
3. To monitor trends in programs and evaluate program effectiveness.
4. To obtain benchmark data for accountability purposes at the local, state and national level.

How are the Children Progressing???

Purpose 1: Instructional Improvement

- Are the Children Becoming Bilingual, Biliterate/Bicultural? What Language/learning Benchmarks Should be Expected of Dual Language Learners?
- (*How do you know?*)

Purpose 1: Assessment for Instructional Improvement

- Includes regular and periodic observations of the child in many settings over time
- Relies primarily on procedures that reflect the ongoing routine of the classroom
- Avoids placing children in artificial situations or diverting children from their natural learning process

Authentic, Informal, Alternative Assessments

- Observations, Interviews, Check lists, Language Samples, Work Products, Portfolios, etc.
- Potential for Bias and Lack of Validity
- Examples from WSS, Head Start Child Outcomes Framework, CA Desired Results

Work Sampling System

- Uses language for a variety of purposes.
 - Which language?
- Listens with understanding to directions & conversations.
 - In English only?
- Listens with interest to stories read aloud.
 - Without Understanding Language of Instruction?

Head Start Child Outcomes Framework

- Understands/uses an increasingly complex and varied vocabulary
 - Do you count L1 and L2?
- Progresses in speaking English
 - At what rate?
- Identifies at least 10 letters of the alphabet
 - Which alphabet?

Head Start Child Outcomes Framework

1. Language: Uses an increasingly complex and varied vocabulary

2. Social & Emotional: Progresses in responding sympathetically to peers who are in need...and in expressing empathy or caring for others.

CA Desired Results

- Personally and Socially Competent:
PreK: *Expresses empathy or caring for others*
- Effective Learners: (Emergent Literacy)
PreK: *Makes three or more letter-sound correspondences*

Acquisition of English

- **Stages**

Home Language Use,
Nonverbal Communication,
Telegraphic, Formulaic Speech,
Productive Language

*Do you know which stage the child is in
and how far he has progressed?*

When Observing and Assessing Preschool Children's Acquisition of English....

Adapt Expectations based on Knowledge of
Total Language Environment (SES, Exposure &
Learning Opportunities in L1 &L2, Family
Culture & Practices, etc,) and Child.

Goal: Increasingly able to understand and follow English conversations and oral directions

Stage 1: Understands little or no English; repeats words in home language even when not understood by others; appears confused or unsure of what to do. May use gestures or body language to respond to questions/directions; may participate non-verbally by following actions of others.

Is socially appropriate non-verbally, e.g., *looks at, smiles at peers and adults but rarely interacts verbally*

Joins in non-verbal play of classmates. Ex: *classmate asks child to play with blocks and child smiles and walks to dramatic play corner; will watch and follow others' lead in play, classroom transitions, or directions..*

Language of Assessment

- Assessment Must Reflect Program Goals (*English Acquisition and Home Lang*)
- How Do You Assess Home Language Development?

Adapt Current Observational Systems for EL (COR, WSS, CC, ELLCO)

- ✓ Use Language that Reflects Program Goals
- ✓ Be Explicit About Monitoring Home Language Development

“What we teach is what we assess.”

“Assessment Drives Curriculum”

Early Language & Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO)

- Can be Adapted for EL
 - Example: Approaches to Book Reading (#9)
 - There is evidence of an intentional approach to book reading that is coordinated with goals for children's language and literacy development (strong, some, minimal)
 - *Teachers use multiple strategies for supporting the Els' comprehension of the book-reading experience (e.g. use of thoughtful questioning, pictures and props, key words in home language, explicit bridges from home language to English, etc.)* Adapted from Nuestros Niños Project, 2006

Assessment for Identification of Special Needs: Screening, Referral & Diagnosis

- Standardized Screening and Assessment Instruments and Procedures Are Often Administered

Standardized Screening, Readiness, and Diagnostic Measures

- **Issues for Young Children Who are English-Language Learners:**
 - Literal Translations----NO
 - Developmental Screeners: Accuracy of Predictive Ability (*Specificity & Sensitivity*)
 - Norming Sample (monolingual? *SES, Dialect*)
 - Psychometric Properties (Reliability & Validity)
 - Cultural Sensitivity

The Challenge

- Diagnostic decisions about bilingual children should be based on current views of bilingualism
- Normative Data about Development of Dual language Learners is Not Plentiful
- High Degree of Variability That is Normal; ELL Children May Look Delayed Because of Weak Language Ability, but Eventually Catch Up

Assessment Considerations for ELL Child

- Child May be Unresponsive or Uncooperative in English Assessment Situations; Child May Know Concept, Vocabulary, or Skill, but not Understand Demands of Assessment
- Need to Distinguish Between *Language Difference* Due to Dual Language Status and *Language Disorder*

Assessment Challenges

If children are assessed in a language they do not fully use or comprehend or with invalid measures, their language skills will be underestimated (Pre-LAS)

Invalid measures of language will result in over-referral of typical language learners or under-referral of at-risk children



Recommendations....

- The child's early language experiences, with particular attention to home language learning opportunities, must be considered when assessing oral language proficiency. Bilingualism may result in a slower rate of vocabulary development than children learning a single language. As children are acquiring two languages and becoming bilingual, one language may dominate (Espinosa, in press; Genesee 2004). That is normal. It does not mean that the child is necessarily language delayed or disordered. Results of any vocabulary test must be interpreted with caution if the child is a preschool EL child.

Recommendations for Practice.....

- ✓ Assessors need to understand the process and stages of acquiring a second language so they can accurately interpret the oral proficiency of an emergent bilingual child (Espinosa, in press). Some researchers recommend combining the vocabulary scores from assessments in the child's home language and English to achieve a more complete and accurate profile "conceptual scoring".

Recommendations.....

- ✓ Great caution must be used when administering standardized tests to young ELLs. They must be culturally validated and normed on a population that represents the children being tested. Few screening and assessment instruments have been translated into other languages and renormed for the new ELL population (Kochanoff, 2004).

Recommendations....

- ✓ Parents and other family members must be included in the assessment process. Parents have generally found to be reliable informants about their child's language and overall development (Pavri & Fowler, 2005). With the help of translators, if necessary, parents can share information about the child's language competence with siblings, peers, parents and other adults.
- ✓ An assessment team must be used that includes at least one other person who speaks the child's home language and is familiar with the child's culture. The team should use multiple formal and informal procedures including: observations, interviews, and play-based assessments (McLean, 2005).

Recommendations for Research

- Develop formal assessment tools that have good psychometric qualities across populations; oral language, early reading skills (DeLSS Project), functional competence
- New tools that are accessible to practitioners
- Key Constructs Validated across language populations
- Targeted funding for ELL subpopulations within ongoing large-scale national studies

Final Thoughts...

- Collect assessment information frequently
- Propose “Multiple Hypotheses” about Meaning of data
- Continually monitor classroom practices
 - ***Proceed with caution and care.***

Assessment Practices Can
Contribute to Enhanced Attention
to Dual Language Development
&
Children More Likely to Benefit
from Bilingual Status

First, Do No Harm!