

2009 CCPRC Annual Meeting
Breakout C-4
Friday, October 30, 2009, 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Assessing School Readiness in Special Populations

Description

Are school readiness assessments adequately measuring children’s development among special populations such as Dual Language Learners (DLL), English Language Learners (ELL), recent immigrants, and children with special needs?

During this breakout session, researchers with particular expertise discussed special measurement considerations that need to be addressed with special populations. Also discussed was the need for subgroup analyses of school readiness assessment results to highlight differences by risk factors (e.g., poverty status, etc.).

Moderator

Wendy Robeson, Wellesley College

Panelists

Kathleen Hebbeler, SRI International
Dina Castro, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Discussant

Tamara Halle, Child Trends

Scribe

Danielle Clark, Washington State University

1. Documents in Session Folder

- “School Readiness and the Assessment of Children with Disabilities,” Kathy Hebbeler.
- “Assessing Dual Language Learners and Children of Immigrant Families in Early Care and Education,” Dina C. Castro.

2. Summary of Presentations

- **Summary of Presentation #1: Kathleen Hebbeler**
 - Kathleen began with a review of outcomes reporting required by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). States report progress on social skills, acquisition and use of knowledge and skills, and taking action to meet needs to OSEP. (Delineation of the progress categories is included in her PPT.)
 - The principles of good, early childhood assessments apply to all children, including typically and atypically developing children. The selection of an assessment tool is driven by the information to be derived from the assessment.
 - Assessment purposes include determining eligibility for special programs, intervention planning, and program evaluation/accountability. Assessment types include checklists, standardized assessments, and naturalistic assessments.

- The assessment process for children with delays and disabilities needs to provide multiple ways for children to demonstrate mastery of skills. Observation-based assessments are the preferred way—they are also a research-supported method of assessing children with delays.
 - Two-thirds of young children with disabilities have developmental delays with no medical diagnosis which means they are identified through assessment. Standardizing testing conditions does not standardize the experience for the child. We need to design assessments, teaching strategies, and programs that are accessible to all children, both typically and atypically developing.
 - Good assessment tools incorporate principles of universal design which means they are accessible (and valid) regardless of the nature of the child’s disability. If accommodations are needed, it is important that they do not alter the nature of the construct being assessed.
 - Floor effects can be a problem for assessing children with disabilities. Floor effects occur when an assessment does not include a sufficient number of low-level items appropriate for the child’s current level of functioning. Floor effects and insufficient items to capture small increments of growth can compromise the usability of the results of some assessments for children with delays and disabilities.
- **Summary of Presentation #2: Dina Castro**
 - The purposes for assessing children include identifying children with special needs, monitoring programs, and providing accountability. Dina focused on DLL/ELL children and children of immigrants. Although there is overlap in these two populations, there are also distinctions between them.
 - Difficulties in standardized assessment with DLL children include a lack of appropriate measures. Also of significant concern is that these assessments aren’t normed on the populations to which they are being applied. Items on standardized assessments may not be culturally sensitive, responsive, or meaningful for children from different cultural backgrounds. Limitations can also be found in translating test items. DLLs develop concepts in two languages. Because of this, literature supports assessing the child in both languages. When you assess only in one language, you are missing concepts the child may know in another language.
 - The characteristics of assessors affect assessments. For example, if the assessor lacks proficiency in the child’s language (and culture), he or she will not be able to decipher whether the child can demonstrate particular skills.
 - Modifications to assessment tools that can help DLL children be assessed accurately include assessing the child in his or her primary language, providing additional example items/tasks, and simplifying the language used in assessment instructions. The child should be given extra time and assessment should occur in multiple, shorter sessions. We need to ask, however, if we introduce accommodations, are we altering the validity of the assessment? Furthermore, will these accommodations affect all children in the same manner? State and local policies will govern which accommodations are allowed.
 - Research suggests that language proficiency interferes with test performance. Translating an assessment for a child who receives classroom instruction in English

- can interfere with the reliability of results. The child's mobility and length of time in the U.S. will also affect performance on an assessment.
- Specific considerations for children of immigrant families include: most are DLL, experiences are influenced by immigration status and history (e.g., recruited professional versus refugee versus unauthorized immigrant), and experiences are influenced by SES and family composition.

3. Summary of Discussion with Presenters and Participants

- We need to ensure culturally-responsive assessments that consider the needs of diverse families. Dina recommended that early child assessments always be administered in a child's native language.
- We need to ensure that if observational assessments are used, the staff is adequately qualified and trained to perform those assessments. There is a need in the field for standardized assessments to be norm-referenced on DLL populations.

4. Key Themes and Issues

- We need new assessment instruments.
- We must know why the assessment is being conducted.
- Naturalistic observation assessment tools are best for young children.
- Standardized tests are difficult to use because of lack of norms on special populations. Furthermore, if they are not designed for a particular population, they may not be culturally sensitive or appropriate for assessing that population of children.