

Assessing Dual Language Learners and Children of Immigrant families in Early Care and Education

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Purpose of Assessment

- To promote learning and development of individual children.
- To identify children with special needs
- To monitor trends in programs and evaluate program effectiveness.
- To obtain benchmark data for accountability purposes at the local, state, and national levels.

Assessment Strategies

- Best practices for assessing young children include informal and formal strategies, used over several periods of times and in different contexts.
- Formal
 - Usually involves use of standardized test that require to follow specific time limits, instructional and scoring procedures and administration guidelines.
- Informal
 - Rely on observational and work sampling procedures over selected periods of time and in a variety of contexts.

Methodological challenges

- **When using standardized instruments:**
 - **Lack of appropriate norms**
 - **Instruments with cultural biases**
 - **Limitations of translations**
 - **Instruments/procedures do not consider bilingual development**
 - **Finding qualified assessors**

Lack of appropriate norms

- **Most standardized measures have been normed with monolingual populations, not populations of bilinguals.**

Instruments with cultural biases

- Items might not represent the lives of the population

Limitations of translations

- **Translations can differ from the original version in difficulty and content which affects reliability and validity.**

Instruments/procedures do not consider bilingual development

- **The dual language learner child develops concepts in two languages, therefore an assessment in only one language can underestimate his/her knowledge (Pearson et al., 1993).**
- **Specific concepts can have different developmental trajectories depending on the language (Bialystok, 2002).**
- **The stages of second language acquisition affect the responses of the child in an assessment situation.**

Characteristics of the assessors

- Characteristics of the assessors such as cultural-linguistic background and prior knowledge can affect the administration of the assessment (Gonzalez, 1996)

How these challenges affect school readiness assessment?

- **Selecting assessment procedures**
- **Selecting tools**
- **Identifying assessors**

Accommodation Strategies Used

Modifications to the assessment instrument

- Assessment in child's primary language
- Additional example items/tasks
- Reducing language complexity of test directions

Accommodation Strategies Used (continue)

Modifications of the assessment procedure

- Extra assessment time**
- Oral directions in the child's primary language**
- Administration in several sessions**
- Small group administration**

Accommodation Issues

- **Validity: Is the construct of the assessment altered?**
- **Effectiveness**
- **Differential impact**
- **Feasibility**

What research tell us

- Language proficiency strongly relates to test performance.
- Translating test items does not significantly improve performance when the language of instruction is not the child's native language.
- In addition to language proficiency, other factors influence DLL performance: length of time in the U.S., child's mobility.
- Many accommodations require additional administrative time that may increase costs.

Considerations for children of immigrant families

- **Most children of immigrant families are DLL (84%) (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).**
- **Immigration status**
(e.g., Recruited professional vs Refugee vs Unauthorized immigrant)
- **Socio-economic status**
- **Family composition (nuclear –two parent or single parent, extended family)**

Considerations for children of immigrant families

(continued)

- **Length of residency in the US**
- **Child's lack of familiarity with early education and formal assessment situations**
- **Family's expectations about the teacher and its own role in supporting their children's early education**

Assessment guidelines

- **Select developmentally and culturally appropriate strategies.**
- **Be aware of the child's linguistic and experiential background.**
- **Use an approach that allows children demonstrate what they can do (e.g., observations, prompted responses, classroom products).**
- **Involve parents/caregivers, teachers and staff.**

Recommendations

- **To the extent possible, assess in both languages.**
- **Collect child's background information including length of time living in the U.S., language spoken in the home, and proficiency level in English.**
- **Have bilingual and bicultural assessors, assessing in their dominant language.**
- **Analyze and interpret results considering the limitations of the instruments used.**

Remember...

Effective assessments of young children:

- Focuses on individual strengths and uniqueness
- Is performance, process, and product based
- Is ongoing and occurs in many contexts
- Is reflective and analytic, honest and accurate, instructive and useful
- Is collaborative with children, parents, teachers, and professional specialists