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.
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
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.
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 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
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 to 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.
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