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Screening and Assessment of Young English-Language Learners

Supplement to the NAEYC and NAECS/SDE Joint Position Statement on Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

Adopted Summer 2005

Introduction

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) in 2003 published the joint position statement "Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children Birth through Age 8." The position statement explains what effective assessment looks like for all young children.

One of the indicators of good assessment is that it is linguistically and culturally responsive for all children, including children whose home language is not English. The aim of this document, which was requested by experts in the field, is to explain and expand on the meaning of "linguistically and culturally responsive"; to discuss other issues uniquely related to the screening and assessment of young English-language learners; [1] and to make specific recommendations to increase the probability that all young English-language learners will have the benefit of appropriate, effective assessment of their learning and development. All aspects of the full position statement are important and relevant for young English-language learners, and readers of this document should first read the curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation position statement (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2003), bearing in mind that this document serves as a supplement to the full position statement.

This supplement is intended for a range of audiences in the early childhood profession who have a stake in the well-being of young English-language learners, including education decision makers and policy makers, program administrators, teacher educators, researchers, and current and future early childhood educators. Because it is intended for a wide audience, this document is not a how-to manual offering detailed technical advice.[2] The absence of detailed technical advice here is not meant to abnegate the need for or diminish the importance of such support. Rather, it is hoped that readers will use this document for different purposes: to better articulate their own philosophies, needs, and challenges in this area; to create or revise policies and practices; to guide the development of more resources; and to develop a forward-looking vision of how to improve the development and education of young English-language learners.

1 Although all young children are language learners, we use the term *English-language learner* to describe young children whose home language is not English, because this is the term used in research and in public policy to describe children learning English as a second language. Many of the issues discussed in this document are relevant for children learning a second language other than English. They are also relevant to trilingual or multilingual young children.

2 Some readers of drafts of this publication requested a list of assessments appropriate for use with English-language learners. NAEYC's policy is to refrain from endorsing or recommending specific products; therefore this document does not include such a list.

Why now?

A number of factors make the need for this document especially urgent, not the least of which is the dramatic rise in ethnic diversity in the United States. Citizens from diverse racial and ethnic groups now comprise about one-third of the U.S. population. Hispanics are the largest minority population; there are approximately 40 million people of Hispanic origin living in the United States, from Mexico, Central and South America, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other places. In 2003, Hispanic children from birth to age 5 represented 21 percent (4.2 million) of the total number of children in that age range (19.8 million) (Collins & Ribeiro 2004). In the public school setting alone, there are more than two million English-language learners in prekindergarten through grade 3 (Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord 2004). Although Spanish accounts for almost 80 percent of the non-English languages (Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord 2004), more than 460 languages are spoken by English-language learners nationwide (Hepburn 2004).

Because early childhood professionals are serving so many more young English-language learners, there is a great need for appropriate and effective assessment to support these children's learning and development. The field lacks the kinds of assessment tools and well-trained professionals required to implement effective assessment practices for this group. This gap has consequences for the children: without appropriate ways to assess young English-language learners, teachers cannot make the best decisions about how and what to teach, because they are unable to capture a full and accurate picture of children's interests, abilities, and learning needs. Also, the lack of good tools and practices can lead to underidentification of children who have special needs, resulting in the failure to provide needed services.

Simultaneously, problems with the assessment of young English-language learners sometimes lead to overidentification of special needs—that is, misdiagnosing language delays and other learning and developmental disabilities—resulting in children being taken out of the classroom to receive services they do not need and thus missing out on other beneficial activities (Gutierrez-Clellen & Kreiter 2003; NAEYC 1995). Compounding these immediate difficulties are the enduring danger, stigma, and frustration that result when children are mislabeled, which is especially grievous with vulnerable children and families who already must cope with multiple challenges. For these and other reasons, it is critical that the early childhood field improve its ability to screen, assess, and effectively use the results of assessments with young English-language learners.

The NAEYC Governing Board, responding to a request from a group of experts in the field, developed this supplement with the assistance of a work group, liaisons, and NAEYC staff. Feedback from additional experts and the public was sought and incorporated. Endorsement is being sought from the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE), which codeveloped the 2003 joint position statement on early childhood curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation, and others.

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The right to be assessed

Whether enrolled in a child care center, Head Start program, family child care setting, or public school, the millions of young English-language learners in the United States have the right to experience ongoing, effective assessment that supports their learning and development. Observing and documenting the progress of young children is central to the practice of early childhood professionals. Through individual assessments, teachers can appreciate children's unique qualities and talents and individualize instruction (Hyson 2003; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2003); make decisions about classroom activities, such as what books to read and what instructional strategies to use; identify children who might benefit from special services; and have more informed communication with families and with other professionals (McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova 2004). Through program evaluation and accountability assessments, decision makers can make improvements in programs and services that benefit children. Therefore, when children are not regularly and appropriately assessed, they miss out on an effective education: they may fail to receive beneficial special services; classroom activities may not be effectively individualized; and important data that can lead to broader program improvement may be lacking.

Young English-language learners have the right to be assessed for the same reasons and benefits as all children. Moreover, they have the right to be assessed with high-quality assessments and under assessment conditions responsive to the needs of young English-language learners. NAEYC's belief in the right of children to be assessed stems from research and professional values.[3]

Acknowledging the challenges

Because assessment is key in determining effective practices and enhancing program quality, it is of great concern when real-world obstacles stand in the way of appropriately assessing young English-language learners. The biggest challenge, of course, is the scarcity of appropriate assessments to use with young English-language learners. For the vast majority of the hundreds of languages represented in the United States, there simply are no assessments. For some languages, such as Spanish, assessments exist, but many of them do not meet technical standards for reliability and validity, or they contain culturally unfamiliar material or are predicated on culturally inappropriate expectations for children's responses. Moreover, even when high-quality assessments are available, programs rarely have qualified bilingual staff to assess children in their home language.

Other obstacles include lack of financial resources, lack of articulated program philosophies or mission statements about English-language learners, difficulty attracting and retaining bilingual and bicultural staff, lack of community awareness about the importance of the issue, and lack of professional development opportunities, to name a few. Later sections of this document will propose steps toward addressing these challenges.

These conditions make it difficult to implement recommendations or improve policies and practices for the assessment of young English-language learners. NAEYC recognizes the gap between realities faced in the field and the vision conveyed in these recommendations. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the recommendations will help policy makers, program administrators and supervisors, assessment specialists, advocates, and practitioners to know what to strive for and how to begin to create environments for improved assessment of young English-language learners.

Overview of recommendations

Recommendations about the screening and assessment of young English-language learners are presented in seven categories:

1. appropriate uses of screening and assessment;
2. culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment;
3. characteristics of assessments used to improve instruction;
4. use of standardized formal assessments;
5. characteristics of those conducting assessments;
6. the role of family; and
7. needs in the field.

Each category, or section, begins with a general recommendation and then lists and discusses several indicators of effective practices and policies.

The seven recommendations and their indicators are outlined on pages 4–5. An expanded section follows, giving the rationales for the recommendations and discussing the indicators.

3 It is important to be aware of federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and rules as well as case law guiding the provision of education, including for immigrant children.

NAEYC Recommendations on Screening and Assessment of Young English-Language Learners

Adopted Summer 2005

1. Using Screening and Assessment for Appropriate Purposes. *As with assessment of all young children, assessment of young English-language learners should be guided by specific, beneficial purposes, with appropriate adaptations to meet the needs of children whose home language is not English.*

1a. Screening: Young English-language learners are regularly screened using linguistically and culturally appropriate screening tools. Results of screenings are used to determine what further supports and services are needed.

1b. Assessment to promote learning: Assessments of young English-language learners are used primarily to understand and improve children's learning; to track, monitor, and support development in all areas, including language development; and to identify disabilities or other special needs.

1c. Program evaluation and accountability: Young English-language learners are included in program evaluation and accountability systems, and culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment instruments and procedures are used. Inclusion of English-language learners in accountability systems never acts as a disincentive for programs to serve English-language learners.

2. Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Assessments. *In assessing young English-language learners, great emphasis should be given to the alignment of assessment tools and procedures with the specific cultural and linguistic characteristics of the children being assessed.*

2a. All screenings and assessments used with young English-language learners are culturally appropriate.

2b. All screenings and assessments used with young English-language learners are linguistically appropriate.

2c. Translations of English-language instruments are carefully reviewed for linguistic and cultural appropriateness by native speakers well versed in the complex issues of assessment and translation.

3. Characteristics of Assessments Used to Improve Instruction. *The primary purpose of assessing young English-language learners should be to help programs support their learning and development; classroom-based assessment should maximize the value of the results for teachers' curriculum planning and teaching strategies.*

3a. Programs rely on systematic observational assessments, using culturally and linguistically appropriate tools as the primary source of guidance to inform instruction and to improve outcomes for young English-language learners.

3b. Assessments for young English-language learners are based on multiple methods and measures.

3c. Assessments for young English-language learners are ongoing; special attention is given to repeated assessments of language development over time.

3d. Assessments for young English-language learners involve two or more people.

3e. Assessments for young English-language learners are age appropriate.

4. Using Standardized Formal Assessments. *The development of state and other accountability systems has led to increased use of standardized formal assessments of young children. Specific considerations about the development and interpretation of these assessments should guide their use with young English-language learners.*

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NAEYC Recommendations on Screening and Assessment of Young English-Language Learners *(cont'd)*

4a. It is appropriate to use standardized formal assessments to identify disabilities or other special needs, and for program evaluation and accountability purposes. They may also contribute to monitoring and improving learning at an individual level as part of a more comprehensive approach to the assessment of young English-language learners.

4b. Decision makers and those conducting assessments are aware of the concerns and cautions associated with using standardized formal assessments with young English-language learners.

4c. Decision makers and test developers carefully attend to test development issues, including equivalence and norming.

4d. Decision makers and those conducting assessments know appropriate conditions for using and interpreting standardized formal assessments with young English-language learners.

5. Characteristics of Those Conducting Assessments. *Whatever the purpose of the assessment, those conducting assessments of young English-language learners should have cultural and linguistic competence, knowledge of the children being assessed, and specific assessment-related knowledge and skills.*

5a. It is primarily teachers who assess young English-language learners, but paraprofessionals, assessment assistants, and specialized consultants also play an important role.

5b. Those assessing young English-language learners are bilingual and bicultural.

5c. Those assessing young English-language learners know the child.

5d. Those assessing young English-language learners are knowledgeable about language acquisition, including second-language acquisition.

5e. Those assessing young English-language learners are trained in and knowledgeable about assessment in general and about considerations in the assessment of young English-language learners in particular.

6. The Role of Family in the Assessment of Young English-Language Learners. *Families of young English-language learners should play critical roles in the assessment process, being closely involved in a variety of appropriate ways.*

6a. Professionals involved in the assessment of young English-language learners seek information and insight from family members in selecting, conducting, and interpreting assessments.

6b. Programs refrain from using family members to conduct formal assessments, interpret during formal assessments, or draw assessment conclusions.

6c. Professionals involved in assessment regularly inform and update families on their child's assessment results in a way that is easily understood and meaningful.

7. Needs in the Field. *Resources should be invested to ensure rapid progress on several fronts: expanding the knowledge base; developing more and better assessments; increasing the number of bilingual and bicultural professionals; and creating professional development opportunities for administrators, supervisors, practitioners, and other stakeholders in effective assessment of young English-language learners.*

7a. Scholars provide an expanded knowledge base about second-language acquisition and the development of young English-language learners.

7b. More and better assessments are developed to meet the most pressing needs.

7c. Policy makers, institutions of higher education, and programs adopt policies and practices to recruit and retain a diverse early childhood workforce, with a focus on increasing the number of bilingual and bicultural early childhood professionals.

7d. Early childhood professionals, including program administrators, receive ongoing opportunities for professional development and support in the area of assessing young English-language learners. ♦

RECOMMENDATIONS AND INDICATORS, WITH RATIONALES

1. Using Screening and Assessment for Appropriate Purposes

RECOMMENDATION

As with assessment of all young children, assessment of young English-language learners should be guided by specific, beneficial purposes, with appropriate adaptations to meet the needs of children whose home language is not English.

Assessment of young children should occur for specific and beneficial purposes (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2003). The purpose of each assessment must be clear to those conducting the assessments, program administrators, and policy makers or other decision makers who review and use the results, and assessments results should be used only for the purpose for which the assessment was designed (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Clifford 2003). Because so few appropriate assessments for young English-language learners are available, this caution is especially pertinent in the assessment of these children.

INDICATORS

1a. Screening: Young English-language learners are regularly screened using linguistically and culturally appropriate screening tools. Results of screenings are used to determine what further supports and services are needed.

For all children, screening usually entails a brief, standardized procedure that can quickly determine whether a child may have a problem in some area that would require further assessment and possibly special services to address the problem (McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova 2004; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2003). As with all children, young English-language learners should receive regular screenings. Screenings for young English-language learners should be used with two ends in mind: (a) to detect a possible problem in areas including health and physical development, social and emotional development, and cognitive development and (b) to detect a possible problem in the area of language development, including first- and second-language acquisition.

What should differentiate screening of young English-language learners from the screening of monolingual English-speaking children are the tools used and the patterns of follow-up after the screenings. Screenings should use linguistically and culturally appropriate tools (see section 3) that meet appropriate technical standards. Screenings should occur in the child's home language and English, if the child speaks some English, and screeners should accept a child's use of code-switching (i.e., using words and grammar rules from both languages).

Follow-up after screening is critical. If a potential problem is detected, further in-depth assessment with specialists should be scheduled to determine whether the problem exists, and if so, how best to address it (McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova 2004). Because young English-language learners show variable paths to language development and because there is limited research regarding what levels of language proficiency should be expected (Gutiérrez-Clellan & Kreiter 2003), it can be difficult to interpret the results of language screening for individual children. When screening results suggest that follow-up is needed, it is important to involve a specialist who can communicate with the child and family in the child's home language and has specialized expertise in the relevant area of diagnostic assessment.

1b. Assessment to promote learning: Assessments of young English-language learners are used primarily to understand and improve children's learning; to track, monitor, and support development in all areas, including language development; and to identify disabilities or other special needs.

As with all young children, assessment of young English-language learners should be used primarily to understand and promote a child's learning and development as well as to respond to concerns raised by screenings. Specifically, assessment of young English-language learners should be used to (a) guide curriculum planning, teaching strategies, and the provision of learning opportunities in all areas (further discussed in section 3); (b) monitor development and learning in all domains—including children's content knowledge, skills, and capabilities; (c) determine language proficiency and ongoing language development in both the child's home language and English, as appropriate; and (d) identify children with developmental disabilities or delays, emotional impairments, physical disabilities, and other conditions that indicate the need for special services.

1c. Program evaluation and accountability: Young English-language learners are included in program evaluation and accountability systems, and culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment instruments and procedures are

used. Inclusion of English-language learners in accountability systems never acts as a disincentive for programs to serve English-language learners.

The use of carefully designed evaluations that hold a program accountable for producing positive results can benefit all children, including young English-language learners, and the use of child-level assessment results for program evaluation and accountability purposes has become more prevalent in recent years—in Head Start programs, for example, as well as in public school settings. However, program-level evaluations often are attached to high stakes, such as decisions about funding for the program. Therefore, when child-level assessments are used in accountability systems, they should be subject to particularly rigorous standards for their design, instrumentation, and analysis (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2003; Scott-Little, Kagan, & Clifford 2003).

As noted earlier, young English-language learners have the right to be assessed for all of the reasons all young children are assessed, and young English-language learners should be included in program evaluations and tracking systems so their progress as a group may be monitored and services improved.[4] Every effort should be made to find appropriate instruments so that these children can be included. At present, however, very few assessments developed for young English-language learners meet the rigorous standards necessary for use as part of program evaluation and accountability. When it is the case that appropriate assessment instruments and procedures are not available for children who are not proficient in English, these children should not be included in program-evaluation or accountability procedures, but test developers, program administrators, and policy makers should rapidly work to find ways to include them by developing or supporting the development of appropriate assessments.

In large-scale accountability systems, assessments typically rely on standardized formal instruments that directly assess young children through questions and answers or, with older children, written responses. (Recommendations and indicators related to these types of assessments are found in section 4.) In addition to developing more appropriate and effective formal standardized instruments, policy makers and educators should proactively seek ways to include English-language learners' results from other types of assessments, such as observation-based assessments.

Two primary audiences rely on results from program evaluations—program administrators (for decision-making purposes about curriculum, staffing, etc.) and policy makers (for accountability purposes)—and both audiences should examine results for young English-language learners in order to track their development over time as a group. The first purpose of program-level evaluation is for program administrators (e.g., directors, principals) to gather information to guide planning and decision making for their program. Administrators should examine progress in children's home language and English, and in other major domains of learning and development (e.g., social-emotional skills, mathematical thinking, the arts). With this kind of information, they can determine the effects of various approaches to teaching English-language learners and answer questions about curriculum, staffing, approaches to using English and other languages for instructional purposes, ideal groupings of children by language background or proficiency, and so forth. Results from this type of evaluation are also important for communicating with families, the community, and policy makers about the efficacy of a program.

A second purpose of program-level evaluation is accountability at the local, state, or federal level; that is, to provide evidence to entities funding the programs and to the community that programs are meeting determined goals and providing expected services. Policy makers and others look closely at results from these assessments, and English-language learners should be included in order to ensure that these children make progress and that programs receive the support they need to serve young English-language learners.

It is important to ensure that the inclusion of young English-language learners in accountability systems does not discourage programs from serving these children. Administrators who fear that results from young English-language learners' assessments will reflect negatively on their program might limit or even deny services to these children. Policy makers should use this assessment information to create incentives for programs to serve and promote progress in the development of young English-language learners.

Program evaluation for accountability purposes requires that information be gathered from large numbers of children. As recommended in NAEYC and NAECS/SDE's joint position statement on curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation (2003), sampling (assessing only a representative percentage of children) is the most efficient and effective means of capturing data for accountability purposes in a way that is both

4 Assessment procedures for accountability purposes—because they are not designed or used to guide instruction or improve programs—do not directly benefit young children, and the results should never be the sole determinant of any decision made for an individual child, whatever the child's language, culture, or other characteristics.

scientifically rigorous and sensitive to program needs. Administrators and policy makers should include enough English-language learners in their sampling plans to permit conclusions to be reached about the probable effectiveness of the strategies being used to support young English-language learners and the programs serving these children and their families.

In addition to improving program performance and services, results from these types of evaluations also will, in the long run, allow early childhood professionals to create a better picture of the trajectories of young English-language learners as they experience different kinds of early education and as they move through the primary grades.

2. Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Assessments

RECOMMENDATION

In assessing young English-language learners, great emphasis should be given to the alignment of assessment tools and procedures with the specific cultural and linguistic characteristics of the children being assessed.

One of the indicators of effective assessments is that "assessments are designed for and validated for use with children whose . . . cultures [and] home languages . . . are similar to those of the children with whom the assessments will be used" (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2003, 2). In other words, assessments should be culturally and linguistically responsive and appropriate.

INDICATORS

2a. All screenings and assessments used with young English-language learners are culturally appropriate.

Culturally appropriate or culturally responsive assessments are those that occur in settings that embrace diversity and demonstrate esteem for a child's home culture; are administered by bicultural professionals who are knowledgeable about the values and norms (especially norms pertaining to interactions) of the child's home culture; do not include inappropriate referents to objects or words that are either unfamiliar to the child or may carry a different meaning than the one intended; and are interpreted in the context of the child's cultural and social history.

As defined in the full NAEYC and NAECS/SDE (2003) position statement, the term *culture* includes ethnicity, racial identity, economic class, family structure, language, and religious and political beliefs. Each of these aspects of a child's identity, heritage, and experience profoundly influence the child's development and relationship with the world. The issue of culture is relevant not only to English-language learners, but also to speakers of English who have a unique cultural heritage and may use dialects that differ from those of the prevalent U.S. culture.

Every child deserves learning and assessment environments that are welcoming and responsive to her or his culture (NAEYC 1995). Programs should create environments that respect diversity of language and culture and incorporate elements of children's home language and culture in the classroom's physical environment and activities. Teachers should encourage children to share or explain family values and traditions and to communicate in their home language as well as English. Teachers who speak a child's home language should use it, as well as English, to communicate with the child. A classroom climate that shows that teachers and children value children's cultures and home languages tends to reduce children's sense of intimidation and inhibition and encourage their attempts to communicate (NAEYC 1995). This type of environment is important because it allows teachers more opportunities to observe children's abilities, reduces the chances that a teacher will prematurely or incorrectly conclude that language errors indicate disability, and allows children to show all of their skills and capabilities—leading to accurate assessment conclusions.

The adults involved in conducting and interpreting assessments—they are usually teachers but may be aides or specialists (see section 5)—must be aware of how cultural values may affect young children's behavior and performance on assessments (Soto 1991). They should make a point of knowing generally about a child's culture, such as the important holidays, unique customs and traditions, major figures of that culture, and so forth. However, general knowledge is not enough; those assessing should find out as much as possible about the child's community—for example, adaptations the community has made so as to continue traditions from the country of origin, and specific cultural concerns with which the community may be dealing. This and other information allows those assessing to individualize an assessment to make sure it is culturally appropriate—that is, compatible with the child's interaction and communication style (Bruns & Corso 2001; Santos & Reese 1999).

Culturally shaped expectations and values affect young children's ideas about interactive behaviors, such as when they are supposed to talk, to whom they should talk, and what kind of language to use in various contexts (Espinosa, in press). These factors affect performance during assessments, especially standardized formal assessments in which a child may not know

the person conducting the assessment. For example, children from some cultures may be reluctant to use elaborate language when speaking to adults, having been taught to use it only in answer to particular questions or to use formulaic responses. Although they are capable of providing a more sophisticated answer, these children may shrug or give only a short phrase in response to a question, as is appropriate in their culture (AERA, APA, & NCME 1999). An individual familiar with their cultural norms will understand this phenomenon and interpret their responses accordingly.

Before being accepted as culturally appropriate, an assessment should be carefully examined by bilingual, bicultural professionals familiar with the culture and community in question to ensure the assessment is culturally appropriate. Culturally appropriate assessments do not contain any inappropriate referents, such as words and objects that would be unfamiliar or have an unintended meaning for a child. An example of an inappropriate referent is a picture of Raggedy Ann, with which a child may not be familiar because it is unique to the prevalent U.S. culture (Santos 2004). Another example is a picture of a bear. Teddy bears may be meant to represent cute, benign, friendly animals; but in the Navajo culture, bears usually denote something wicked (Nissani 1993). Differences in connotation like this can result in confusion, frustration, and misunderstood responses on the part of the child. Assessments, whether standardized formal assessments or classroom-based observation tools, should avoid culturally inappropriate components.

If the individual conducting an assessment is not familiar with a child's culture, a cultural guide (a qualified representative of the child's cultural and linguistic group who can serve as a broker or mediator) should assist in the assessment process, including the interpretation of results. The presence of a person who knows the child's culture helps ensure that assessment methods and measures are appropriate, and that the child can communicate in a language, dialect, or interaction style that is comfortable. A cultural guide also should ensure that neither translation discrepancies nor cultural conventions nor differences in childrearing practices lead to misinterpreted results (Santos 2004).

Interpretations of assessment results, whether from systematic observations or direct assessment, should be made only in the context of a child's language history and cultural background. Everyone involved in the assessment process must consider the child's culture, home context, social history, and prior experiences and learning opportunities before drawing conclusions about the child's performance (or the performance of a subgroup) on assessment procedures and before making decisions that will affect the child's education and receipt of services.

2b. All screenings and assessments used with young English-language learners are linguistically appropriate.

An assessment approach that is linguistically appropriate or responsive goes beyond simply translating materials into another language. Linguistically appropriate assessment takes into account a child's language history, proficiency, and dominance and preference, where applicable; has alignment between the goal of the assessment and the language(s) used to assess; is administered by a bilingual person fluent in the language of the assessment; and allows for flexibility in the child's language of response (except when assessing for proficiency in a given language). Because of these challenges, when assessing young English-language learners, it is important to include curriculum-embedded, observational assessments and other methods that place less reliance on children's production or comprehension of language as a key part of the assessment. However, to some degree all assessments are measures of language (AERA, APA, & NCME 1999; Shepard, Kagan, & Wurtz 1998), and the issues analyzed below are important to keep in mind no matter what the assessment purpose or approach.

Language history and proficiency. Whether assessments are classroom based or part of a larger assessment system, planning for assessment of young English-language learners should begin with gathering information about the child's and family's history with language. The information should include the language the family primarily speaks at home and in the community, other languages spoken in the home, the family's country of origin, the length of time the family has lived in the United States, the child's age at first exposure to English, and who in the family speaks English and how well (CLAS Early Childhood Research Institute 2000; Santos & Reese 1999). Program staff is often able to do this in preliminary home visits or family meetings. (See section 5 for more about family involvement in assessment.)

Also, for children relatively advanced in their language development, those assessing need to determine a child's language dominance (the language in which the child is most proficient) and language preference (the language in which the child prefers to speak) (Páez 2004), keeping in mind that these characteristics are difficult to determine with very young children whose language development is rapid, variable, and dependent on the home-language environment. Accurate assessment of language proficiency is especially important for

young English-language learners, because they may seem to be speaking English with ease when actually they are not fully capable of understanding or expressing themselves in complex ways and still lack vocabulary skills, auditory memory, ability to follow sequenced directions, and other markers of proficiency (NAEYC 1995). Insights about language proficiency will help teachers and others more effectively plan learning opportunities for young English-language learners.

Cautions about language proficiency assessments. Assessments of language proficiency should rely only on instruments and procedures designed to assess language proficiency, not those designed to assess content knowledge or anything else. It should also be noted that some researchers have concerns about the validity of English proficiency tests. For example, there is little evidence that content and construct validity of English proficiency tests align sufficiently with the standards put forth by experts in the field, such as Teachers of English as a Second Language (Bailey & Butler 2003).

Furthermore, many language proficiency assessments are not consistent in how they measure various aspects of language and measure only a limited set of language components. For example, one assessment evaluating oral language proficiency might measure ability to follow instructions (a component of basic interpersonal communication skills), whereas another might measure knowledge of synonyms and antonyms (a cognitive-academic language proficiency). It is important not to assume that all assessments of language proficiency measure the same aspects of language (Schrank, Fletcher, & Guajardo Alvarado 1996). These cautions are not meant to deter assessment of language proficiency, but rather to prompt assessment decision makers to carefully review information about language proficiency assessments before selection.

Home language or English? Matching the method and purpose of assessment. After gathering information about the child's language history and current language proficiency, administrators and others responsible for assessment need to consider the purpose of the assessment before deciding on appropriate language(s).

If an assessment is to be used for program evaluation or accountability purposes, it should take place in the language and dialect in which the child can best show what he or she knows and can do. If the child is proficient in both the home language and English and it is unclear which language is dominant, the child should be assessed in both languages. Code-switching (see later discussion) should be allowed. Although it is always important that a well-trained professional fluent in the child's home language and knowledgeable about the child's home culture administer any assessments to be used for these purposes, it is especially important here.

If an assessment is to be used to guide instruction and for other learning-related purposes, three options could be appropriate, depending on the goal of the assessment and the child's level of proficiency: (1) assess only in the child's home language (for example, when evaluating a child's knowledge of content in a specific area, such as mathematics); (2) assess in a language in which the child is proficient, even if it is not the child's home language (this could be English or a third language); or (3) assess in both English and the child's home language. Because of the episodic, unpredictable, and rapidly evolving nature of language development among young English-language learners, a dual-language approach is recommended, assessing in both English and the child's home language whenever possible.

The dual-language approach. There are several reasons to recommend a dual-language assessment approach. There is no one path to learning a new language (Wong Fillmore 1985); there are multiple environmental influences and individual differences that interact to shape second-language acquisition. To get an accurate picture of progress in the language domain, it is therefore useful to monitor progress in both English and the child's home language. Also, young children perform better when the language of the assessment matches the language of instruction (Abedi, Leong, & Bodrova 2004; Gonzalez, Bauerle, & Felix-Holt 1996). Young children are "instructed" both at home and in the education setting, but the content and the skills developed may be different, and they may be differently revealed in assessments in either the home language or English—but not equally well revealed in both languages. For these and other reasons, whenever feasible, assessment should involve both languages to most accurately reveal children's knowledge and skills.

Code-switching. When learning a second language, children often go through a period of code-switching or code-mixing, using rules and words of both languages from one sentence to another or within a sentence, respectively (Chamberlin & Medinos-Landurand 1991). (Even as adults, bilingual individuals often mix languages in social conversation with others of the same group.) This behavior is not unusual and is not necessarily a sign of deficiency in language development (Garcia 1990). It demonstrates children's efforts not only to practice multiple languages, but also to successfully navigate multiple cultural markers, norms, and values in order to communicate effectively (Celious & Oyserman 2001). Except when evaluating language proficiency in a particular language, those conducting

assessments should accept responses that involve children's code-switching and code-mixing as an appropriate means of determining what children know and can do.

2c. Translations of English-language instruments are carefully reviewed for linguistic and cultural appropriateness by native speakers well versed in the complex issues of assessment and translation.

Assessments used with English-language learners are often translations of assessments developed for monolingual English-speaking children. There are a number of things to consider when selecting and using translated materials (see Santos et al. 2001), and everyone who is involved in assessment of young English-language learners should be aware of these considerations. For example, it is common to assume that a translated assessment is appropriate for a young English-language learner simply because the language of the assessment is the child's home language. This assumption may not be correct. Translated materials are likely to differ from the original version in both content and construct, and those conducting the assessment should not assume a translation produces a version of the instrument that is equivalent to the original version in difficulty, content, and reliability and validity (AERA, APA, & NCME 1999; Kopriva 2000). Translations may use a dialect, colloquialisms, and unfamiliar referents that are inappropriate for the child being assessed. Spanish-translated materials appropriate for a child from a Mexican American community, for example, may not be appropriate for a child from a Puerto Rican community.

Native speakers of a child's home language who are familiar with assessment constructs should carefully review translated materials for cultural and linguistic appropriateness (Ohtake, Santos, & Fowler 2005; Santos & Reese 1999). Likewise, test developers should establish translation equivalence—evidence that the adapted instrument is comparable to the original in content and difficulty—before assessment decision makers decide to use translated instruments (AERA, APA, & NCME 1999). Methods of checking for appropriateness and equivalence can include back-translating the translated version of the assessment back into English to determine whether the home-language and English-language versions are the same in terms of content and difficulty. However, back-translation alone is not sufficient; assessments still need to be examined for reliability and validity. On-the-spot translations of standardized assessments should not be used (Páez 2004), as they are likely to include errors and are highly unlikely to be appropriate and equivalent at the necessary levels.

3. Characteristics of Assessments Used to Improve Instruction

RECOMMENDATION

The primary purpose of assessing young English-language learners should be to help programs support their learning and development; classroom-based assessment should maximize the value of the results for teachers' curriculum planning and teaching strategies.

The indicators discussed in this section are adapted from those outlined in the full position statement on curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2003), but with special reference to implications for young English-language learners.

INDICATORS

3a. Programs rely on systematic observational assessments, using culturally and linguistically appropriate tools as the primary source of guidance to inform instruction and to improve outcomes for young English-language learners.

For monitoring progress, informing classroom teaching, and improving a child's learning, assessments based on observation provide the richest and most relevant, accurate, and useful data. However, observation needs to go beyond incidental or casual processes; observation-based assessments should be chosen with care to ensure they are sound, of high quality, and culturally and linguistically appropriate. When used systematically as part of an assessment system, they should have appropriate evidence of reliability and validity. Program staff involved in teaching young children should rely most heavily, therefore, on observational assessments such as rating scales, checklists, analyses of samples of children's work, and portfolio approaches, many of which are linked to a particular curriculum model. These methods are especially valuable in assessing young English-language learners, whose strengths and developmental needs may not reveal themselves through direct verbal methods.

Observational assessments alone, however, are not sufficient for all purposes. In some cases, standardized formal assessments may be not only useful but also necessary—for example, when assessing for certain disabilities. When used as part of a comprehensive assessment system, information from standardized formal assessments also can be helpful in monitoring children's progress. The next section, section 4, discusses the appropriate uses of standardized formal assessments with young English-language learners.

3b. Assessments for young English-language learners are based on multiple methods and measures.

No one assessment, measure, or method of collecting information about a child will provide all the information educators and others want to know. This is especially true for young English-language learners, and assessments of any aspect of their development and learning should always include several methods and measures (Gonzales, Bauerle, & Felix-Holt 1996). Because purely verbal procedures tend to underestimate children's cognitive ability (Chapman 1991; Gonzalez 1994), approaches should include both verbal and nonverbal procedures. Also, as with all young children, assessments should occur across all the domains of the curriculum and should involve a range of activities. Allowing children—especially young English-language learners—to express themselves and to be assessed across the curriculum in areas as diverse as art, music, and block building gives them opportunities to demonstrate their intellect and knowledge in ways that exceed the boundaries of language (NAEYC 1995). To round out this picture, observations should occur across different settings, such as in the classroom, on the playground, and during interactions with peers, familiar adults, and strangers.

3c. Assessments for young English-language learners are ongoing; special attention is given to repeated assessments of language development over time.

Young children's development and learning can never be captured in a single snapshot. Ongoing assessment is always the recommended practice. Special issues around language learning make this point especially relevant in assessing language development among young English-language learners. Learning a new language takes time. There is a misconception that young children acquire language more easily and quickly than adults; in fact, with the exception of pronunciation, this is not the case (Soto 1991). Children can, but do not necessarily, achieve social language proficiency in a second language in two to three years and academic proficiency in four or more years (NAEYC 1995). Because of the long-term nature of second-language development, and because paths to proficiency are uneven and unpredictable, a snapshot approach to assessment is particularly ineffective for young English-language learners. A more accurate picture of a child's progress will reveal itself gradually over time as a child experiences a variety of social interactions and opportunities for growth in all domains. Complex interactions between children's social, linguistic, and cognitive domains determine what path language development might take, and individual differences among children lead to great variability in those paths (Genishi 1989; Wong Fillmore 1985). For these reasons, assessments used to monitor and guide children's learning in language and other domains should be ongoing (Duarte & Gutierrez 2004; Santos 2004; Trister Dodge et al. 2004), with emphasis on assessment in everyday, naturalistic settings.

3d. Assessments for young English-language learners involve two or more people.

Conclusions about the development of young English-language learners should always be based on information from multiple sources (Gonzalez, Bauerle, & Felix-Holt 1996; Lewis,1991; Ohtake, Santos, & Fowler 2005; Páez 2004). Assessments usually involve some interpretation and judgment on the part of those assessing. Because of this subjectivity, there is always room for error and bias in the assessment process (Espinosa, in press). With assessments of young English-language learners, the backgrounds of those assessing—their identity, cultural stereotypes, life experiences within linguistic and cultural milieus, conceptualizations of constructs measured, and so forth—can influence assessment decisions (Gonzalez, Bauerle, & Felix-Holt 1996). (Section 5 offers recommendations concerning the characteristics of those who assess young English-language learners.)

Furthermore, because there are few appropriate instruments for young English-language learners, it is important to triangulate information, or verify it by getting information from a number of people, especially when the results of assessment have important consequences. Adults often have different perceptions of a child's abilities, depending on the sources of information available and the settings in which the child and adult interact. This difference in perception can become particularly salient when there is a linguistic divide—when adults communicate with the child in different languages. Observations or data about a child can more safely be assumed to be accurate if they are verified by several people (such as a teacher, a parent, and a reading specialist) rather than by only one person.

More than one professional (teacher, paraprofessional, consultant, and so forth) should be involved in significant assessment-related decisions about a child's progress, and at least one of these professionals should be proficient in the child's home language. In addition, at least one of the people providing input on the child's progress should be a family member. (See section 6 for discussion on the role of family members.)

3e. Assessments for young English-language learners are age appropriate.

Age is an important consideration in selecting assessment tools and procedures for all young children; assessments used for preschool children should obviously look quite different from assessments used with children in primary school. Because there are few assessments—and in some cases, no assessments—available for young English-language learners that are psychometrically, linguistically, culturally, *and* age appropriate, those who assess may be tempted to use an assessment designed for an age group different from the age of the child being assessed, if that assessment tool has other positive features. Despite these constraints, assessment decision makers should avoid selecting assessments that are developmentally or age inappropriate, as the results are likely to be inaccurate and uninformative.

4. Using Standardized Formal Assessments

RECOMMENDATION

The development of state and other accountability systems has led to increased use of standardized formal assessments of young children. Specific considerations about the development and interpretation of these assessments should guide their use with young English-language learners.

Standardized formal assessments, or direct assessments, are typically administered at a single point in time, either orally via questions and answers or, for 6- to 8-year-olds, via paper-and-pencil approaches. When used appropriately and in context, these types of assessments can provide important and useful information. However, early childhood professionals should be aware of concerns about the use of many of these assessments with young English-language learners. The decision to use a standardized formal assessment with young English-language learners should be made cautiously and with awareness of the complexity of the issues involved.

INDICATORS

4a. It is appropriate to use standardized formal assessments to identify disabilities or other special needs and for program evaluation and accountability purposes. They may also contribute to monitoring and improving learning at an individual level as part of a more comprehensive approach to the assessment of young English-language learners.

Because program evaluation and accountability assessment procedures necessarily involve large groups of children, these procedures have primarily relied on standardized formal assessments. When tools and practices are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate, it may be useful to employ standardized formal assessments for these purposes, keeping in mind the cautions outlined in indicators 4b and 4c.

In addition, because information from standardized formal assessments allows staff to compare a child's progress against the progress of similar children, this information may offer an improved understanding of an individual child's development, if the information is viewed in a broader assessment context. For example, the results of a linguistically appropriate standardized formal assessment could reassure teachers and parents that a young English-language learner who seems to be silent much of the time is actually developing typically, considering her age and language experiences. It is important to reemphasize that only meaningful comparisons should be made; data from English-language learners should be compared to data from other, similar groups of English-language learners and not to monolingual English-speaking children.

4b. Decision makers and those conducting assessments are aware of the concerns and cautions associated with using standardized formal assessments with young English-language learners.

Those responsible for making decisions about assessment systems should be aware of specific concerns about using standardized formal assessments with young English-language learners. They should know, for example, that standardized formal assessments often contain a great deal of material for which comprehension depends on children's previous learning experiences and background knowledge rather than on their cognitive functioning (Kozulin & Garb 2001). True levels of cognitive ability tend therefore to be underestimated for young English-language learners when using standardized tests (Gonzalez 1994; Gonzalez, Brusca-Vega, & Yawkey 1997).

In addition, and as detailed in indicator 4c, there are serious concerns about the validity and norming of standardized formal assessments used with English-language learners (Abedi 2002; Navarrette & Gustke 1996; Zehler et al. 1994). In many cases there is simply

no information about the validity of assessments used (Gutierrez-Clellan & Kreiter 2003).

4c. Decision makers and test developers carefully attend to test development issues, including equivalence and norming.

NAEYC urges the rapid development of new and better assessment tools that will allow young English-language learners to be assessed in ways that benefit them. However, a number of key issues need careful attention as these assessments are developed.

Equivalence across versions. Ideally, standardized instruments used with populations of young English-language learners are developed through an iterative or concurrent process in which items originate from both languages of the versions being developed. Equivalence across versions of the instrument being developed must be established at several levels. First, the versions should have construct equivalence, or evidence that what the instrument measures for one child is the same as what a version of it measures for another child (for example, it measures academic knowledge for all children; it does not measure academic knowledge for monolingual English speakers and language proficiency for English-language learners). Second, versions should have functional equivalence, meaning that the activities or behaviors measured have the same meaning in each cultural or linguistic group being assessed. Third, they should have translation equivalence, meaning that if instruments are translations, they are comparable in content to the original. And fourth, they should have metric equivalence, meaning that scores from each version of the instrument have comparable psychometric properties, such as reliability and validity (AERA, APA, & NCME 1999). The linguistic and cultural characteristics of each of the groups of children for which the instrument is intended should be reflected in the samples used throughout the processes of test design, validation, and norming (AERA, APA, & NCME 1999).

Norm-referenced assessments. Norm-referenced assessments are standardized so that a child's performance or score is interpreted in relation to the performance of a group of peers who have previously taken the same test. However, these assessments only lead to useful insight when the instruments and standards have been appropriately developed and when the comparisons would make sense. Norms for assessments to be used with young English-language learners should be based on the performance of other young English-language learners rather than on the performance on monolingual children—including children monolingual in the child's home language (Mazzeo et al. 2000; Navarrett & Gustke 1996; Zehler et al. 1994). Moreover, norms should be based on similar populations of children. If, for example, a Spanish-language version of an assessment will be used with Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, and Spanish children, then norms, reliability, and validity should be established with members of each of these groups (AERA, APA, & NCME 1999).

At present, few assessments are normed this way. Until more appropriately normed assessment tools are available, those selecting assessments and using their results with young English-language learners should pay close attention to how the tools were normed and exercise caution when interpreting the results.

4d. Decision makers and those conducting assessments know appropriate conditions for using and interpreting standardized formal assessments with young English-language learners.

Given the concerns, decision makers and teachers should know which assessments might be appropriate to use with young English-language learners. As already emphasized, appropriate standardized formal assessments are those that (a) meet the highest psychometric or technical standards, showing clear evidence of validity and reliability; (b) are used only for the purpose for which the assessment was designed; and (c) are based on norms from similar populations of young English-language learners. Again, few assessments fully meet these requirements; assessment decision makers should therefore exercise caution in how they use information from assessments with respect to young English-language learners.

If standardized formal assessments are used with young English-language learners, it may be appropriate to incorporate accommodations to allow children to show a true picture of their abilities. It may be appropriate, for example, to allow greater wait time for some items, rephrase directions and questions so a child can understand them, and ask for explanations to clarify the child's thinking. Those assessing should plan for additional time in the assessment process to (a) assess language proficiency before selecting measures to assess knowledge and abilities; (b) obtain background information about the child; and (c) conduct additional procedures that might be necessary (Páez 2004).

In addition, standardized formal assessments should emphasize children's progress over time, as other assessments do, and results generally should be

interpreted in the context of children's progress or growth rather than on an absolute basis.

5. Characteristics of Those Conducting Assessments

RECOMMENDATION

Whatever the purpose of the assessment, those conducting assessments of young English-language learners should have cultural and linguistic competence, knowledge of the children being assessed, and specific assessment-related knowledge and skills.

Even the most linguistically and culturally appropriate assessments may be inappropriate and ineffective if the adults who are implementing the assessments and interpreting their results lack relevant experience and preparation. This section explains who should be responsible for assessing young English-language learners and what those adults should know and be able to do.

INDICATORS

5a. It is primarily teachers who assess young English-language learners, but paraprofessionals, assessment assistants, and specialized consultants also play an important role.

Depending on the purpose of an assessment, a variety of individuals may conduct and interpret the results of the assessment. Because the primary purpose of early childhood assessment is to help teachers learn more about children in order to make informed classroom-level decisions about curriculum and teaching practices, most often those involved in assessing are—and should be—children's teachers. In high-quality early childhood programs, teachers assess children on a daily basis, using systematic, well-validated observational methods, analysis of children's work, and other assessment approaches that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate.

Despite the primary role of the classroom teacher, paraprofessionals (e.g., teacher aides), assessment assistants from the community, and specialized professional consultants also play an essential role in some aspects of the assessment of young English-language learners. Programs should be proactive in establishing a pool of assessment assistants on whom they can call as need arises (Páez 2004). Depending on the roles for which they are needed, this pool might include community leaders, business leaders, and members of the clergy who are from the child's cultural and language community (Bruns & Corso 2001). Before collaboration, programs should determine potential assistants' personal history related to the target language and culture as well as other qualifications, including written and oral language proficiency (Páez 2004).

Besides directly helping with some types of assessments, these assistants, who should be fluent in the child's home language (and English) and familiar with the child's community, may be excellent resources to serve as cultural guides or cultural-linguistic mediators between home and school (Lynch & Hanson 2005). They can facilitate communication and understanding between program staff and families and can teach staff unfamiliar with a child's culture about appropriate ways to interact with family members and about community beliefs and values (Dennis & Giangreco 1996; Kalyanpur & Harry 1999). Depending on their qualifications and skills, they also can serve essential roles in translating materials and reviewing already translated materials and in interpreting before, during, and after assessments—especially when standardized formal assessments are being conducted. However, they should not be solely responsible for administering assessments unless they are qualified and have been trained specifically to do so.

Finally, adults with specialized professional training also play a part in assessment of young English-language learners—for example, when screening results indicate the need for in-depth diagnostic assessment or when certain assessments are externally administered as part of an accountability system. These individuals too require knowledge relevant to the assessment of young English-language learners, and they require the ability to conduct assessments in the child's home language as needed. In some situations, community assessment assistants may serve as helpful partners in this effort.

Whatever their role, it is important that teachers, paraprofessionals, and consultants who are involved in any aspect of the assessment process know the relevant laws and ethical issues, the purpose of various assessments, and the importance of using correct procedures.

5b. Those assessing young English-language learners are bilingual and bicultural.

Ideally, those assessing should not only be fluent in the child's home language but also be familiar with the dialect spoken in the child's community. Those who assess young English-language learners must appreciate diversity and show respect for the dignity and uniqueness of all people. People who hold prejudices or negative stereotypes about groups of children based on their background should not assess young English-language learners. Teachers and others assessing should know the cultural traditions, values, and beliefs of the children they assess and should be aware of generally preferred interaction styles for people from those cultures. They should know not only about the

child's culture generally but also about the child's current community specifically—its goals, challenges, and unique circumstances.

5c. Those assessing young English-language learners know the child.

Children tend to perform better when they know and feel comfortable with the person assessing them (Gonzalez, Bauerle, & Felix-Holt 1996). The person assessing should be someone with whom the child is familiar and comfortable. In the case of ongoing assessment that informs curriculum and instruction, the teacher conducts the assessments and should therefore be familiar with the children who are being assessed. Early in the year, or especially in the case of children whose language and culture differ from that of the teacher, teachers may need additional time and support to build relationships that will contribute to more effective assessment and interpretation of assessment results. In situations where an external adult administers standardized formal assessments, that individual should spend time with and develop rapport with the child before the assessment.

5d. Those assessing young English-language learners are knowledgeable about language acquisition, including second-language acquisition.

Whether they are conducting language assessments or assessments in other domains, teachers and other professionals assessing young English-language learners should know about the development of language proficiency and specifically about second-language acquisition, both sequential and simultaneous. Too often, children from diverse backgrounds are overrepresented in special education programs, so it is important for those assessing to be aware that language errors as a function of learning stage might incorrectly lead to diagnosis of a disorder or developmental disability (Espinosa, in press). For example, an untrained teacher might mistake low language assessment scores for a reading disability, when in fact the child is simply not proficient in English, the language of the assessment. In the beginning stages of a child's second-language acquisition, it can be difficult for the individual assessing to separate mere learning errors from disability or delay, so he or she should be aware of ways in which the behaviors look similar in order to reduce the frequency of incorrect conclusions. Also, those assessing should know which specialists—including English as a Second Language teachers, speech and language pathologists, and reading specialists—to consult for assistance.

5e. Those assessing young English-language learners are trained in and knowledgeable about assessment in general and about considerations in the assessment of young English-language learners in particular.

As emphasized in NAEYC's standards for early childhood professional preparation, well-prepared early childhood professionals understand the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment, and they practice responsible, ethically grounded assessment (Hyson 2003; NAEYC 2005). In addition to knowing about assessment in general, those being prepared to work with young children should be trained in and knowledgeable about the assessment of young English-language learners, including knowing about specific ethical issues that may arise. They should also know about selecting appropriate assessments, soliciting information from family members, consulting with cultural guides, using translators, interpreting results, and the purposes for which assessments may be used.

6. The Role of Family in the Assessment of Young English-Language Learners

RECOMMENDATION

Families of young English-language learners should play critical roles in the assessment process, being closely involved in a variety of appropriate ways.

Families are always significant sources of information about their young children, and in the case of young children with disabilities, there are legal requirements for family involvement. Efforts to gather information and build positive relationships with families whose home language is not English are essential for many reasons, one of which is to create effective assessments that will benefit children. Yet family members should not be exceptionally burdened or asked to take on roles for which they are neither prepared nor responsible.

INDICATORS

6a. Professionals involved in the assessment of young English-language learners seek information and insight from family members in selecting, conducting, and interpreting assessments.

Family members have perspectives on, preferences for, and observations about the child that program staff will not know unless they ask—and they should ask. Program staff should seek this critical information from parents, grandparents, and other caregivers in the

home, listening respectfully and with an open mind to the family's goals and concerns for the child, as well as what behaviors and skills the family observes in the child (Banks, Santos, & Roof 2003; Santos, Corso, & Fowler 2005). Important for the families of all young children, these discussions are especially valuable when families are linguistically and culturally diverse.

However, cross-cultural differences too often interfere. Lack of experience with diverse families often disrupts the process of developing positive, respectful relationships between those assessing and family members, resulting in lack of family input (McLean 2002). Even if the individual assessing is generally familiar with a culture, there are significant within-culture differences and within-family differences about which teachers and others involved in assessing should become aware.

If program staff unwittingly offend families, families are unlikely to be forthcoming with important assessment-related information (Dennis & Giangreco 1996), so one of the first things those assessing should determine is a family's preferred communication style. For example, they should determine whether a family prefers an informal, friendly relationship with program staff, as do many traditional Hispanic families (Gonzalez-Alvarez 1998), or whether the family prefers a more formal, professional relationship with program staff, as do some traditional Asian families (Schwartz 1995). Each family is unique, so although sensitivity to general cultural differences is an important foundation for good communication, those assessing need to learn about the characteristics and preferences of individual families.

When comfortable patterns of communication between families and staff have been established, individuals conducting assessments (in this case, classroom teachers or other program staff) should gather as much information as possible about each family's history and current situation, as these factors could affect a child's responses to both observational and direct assessments and should affect interpretation of results. Those assessing should keep in mind that many factors work together to influence family functioning, so looking at a factor in isolation may be misleading.

Teachers and others involved in assessing young English-language learners should know each family's country of origin, where a family currently lives, how long the family has lived in the United States, and the primary language the family speaks at home and in the community. It is especially important to determine whether a family has any concerns about their child's language development. They also will want to find out, in a sensitive manner, about a family's education, religious affiliation, and degree of acculturation. If possible, teachers and others assessing should sensitively seek additional information, such as whether there are specific accomplishments a family is proud of, what the family believes are the most important things children should learn, and how the parents see their role (Santos & Reese 1999). They should determine families' concerns about stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. They should also, if possible, find out about families' experiences with educational, health, and other institutions. These concerns and experiences are likely to affect families' involvement and interactions with their child's educational program and teachers, as well as their willingness to share assessment-related information.

6b. Programs refrain from using family members to conduct formal assessments, interpret during formal assessments, or draw assessment conclusions.

There are some types of assessment practices in which it is appropriate and important to involve family members, for example, in completing observation charts used to record behaviors in the home, in completing parent rating scales or questionnaires, and in dynamic assessments that involve observations of parent-child interactions.

Family members, however, are not trained in administering formal or standardized assessment instruments, and they also are less likely than professionals to be objective about the performance of their child. Aside from the types of circumstances just noted, family members should not conduct assessments of their child, nor should they serve as interpreters during formal assessments of their child. Regardless of whether formal or informal assessment procedures are being used, family members should not be responsible for independently interpreting assessment results or drawing conclusions from the assessments, although their insights are an essential contribution to the interpretation. Because of confidentiality issues and the sensitive nature of assessment results, it is also recommended that close friends of the child's family not be involved in assessment procedures.

Program staff may find themselves in situations where the only person available who speaks both English and the child's home language is a family member, often an older sibling (or another older child in the community). Children of any age may be linguistically and cognitively ill-equipped to participate, even as interpreters, in assessment procedures; they also may be burdened emotionally by participating in an assessment of their younger sibling. Instead of relying on parents, siblings, or older children in the community, those assessing should make every effort to collaborate with a professional consultant or an assessment assistant who is

familiar with a child's community but not intimately involved with the child's family. If it is simply not feasible to collaborate with a professional consultant or cultural guide, decisions about involving older children should be made cautiously on a case-by-case basis.

6c. Professionals involved in assessment regularly inform and update families on their child's assessment results in a way that is easily understood and meaningful.

Staff and family communication about a child's development is a two-way street. Program staff, who should be soliciting assessment-related information from family members on a regular basis, should also be giving information regularly to family members about results of assessments. Regardless of what role family members play in assessment procedures—whether they are intimately or only remotely involved—staff should explain what the results show about the child's development in a way that is easily understood and meaningful to the family. At the same time, staff should seek to understand families' interpretations of assessment results and how the results may fit with families' goals for their children—in language acquisition and in other areas. Clearly communicating results and providing guidance about how to use the information are essential components of responsible assessment for staff working with all families; but this component is especially important for staff working with families from diverse cultures and who might have language differences. Staff should be particularly proactive in finding clear, meaningful ways to share assessment information reciprocally and respectfully with families of young English-language learners.

7. Needs in the Field

RECOMMENDATION

Resources should be invested to ensure rapid progress on several fronts: expanding the knowledge base; developing more and better assessments; increasing the number of bilingual and bicultural professionals; and creating professional development opportunities for administrators, supervisors, practitioners, and other stakeholders in effective assessment of young English-language learners.

The supports and resources available to those developing assessment-related policies, designing assessment tools and procedures, and directly assessing or supervising those who assess young English-language learners have not kept pace with rapidly increasing demands in the field. For the preceding recommendations to be implemented, specific actions are needed.

INDICATORS

7a. Scholars provide an expanded knowledge base about second-language acquisition and the development of young English-language learners.

Program administrators, teachers and other program staff, psychologists, and other professionals and paraprofessionals who work with young English-language learners need practical information about second-language acquisition. They need to know how second-language acquisition relates to cognitive, emotional, cultural, and social factors and how to monitor it effectively. They also need to know more about what influences the development of young English-language learners, especially about the factors that may be under their control. Researchers must help the field move forward with more fully developed theoretical frameworks and empirical research about second-language acquisition as it pertains to young children in general, and specifically how it relates to children from various language and cultural groups. Continued efforts to develop an expanded knowledge base in this area must be supported as an essential foundation for evidence-based assessment policies and practices.

7b. More and better assessments are developed to meet the most pressing needs.

Those responsible for planning and conducting assessments of young English-language learners have few, and sometimes no, appropriate assessments from which to choose. Because 79 percent of English-language learners in U.S. public schools are Spanish speakers (Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord 2004), the first priority should be to develop appropriate assessments in Spanish. In developing these assessments, assessment designers should be responsive to the within-group differences in dialect and culture that will be represented among Spanish-speaking children. Beyond these needs, research and technical expertise are needed to develop and improve assessments for young children who speak the many other languages represented in U.S. early childhood programs.

7c. Policy makers, institutions of higher education, and programs adopt policies and practices to recruit and retain a diverse early childhood workforce, with a focus on increasing the number of bilingual and bicultural early childhood professionals.

The field urgently needs culturally sensitive bilingual early childhood professionals who not only are proficient in conducting assessments but also can communicate with children and family members in their home language. As the demographics of the United States

shift to include greater and greater numbers of bilingual and multilingual children, the need for the early childhood workforce to diversify becomes more urgent. So far, the workforce has not kept pace with the diversity of the children served (Lynch & Hanson 2005).

Specifically, the field needs to increase the number of well-prepared bilingual professionals. Bilingual teachers will be able to support the preservation of young children's home language and culture. They help create environments that encourage young English-language learners to participate in social interactions, and they are likely to empathize with children's challenges, frustrations, and ultimate satisfaction as they attempt to learn a new language. Teachers who are not able to become fully bilingual benefit from learning even the basics of a second language. Besides enhancing communication with children and families, experiencing the process of learning a second language may help professionals be more sensitive to the challenges and processes experienced by young children learning a new language.

7d. Early childhood professionals, including program administrators, receive ongoing opportunities for professional development and support in the area of assessing young English-language learners.

To improve the quality of assessment practices with young English-language learners, the early childhood field needs teachers and administrators who know about assessment principles and practices, how young children acquiring a second language typically develop, and the implications of second-language acquisition for assessment. Many early childhood teachers receive little preparation for working with children and families from a wide range of cultures and linguistic backgrounds (Garcia et al. 1995). In-service and preservice educators may not be giving enough attention to working with young English-language learners; for example, only 10 percent of baccalaureate and 8 percent of associate degree early childhood programs require a course on working with young English-language learners (Early & Winton 2001). And simply managing day-to-day responsibilities with limited resources and time makes it difficult for program staff to attend to this need.

The burden, however, should not rest primarily on teachers. Assessments, especially standardized formal assessments, are usually selected and implemented by education decision makers as part of program-level assessment planning or large-scale accountability systems. Program administrators should be actively involved in implementing and acting on results of assessments to improve outcomes for children and their programs. For example, they should select, or help staff select, good assessments for young English-language learners; they should monitor assessment procedures; and they should assist teachers in using results to inform their curriculum and teaching practices.They also need to be informed about the development of young English-language learners in order to create a program philosophy and environment that reflects a coherent, knowledge-based, mission-driven approach to the assessment and teaching of young English-language learners.

Given the growing urgency and the demands related to assessment of second-language learners, teacher educators, program administrators, trainers, and policy makers need to make this area a priority, investing resources and emphasizing its importance to staff, students, and the public. Professional development opportunities in the form of workshops, conference sessions, college courses, and distance-learning activities should be developed, widely accessible, and linked to incentives for participation.

Conclusions

If well implemented, the recommendations presented in this document would contribute to more positive developmental and educational outcomes for the millions of young English-language learners served by early childhood programs. At present and as emphasized throughout this document, the conditions needed to fully implement the recommendations do not yet exist, although promising practices are evident in many settings—practices that need to be better identified and showcased as models. If the vision behind these recommendations were fully realized, then technically sound and developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate assessments would be available for all purposes and settings. The recommendations also reflect a vision in which all early childhood program managers and practitioners would be fully prepared to assess the diverse children in their programs in ways that support those children's learning and development. And the recommendations envision a policy environment with both the resources and political will to support the needs of young English-language learners and their families. At present, sufficient resources are not being directed toward these ends.

Until more resources and supports—financial, scientific, and professional—are made available, early childhood professionals will have to continue to use their best judgment, wisdom, and practical knowledge to make decisions about how to effectively assess and use assessment results for each child in their care, with the limited means currently available to them. At the same

time, early childhood professionals who guide programs and work directly with the millions of young English-language learners must continue to advocate for the support and resources they need in order to fully implement these recommendations.

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