



Dual Language Learners: Screening and Assessing Young Children

Est. Time: 30 Minutes

Objective

Understand some of the unique considerations that educators must keep in mind when screening and assessing young dual language learners (DLLs).

DEC Recommended Practices

This Activity addresses the DEC Recommended Practices (DEC-RP) topic area outlined below:

Assessment

A3. Practitioners use assessment materials and strategies that are appropriate for the child's age and level of development and accommodate the child's sensory, physical, communication, cultural, linguistic, social, and emotional characteristics.

A5. Practitioners conduct assessments in the child's dominant language and in additional languages if the child is learning more than one language.

A6. Practitioners use a variety of methods, including observation and interviews, to gather assessment information from multiple sources, including the child's family and other significant individuals in the child's life.

Overview

Children's language development is dynamic; it is constantly changing. This is especially the case for dual language learners. Not only are they exposed to and learning their home language but they are also exposed to and learning a second language, such as English. If a child is learning his or her home language at the same time as he or she is learning English, the pace might be slower than that of a child who is learning only one language. On the other hand, if a child has mastered his or her home language, he or she will most likely learn a second language over time. In either case, delays in social and communication development might occur when a child is learning two or more languages.

Discerning between normal developmental language differences in young DLLs and potential developmental delays can be difficult. For example, if a child is asked to "Put the block on top of the table," and he or she picks up the block and just holds it, it may be difficult to discern whether or not the child doesn't understand the concept, or whether he or she simply doesn't have the English vocabulary to correctly respond.



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Because delays in social and communication development can be red flags for further developmental problems, it is important for teachers to determine whether a DLL has a language difference or a developmental delay or disability. In general, teachers should not rely on a single assessment to make this determination. Instead, they should:

- Consider how long the child has been speaking and exposed to his or her home language
- Consider how long the child has been speaking and exposed to English
- Determine whether the difficulties are present in both languages
- Observe the child's language learning environments
- Screen and assess the child in a variety of ways over time

Activity

Click either the URL or the image below to visit a Webpage where you can watch the video Interview of Fred Genesee. After you have done so, answer the questions that follow.

<http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/?p=109670>



Credit: National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (2015). Washington, DC: Office of Head Start.

Questions/Discussion Topics

1. What should teachers consider when assessing young dual languages?
2. Why is it important to assess young dual language learners both formally and informally across the day and across the school year?