

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 Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices topic areas outlined below. (DEC is a division of the Council for Exceptional Children).

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 simultaneously learning both his home language and a second language, such as 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 at the same time.

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.

Because delays in social and communication development can be red flags for further developmental issues, it is important for teachers to determine whether a DLL has a language difference or a developmental delay or disability.

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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

1. Click the image below to visit a Web page where you can watch the video Interview of Fred Genesee.



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

Use the information you learned in the video to answer the following questions.

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

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Activity

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Use the information you learned in the video to answer the following questions.

2. What should teachers consider when assessing young dual language learners?

Responses will vary. Answers or discussions might include the following:

- *Assessment strategies should be age- and language-appropriate.*
 - *Assessments should include the child's dominant language and any additional languages the child is learning.*
 - *Assessments should utilize a variety of different methods, including formal and informal assessment, observation and interviews, and they should gather assessment information from multiple sources, including families.*
 - *Assessments of young DLLs should consider how long the child has been speaking and exposed to his or her home language.*
 - *Assessments of young DLLs should consider how long the child has been speaking and exposed to English.*
 - *Assessments should determine whether the difficulties are present in both/all languages a young DLL speaks.*
3. Why is it important to assess young dual language learners both formally and informally throughout the day and throughout the school year?

Responses will vary. Answers or discussions might include the following:

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- *Assessment of young DLLs should be ongoing.*
- *Teachers should not restrict their assessments of DLLs to only certain times of the year.*
- *Teachers should use informal and semi-formal assessment, along with periodic formal assessment, to decide what to work on and to decide what is supporting children's learning and development.*
- *Assessments can help determine whether what the teachers are doing is working for young DLLs.*