CEELO *FAST*facts

Training to Screen Young English Language Learners and Dual Language Learners for Disabilities

Information Request: *Can you recommend experts in the field of assessing young children who are English Language Learners (ELL)[1] to train administrators and psychologists working in district preschool programs for young children with special needs? This is particularly relevant to children transitioning from Part C (serving children birth to age three) to Part B-619 (serving children ages three to five).*

State's Goal: To ensure that children who have a different primary language are screened with an appropriate measure that does not over-identify children who have never had learning opportunities but who are at risk of having learning disabilities.

Background and Context: Districts are required to assess children in their home language under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C (grants for early intervention services targeting children aged birth up to age three) and Part B (special education services for children aged three

and older). However, research has shown that districts struggle to assess Part C children transitioning to Part B in their home language, thereby leading to an over- or under-identification of actual disabilities. Some State Education Agencies are required by the U.S. Department of Education to develop an improvement plan to verify compliance with federal regulation regarding the assessment of children under IDEA Parts B and C.

Response: The request for identification of experts to train staff to screen young children who are ELLs is based on two important assumptions: a) psychometrically valid and reliable methods of assessing young children who are English Language Learners are available; and b) national experts have effective strategies to ensure ELL children are not disproportionately over– and under-identified. The review of key research, interviews with experts in the field, and analyses of existing capacities suggests that there are challenges in addressing these assumptions. Currently no single screening tool can validly and reliably screen young ELL children for disabilities. Research suggests that identification requires processes that engage teachers, families, and children in the primary language using multiple methods and screening instruments. National experts have written extensively about the shortcomings of existing approaches and have suggested methods to address these problems.

What we know: Assessing young dual language learners, especially those who may have learning disabilities is currently not an easy task. Based on the research and guidance from experts, we offer the following considerations:

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[1] Recognizing that all young children are learning English, the term English Language Learner (ELL) is to describe young children who acquire two or more languages simultaneously, and learn a second language while continuing to develop their first language. This term encompasses other terms frequently used, such as Limited English Proficient (LEP), bilingual, Dual language learners (DLL), English learners, and children who speak a Language Other Than English (LOTE).

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Considerations for policy and practice

- IDEA requires that identification is not due primarily to a lack of appropriate instruction or student's lack of proficiency in English before the student can be identified as having a learning disability (Sánchez, Parker, Akbayin, & McTigue, 2010).

- The early childhood profession and bilingual assessment experts have not yet agreed on a specific set of tools and procedures to accurately appraise the developmental status of the vast range of young children who are learning more than one language during the preschool years (Espinosa & Lopez, 2007).

- The language and learning needs of the child are often misidentified, because young children's ability to speak and understand English may be overestimated and their general cognitive and social abilities may be underestimated (Espinosa & Lopez, 2007).

- The context of the testing situation as well as the specific aspect of language being assessed can influence the child's language usage (Genessee, Paradis & Crago, 2004).

Considerations on choosing assessment tools:

- Many of the current assessments available for young ELL children are basic translations or adaptations of English language versions of measures (Wolf, Kao, Griffin, Herman, Bachman Chang, & Farnsworth, 2008).

- There are varying levels of attention paid to ensuring comparability and validity in the conceptual, linguistic, or semantic content and/or difficulty level of the translated items across languages (Espinosa & Lopez, 2007).

- As a result, the content validity and construct validity may not be the same between the two versions of the same measure (Espinosa, 2010).

Key recommendations to include in training:

- Information gathered from any assessment process (regardless of whether constructed in one or more languages) will be most effective when combined with information gathered from teachers, families, and careful observation when making any decisions about the educational functioning of young ELLs (Espinosa & Lopez, 2007).

- For ELL children, the results from initial screening efforts should be interpreted with caution because of the unique developmental characteristics of dual language learners and the limitations of most current screening measures (Barrueco, S., Lopez, M., Ong, C., & Lozano).

- When using one of the recommended screening instruments, and engaging parent judgments in a multidisciplinary team, it is possible to make professional judgments that are reasonably accurate. It is better to err on the side of over-referring ELL children to a specialist so that a comprehensive evaluation can be conducted to determine if the child qualifies for special services. However, it is essential that a bilingual specialist and a representative of the child's culture/language be included as part of the child assessment team (Luke, S & Schwartz, A., 2007 updated in 2010).

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CEELO staff identified the following national experts who have the technical expertise to provide training to administrators and school psychologists on effective measures, methods, and uses of screening and assessment data to ensure appropriate identification and placement of young ELLs with, or at risk of, developmental delays. In light of the above considerations, State staff can consider the specific expertise and qualifications in determining the expert that will best meet their needs.

National Experts:

1. **Sandra Barrueco.** Dr. Barrueco is an Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology at The Catholic University of America. Her research examines developmental and mental health difficulties among young language-minority, immigrant, and migrant children. Her work focuses on methodological improvements in the assessment and early identification of young bilingual children. Email: barrueco@cua.edu.

2. **Linda M. Espinosa**. Dr. Espinosa recently retired as Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Missouri, Columbia, and is now Lead Consultant for best practices for young dual language learners at the California State Department of Education. Her research and policy work has focused on effective curriculum and assessment practices for young, low-income children who are dual language learners. She is Co-principal Investigator of the Center for Early Care and Education Research—Dual Language Learners, Frank Porter Graham, University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill that published the resource noted above. Email: espinosaL@missouri.edu

3. **Fred Genesee.** Dr. Genesee is professor of psychology at McGill University in Quebec. He specializes in second language acquisition and bilingualism research. Email: fred.genesee@mcgill.ca

4. **Claudia L. Galindo.** Dr. Galindo is Assistant Professor on Language, Literacy, and Culture at the University of Maryland—Baltimore. She is the author of many papers on the education of Hispanic students and on the effects of family and school connections on students' math achievement in kindergarten. Dr. Galindo is a member of the Spencer panel on Latino children and schooling. Her work focuses on educational policy and immigration. Email: galindo@umbc.edu

5. **Claude Goldenberg.** Dr. Goldenberg is Professor of Education at Stanford University. His research has focused on promoting academic achievement among language minority children and youth. He has written two books of interest: *Promoting Academic Achievement among English Learners: A Guide to the Research*; and *Language and Literacy Development in Bilingual Settings*. Email: cgoldenberg@stanford.edu

6. **Diane August.** Dr. August is Managing Director of the English Language Learner Center at the American Institutes for Research (http://www.air.org/pdf/1835_ELL_Mrktg_Brochure_d5.pdf) and a Senior Research Scientist at the Center for Applied Linguistics. She has done extensive research in the development of language and literacy in second-language learners.   She focuses on the development of science and literacy in second-language learners, grades Pre-kindergarten through grade 12.

7. **Dina Castro.** Dr. Castro is Senior Scientist at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research focuses on improving early care and education practices to promote learning among young bilingual children and children of immigrants, among others. She is currently director of the Center for Early Care and Education Research–Dual Language Learners mentioned earlier.

8. **Mariela Paez.** Dr. Paez is Associate Professor at the Lynch School of Education, Boston College. Her research focuses on bilingualism, literacy development, and children's early language and literacy. Email: mariela.paez@bc.edu.

9. **Joanne Knapp-Philo.** Dr. Knapp-Philo serves as Director of the Head Start National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (NCCLR). She has expertise with infants and toddlers, disabilities, language and literacy development, and family literacy with an emphasis on parents as their children's first teachers. Dr. Knapp-Philo is currently drafting materials for the Office of Head Start designed to support Early Head Start and Head Start programs as they engage in the process of screening dual language learner infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Email: jknapp-philo@edc.org

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For Further Information:

The following resources have been selected to provide detailed information on the research on effective methods of assessing dual language learners. This information may suggest options and considerations to address in state policy and in designing training for administrators and school psychologists to ensure effective screening of ELL children.

August, D., & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2007). *Developing reading and writing in second language learners: Lessons from the report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth. Lawrence Erlbaum.*
You can download a summary at: http://www.cal.org/projects/archive/nlpreports/executive_summary.pdf.
Email: daugust@msn.com ; ELLCenter@air.org

Bandel, E., Atkins-Burnett, S., Castro, D. C., Wulsin, C. S., & Putman, M. (July 2012). *Examining the use of language and literacy assessments with young dual language learners. Research report #1. Center for Early Care and Education Research-Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL).* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Develoment Institute. Available at: http://cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/sites/cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/files/news/CECER-DLL_AssessingDLLsFinalReport_0.pdf

Barrueco, S., Lopez, M., Ong, C., & Lozano, P. (2012). Assessing Spanish-English Bilingual Preschoolers: A Guide to Best Approaches and Measures. Brookes Publishing Company. PO Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285.
Brief references that include some of the information from the book can be found in the following links:
http://www.latinochildresearch.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17&Itemid=4
http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/events/enhancing-practice-with-e/barrueco_lopez.pdf

Head Start National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (2012). Resource Catalogues, Volumes One through Three.
You can download the volumes at:
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/center/HeadStartCultur.htm

Sánchez, M.T., Parker, C., Akbayin, B., and McTigue, A. (2010). *Processes and challenges in identifying learning disabilities among students who are English language learners in three New York State districts* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2010–No. 085). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands. Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gov/ ncee/edlabs.

State Documents:

(Note: The information in these documents is based on each state's laws and regulations and are provided as examples only)

Connecticut Administrators of Programs for English Language Learners (2011). English Language Learners and Special Education: A Resource Handbook 2011. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/bilingual/CAPELL_SPED_resource_guide.pdf

Oklahoma State Department of Education Special Education Services (2007). Identifying and Assessing English Language Learners with Disabilities. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/SpecEd-IdentifyingELL.pdf

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Bibliography

1. Sánchez, M.T., Parker, C., Akbayin, B., and McTigue, A. (2010). *Processes and challenges in identifying learning disabilities among students who are English language learners in three New York State districts* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2010–No. 085). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?ProjectID=116

2. Espinosa, L. & Lopez, M. (2006). Assessment considerations for young English language learners across different levels of accountability. Prepared for The National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force and First 5 LA. Espinosa, L. (2007) Retrieved from World Wide Web: www.first5la.org/files/AssessmentConsiderationsEnglishLearners.pdf

3. Genesee. F., Paradis, J., & Crago, M. (2004). *Dual Language Development and Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism and Second Language*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes. (Electronic version not available. Summary available at: http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200901/BTJRockingRolling.pdf)

4. Wolf, M., Kao, J., Griffin, N., Herman, J., Bachman, P. Chang, S., & Farnsworth, T (2008). Issues In Assessing English Language Learners: English Language Proficiency Measures And Accommodation Uses. Practice Review (Part 2 Of 3). CRESST Report 732, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing,

5. Graduate School of Education & Information Studies UCLA, University of California, Los Angeles.

6. Espinosa, L. Young English Language Learners: Current Research and Emerging Directions for Practice and Policy (Eds. García, E. and Frede, E.). Excerpts from Chapter 7, "Assessment for Young English Language Learners." Pps. 123-126. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University. 2010

7. Barrueco, S., Lopez, M., Ong, C., & Lozano, P. (2012). *Assessing Spanish-English Bilingual Preschoolers: A Guide to Best Approaches and Measures*. Brookes Publishing Company. PO Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285.

8. Luke, S., & Schwartz, A. (2007 updated in 2010) Assessment and Accommodations Evidence for Education, Volume 2, Issue 1, 2007. Washington, DC: National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://nichcy.org/research/ee/assessment-accommodations

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