



WORKING PAPER #1

Developmental Assessment of Young Dual Language Learners with a Focus on Kindergarten Entry Assessment: Implications for State Policies

Linda M. Espinosa & Eugene García

The accurate and valid assessment of young children's development is critical to both enhancing the quality of instructional services that individual children receive as well as to better understanding and improving early care and education (ECE) systems. A cardinal rule of any assessment system is that the purpose for the assessment must guide assessment decisions. As stated by Snow and Van Hemel in the *National Research Council Report on Early Childhood Assessment* (2008), "Different purposes require different types of assessments, and the evidentiary base that supports the use of an assessment for one purpose may not be suitable for another." (p. 2) For example, assessments for daily instructional purposes are typically less formal than assessments for developmental screening or program evaluation purposes. In addition, the interpretation and use of the assessment data must reflect the initial purpose. How assessment data will be used to make decisions about an individual child's progress or a program's effectiveness must be considered prior to selecting specific assessment instruments or data collection procedures.

Further, the rapid growth of young children who speak a language other than English in the home who are being served in ECE programs requires a careful review of the assessment instruments and procedures used as well as the policies that frame assessment decisions. With the

expansion of state and federal funding for ECE services, there is an urgent need for clear policy recommendations to guide the development of state assessment systems that are accurate and valid for young learners (birth to age five) developing two languages. Ideally, a comprehensive and integrated statewide assessment system would use measures and procedures that are compatible with one another, reflect the state early learning standards or guidelines, and can be combined to provide a coherent profile of the functioning and progress of children, classrooms, and programs.

The challenges of accurately identifying young children's developmental status across multiple learning domains through the use of a one-time assessment have been well documented (Daily, Burkhauser, & Halle, 2010; Mesiels, 1999; Snow and Van Hamel, 2008). For large-scale assessments specifically, there is an urgent need for more well designed and linguistically appropriate tools for children growing up where English is not their primary language as well as the need for caution when interpreting assessment results. It would be difficult if not impossible for a one-time assessment of a child's performance to capture the complexity and variability of any young child's development; these challenges of accurate developmental assessment are compounded when a child is still mastering the home or primary language while also acquiring a second language during a period of rapid cognitive, social-emotional and motor development.

This population of children has been identified as Dual Language Learners (DLLs)¹ in early care and education settings (Garcia and Garcia, in press) and as English Language Learners (ELLs) in the K–12 education sector (Hernandez, et al., 2010). Significantly, the growth of this population has risen in geometric proportions in the last two decades (Garcia and Nanez, 2011) and has been the fastest growing child population for more than two decades (Snow & Van Hemmel, 2008). In 2012, more than 25% of all young children under the age of six had a parent who speaks a language other than English and approximately 15% have at least one parent who is limited English proficient (Matthews, 2012).

In order to accurately assess young DLLs, one must consider the unique aspects of linguistic and cognitive development associated with growing up with two languages as well as the social and cultural contexts that influence overall development. While decades of research has clearly shown that all children are capable of successfully learning and benefitting from two languages during the early childhood years (Bialystok, 2009; 2010; Garcia, 2005; Genesee, 2010), there are important social and cultural differences between DLLs and non-DLLs and within the DLL population that affect the development of skills that are important to school readiness. For example, DLLs are much more likely to have parents without a high school education, to live in low-income families, and to be raised in cultural contexts that do not reflect mainstream norms in the United States than native English speakers (Capps et al., 2005; Espinosa, 2007; Hernandez, 2006). The language and early literacy development of DLLs also follows distinct pathways toward full English proficiency with significant implications for language assessment. These backgrounds and developmental characteristics of young DLLs need to be understood when interpreting assessment results and

¹ The term *Dual Language Learners* (DLLs) is used by the CECER-DLL to refer to children learning more than one language in the home and ECE settings during the early childhood years (ages 0–5); other terms, such as English Language Learners (ELLs), Limited English Proficient (LEP), English Learners (ELs), Non-English speaking (NES), English as a second language (ESL), and Bilinguals are used to refer to children in grades K–12 who are learning English in addition to a home language.

making decisions about program effectiveness or service gaps. As Snow (2011) stated, large-scale statewide early childhood assessments,

should not be seen as reflecting on the quality of early care and education during the prekindergarten year in isolation from demographic risk, experiences in the home and the community, other early care and education experiences, and the resources to support professional development and improve quality. (p. 8)

Assessment for Different Purposes

Assessments are used for a variety of purposes. Whether for instructional improvement, screening and referral, or school readiness, assessments for any purpose require specific attention to appropriateness for use with the DLL population.

Instructional improvement and differentiation.

Observational approaches that: are aligned to curriculum goals, focus on educationally significant outcomes, lead to benefits for children, combine data from multiple sources gathered over time, and include families have been recommended by the leading ECE Professional Associations (NAEYC, NAECS/SDE, 2003) for the purpose of improving and individualizing instruction. Frequent, on-going assessment conducted during every day activities that may include observation of child performance, checklists, rating scales, work samples and portfolios have all been identified as important for instructional improvement and adjustment (Espinosa, 2008). In order to accurately collect data on the emerging competencies of DLLs, these approaches will need to include indicators of typical development of young children who are growing up with more than one language as well as assessors who understand the languages and cultures of the children being assessed. (See Espinosa, & Lopez, 2007, Espinosa, 2008, and Snow & Van Hemmel, 2008 for more complete discussions of the potential for assessment bias when teachers and children do not come from the same cultural and linguistic backgrounds.)

Assessment for screening and referral. Developmental screening is the process of early identification



of children who may be at risk for cognitive, motor, language, or social-emotional delay and require further assessment, diagnosis, and evaluation. Typically, brief standardized developmental screening tools or procedures are administered to large numbers of children to determine if there is a potential problem and if referral for more in-depth assessment is warranted. Standardized instruments are most often used for this purpose since comparisons of one child's development against other similar children is required to determine if the child is developing within normal ranges or may have developmental delays. When screening for possible delays, assessment experts have also recommended that young DLLs be assessed in both their native or dominant language as well as their stage of English language proficiency (Barrueco, Lopez, Ong & Lozano, 2012; NAEYC, 2009).

The use of culturally and linguistically appropriate screening tools and procedures is a challenge when conducting screenings with young DLLs: most standardized screening tools have not been designed for young bilingual children and have serious limitations when used with DLLs; most teachers and assessment professionals have not been trained to conduct nondiscriminatory assessments with children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; many ECE teachers do not speak the child's native language and are not familiar with the home culture and; many teachers lack knowledge of the psychometric characteristics of tests and therefore have difficulty making informed judgments about the appro-

priateness of specific tests when their students are from linguistically diverse backgrounds (Sanchez & Brisk, 2004). Finally, assessors need to be able to distinguish between *language differences* due to growing up with two languages as opposed to *language delays* which may require specialized language interventions (Espinosa & Lopez, 2007). For all of these reasons, it is important for assessors to use multiple measures and sources of information, consult with a multidisciplinary team that includes bilingual experts, collect information over time, and include family members as informants when making any screening recommendations (Barrueco et al., 2012; Espinosa & Lopez, 2007).

As ECE systems have expanded and demands for accountability have grown, states' interest in assessing children's progress across important school readiness indicators has also increased. These school entry assessments have the potential to both shine a light on children's developmental status at kindergarten entry and focus efforts to improve the birth-to-kindergarten ECE system, as well as design linguistically and culturally appropriate instruction in the early elementary grades.

Purpose of Kindergarten Entry Assessments

In December 2011, nine states were awarded Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grants (RT-ELC).² The U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services jointly administer this competitive grant pro-

² The nine states are: California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington

gram. The primary goal of this initiative is to increase access to high quality early childhood programs for children from low-income families thus helping to close the school readiness gap. The RT-ELC requires that states understand the status of children’s learning and development at kindergarten entry (Criteria E). States must have a common, statewide Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) that informs instruction and services in the early elementary grades and that:

- a) is aligned with the State’s Early Learning and Development Standards and covers all Essential Domains of School Readiness;
- b) is valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population and for the purpose for which it will be used including for English learners and children with disabilities;
- c) is administered no later than the start of school year 2014–2015 to children entering a public school kindergarten;
- d) is reported to the Statewide Longitudinal Data System, and to the Early Learning Data System; and
- e) is funded, in significant part, with Federal or State resources other than those available under this grant (CFDA #84.412).

As defined within the grant application, the primary purposes of a KEA are to inform instruction and services in the elementary grades and provide information to help close the school readiness gap at kindergarten entry and **not** to prevent children’s entry into kindergarten. In addition, the states must align and integrate assessments across the early childhood sectors and improve the screening and referral systems. As this will be a statewide profile of the developmental status of children at kindergarten entry, the data collected from KEAs can potentially be used to identify service gaps in the state’s ECE system, as well as to guide the design of K–3 instruction. In essence, states are being asked to assess individual students to determine how much children have learned prior to kindergarten entry, to collect

and enter data into a statewide data system, and make judgments about the level of school readiness across multiple domains for all entering kindergarteners. States are then encouraged to make inferences about the effectiveness of the ECE settings the children have attended as well as the K–3 instructional needs to help children achieve at grade levels.

In order to align and integrate assessments across the ECE service sectors, states will need to review the curriculum and assessment expectations for Head Start, community-based child care and all state funded ECE programming. For example, the new Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework (2010) has identified English Language Development (ELD) as an essential domain of learning for DLLs and includes specific expectations for the development of receptive and expressive English language skills as well as engagement in English literacy activities. This new focus on the process of ELD means that Head Start staff will need to both understand how to promote ELD and monitor its progress. Further, the Head Start Framework states, “programs are to ensure that children have opportunities to interact and demonstrate their abilities, skills, and knowledge in any language, including their home language.” (p. 4). Finally, the document describes the assessment process for DLLs:

With the exception of assessing a child’s English language development, assessment does not depend on a child’s understanding or speaking abilities in English, but on the specific knowledge, skills, or abilities that the assessment measures. For example, a child can demonstrate an understanding of book knowledge or science concepts in the home language. Assessing a child who is a DLL only in English will rarely give an accurate or complete picture of what the child knows or can do.

Programs need to choose assessment instruments, methods, and procedures that use the language or languages that most accurately reveal each child’s knowledge, skills, and abilities. The assessment data gathered in the home

language can be used to inform instructional practices and curriculum decisions to maximize the child's learning. Programs are to use culturally and linguistically appropriate assessments to capture what children who are DLLs know and can do in all areas of the Framework. (p. 5)

These Head Start curriculum and assessment requirements reflect a federal perspective about how to best support the development of DLLs. It is imperative that these perspectives be integrated into all state early learning and development standards and assessment.

Early Learning Standards and Dual Language Learners: States Efforts and KEAs

All state KEAs must be aligned with their respective state early learning and development standards and cover all essential domains of school readiness. They also must be appropriate, valid, and reliable for the target populations including DLLs. In general, early learning guidelines or standards are statements about what children should know and be able to do before they start kindergarten. Standards for young children's early learning outcomes address both the content of what children should know and be able to do as well as the method for determining if the child has met the content standard (NAEYC, 2002; NIEER, 2004). They provide clear definitions of what the child is expected to learn during the years prior to kindergarten, thus giving PreK teachers a roadmap of *what* they need to teach. The essential domains that need to be included are: physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches toward learning, language development, cognitive processes and general knowledge.

California, Delaware, and Maryland were judged to have the highest quality Early Learning and Development Standards by the federal RTT-ELC grant reviewers (OHS, 2012). These states have early learning standards that included children from birth to age 5 and are aligned to the Common Core (K–3) State Standards. These high scoring states have aligned their PreK standards with their K–3

standards across multiple domains of development including social emotional and physical development. Well developed, coordinated, and aligned learning standards from PreK–3RD grade have been advocated as a means of promoting and sustaining early learning gains that will help to reduce the achievement gaps between more advantaged children and those growing up in reduced economic circumstances (Kaurez, 2006).

Currently, a minority of states specifically addresses DLLs in their ECE language and literacy standards, AR, CA, CO, DE, FL, ME, NJ, NC, ND, OR, PA, WI (OHS, 2012) and only one state, Alaska, has standards that address dual language development across multiple domains (NCCLR, 2012). As of 2011, only eight states have early learning guidelines with language benchmarks to measure the ELD for DLLs. For example, In the state of California, all publicly supported preschool programs are required to administer the *Desired Results Developmental Profile-Preschool, DRDP-PS*® (2010). Preschool teachers complete this observational child assessment twice a year to measure children's progress toward the state's early learning expectations, or the Desired Results.

The DRDP-PS® (2010) is aligned to the California Preschool Learning Foundations as well as the kindergarten content standards. Each measure provides detailed examples of children's behavior indicating each child's progress on a continuum of development. To assess the dual language learner's English-language development in preschool, transitional kindergarten, and kindergarten, the domain of English Language Development (ELD) has four measures, comprehension of English, self-expression in English, understanding and response to English literacy activities, and symbol, letter, and print knowledge in English. Furthermore, in the teacher support materials, (WestEd, 2010), the California Child Development Division has stated:

"The teacher who completes the assessment for a child who is a dual language learner should speak the child's home language. If not, the teacher must receive assistance from another



adult, such as an assistant teacher, director, or parent, who does speak the child's home language. It is important that the program plans for time during the day when the child and adult have time to interact if the adult is not the child's parent or the assistant teacher in the child's classroom.” (p. 13)

“The ELD measures are used to assess progress in learning to communicate in English. The LLD measures are used to assess progress in developing foundational language and literacy skills. Children who are dual language learners may demonstrate mastery of developmental levels in their home language, in English, or both ... Children who are dual language learners will vary substantially in their acquisition of English language competencies, depending on factors such as the degree of exposure to English, level of support provided in their home language, and their motivation to acquire English ... Overall, the development of language and literacy skills in a child's first language is important for the development of skills in a second language, and therefore should be considered as the foundational step toward learning English.” (CDE, CDD, 2012, p. vii)

As the KEAs must measure progress toward the learning expectations as defined in states' Early Learning Standards or Guidelines, the content of these standards is critically important when assess-

ing the development and school readiness of DLLs. If state ECE standards have been designed using typical development of native English speakers as the norm against which all students are compared, the unique characteristics of DLLs are likely to be misinterpreted, or worse, determined to be delays. Unfortunately, this is the current state of affairs; when compared to their English-speaking peers, DLLs are consistently found to be academically behind from the first day of kindergarten (Magnuson & Wladfogel, 2005). Furthermore, when state ECE standards focus solely on achievement of benchmarks in English, important linguistic capacities in the child's home language will be overlooked. If states only measure progress in English development, English-only instruction most often becomes the norm, which can overwhelm the ongoing development of the home language, and the potential of emergent bilingualism is lost (Espinosa, 2010). Since the research literature is clear about both the benefits of balanced bilingualism and the negative consequences of home language loss (Bialystok, 2010; Wong-Fillmore, 2000), ECE standards should include specific expectations for both home language and English language development. In particular, in the language and literacy domain, ECE standards need to define appropriate expectations based on current research for listening, speaking, reading, and writing in both the home language and English (Matthews, 2012). As most ECE teachers are not well prepared to offer instruction in multiple languages, it will be imperative for states, TA Systems, and programs to provide professional development on strategies to

support home language development while promoting English language development (See Espinosa, 2010 for more detailed guidance on specific classroom practices for preschool teachers).

By providing clear descriptions of the developmental continuum for DLLs, states will promote deeper understandings on the part of teachers about *how* young children acquire a second language. These understandings are vitally important as teachers design their classroom instruction and adapt their strategies and expectations based on knowledge about the child's stage of English acquisition and competence in the home language. To understand a DLL's academic progress and level of school readiness, it is important to have information on each of the child's languages to shed light on overall development and predict future achievement in English (Garcia, 2005; Oller & Eilers, 2002).

The ECE standards can also provide guidance to teachers on how to design effective instruction for DLLs. For example, the Texas and New Jersey PreK guidelines include sections focused on how to incorporate the home language during instructional activities as well as examples of appropriate language and literacy activities and enriched classroom environments for DLLs. In addition, the California State Preschool Curriculum Framework has a chapter devoted to designing instruction that includes specific activities that help to make classrooms more culturally and linguistically appropriate for DLLs.

As states revisit their ECE Standards and Guidelines in light of the RTT-ELC opportunities and requirements, it will be important to seriously consider the needs of young children who are in the midst of achieving basic competency in their first language, expected to learn another language, and simultaneously developing foundational knowledge about how the world works. The first step toward linguistically and culturally appropriate KEAs is for states to review their ECE learning standards and guidelines to determine if they explicitly address the learning needs of DLLs.

Assessing Dual Language Learners: Implications for KEAs

Since KEAs are intended to be utilized for program evaluation as well as to provide data for instructional planning for the elementary grades, it will be important that state KEAs meet the psychometric standards for large scale assessments and the recommendations defined by professional associations such as NAEYC, AERA, APA, NCME, NRC and outlined in the literature (Snow, 2011; Snow & Van Hemmel, 2008).

Psychometric Standards

Essentially, KEAs must meet industry standards for reliability and validity as well as be linguistically and culturally appropriate for the populations of children to whom they are administered. Reliability includes the extent to which an assessment yields consistent information across time (test-retest reliability), with different assessors (interrater reliability), and the degree to which scores within a given test are correlated (internal consistency). Reliability estimates help to establish confidence that an assessment is consistently and objectively measuring the same dimension of development regardless of who is conducting the assessment and when it is administered. Validity refers to the degree to which the assessment is actually measuring the intended purpose. While there are multiple forms of validity, an important dimension of validity for DLLs is construct validity: the extent to which a given assessment captures the area of development targeted in the assessment. Research has shown that a child's achievement on assessments administered in English is greatly influenced by their level of English proficiency (Abebe, 2010). Therefore, scores of mathematical and literacy skill development may reflect the level of a child's English proficiency rather than their knowledge of numeracy, phonological awareness, basic concepts, etc.

In addition to meeting the standards for reliability and validity, KEAs must address the unique cultural and linguistic features of dual language development. Currently, there are multiple limitations to existing assessment approaches used with DLLs; the scope of this working paper does not allow a complete discussion of the major issues (see Espinosa & Lopez, 2007

or Espinosa, 2008 for a more complete discussion of the technical and administrative considerations). The basic requirements for assessment approaches that are linguistically and culturally appropriate include the standardization samples and content and semantic equivalency.

Standardization Sample. Was the measure standardized with samples of children that are similar to the targeted children? As DLLs growing up in the U.S. have two or more languages, it is important that all versions of the assessment have been normed with samples of children who are bilingual and not monolingual. In addition, the social and economic conditions, and educational levels of the parents of the children in the standardization sample should closely resemble the children included in the assessment. Misleading conclusions about language development can be drawn when assessment norms are based entirely on white, middle-class children's development and the children being assessed are growing up in bilingual families and under more deprived circumstances (Snow & Van Hemmel, 2008). Under-representation in the norming sample can lead to systematic bias when interpreting assessment results for DLLs.

Content Equivalence. Are the area of development being assessed the same for different cultural groups? Are the topics and items relevant to the language and cultural group being assessed? For example, a kindergarten entry assessment item given in the state of Alaska should probably not require a child to recognize a beach umbrella as part of a vocabulary test.

Semantic Equivalence. According to Barrueco et al., (2012), measures and items within measures must possess the same meaning across languages and dialects. Do the words used in the assessments have the same meanings when translated from one language to another? How were the translations completed, by whom, and do the translations maintain the original meanings? This feature is particularly important when assessing vocabulary development in DLLs.

Finally, when assessment measures are developed in more than one language, it is important to carefully

review the specific psychometric characteristics in each language. Often the administration manuals will only include information on the standardization sample, reliability and validity in the English version and then conclude the instrument is appropriate for DLL populations. Therefore, before selecting a specific assessment instrument or procedure, assessment teams must carefully review the administration manual to determine the technical adequacy for groups of DLLs.

The impetus for appropriate and responsive assessment practices of DLLs is supported by a number of legal requirements and ethical guidelines, which have developed over time. A widely cited set of testing standards are found in a publication from the American Psychological Association (APA), the American Educational Research Association (AERA), and National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME) entitled *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (1999). In summary, it is inappropriate to use psycho-educational tests developed for and normed with monolingual, English-speaking children to understand the development of the DLL population. As Snow and Van Hemel (2008) noted in the *NRC Report*,

assessment tools and procedures should be aligned with the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the child. Moreover, in the case of norm based tests, the characteristics of children included in the normative sample should reflect the linguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic characteristics of the child. (p. 252)

Therefore, assessments are valid and reliable when they consider the linguistic and cultural factors related to DLLs throughout the design, administration, and interpretation processes.

Principles for Assessing DLLs

Researchers and organizational bodies have offered principles for practitioners engaged in the assessment of DLLs. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2005) and the National Research Council (NRC, 2009) have both provided comprehensive sets of recommendations. These recommen-

dations aim to “increase the probability that all young English language learners will have the benefit of appropriate, effective assessment of their learning and development” (p. 1, NAEYC, 2005) and improve overall instruction. Five essential recommendations are discussed here.

First, **screening and assessment instruments and procedures are used for appropriate purposes.** Screening tools should result in needed supports and services and, if necessary, further assessment. For evaluation and accountability purposes, DLLs should be included in the surveyed group and provided with appropriate assessments that consider their dual language characteristics. Second, as stated above, **assessments should be culturally appropriate.** This means assessment tools and procedures should be aligned with cultural and linguistic characteristics of the child.

Third, **caution ought to be used when developing and interpreting standardized formal assessments.** Standardized assessments are used for at least three purposes—to identify disabilities and determine program eligibility, to monitor and improve learning, and for accountability purposes. It is important that DLLs are included in large-scale assessments, and that these instruments continue to be used to improve educational practices and placements. However, those administering and interpreting these tests must use caution. Test development issues—including equivalence, translation, and norming (see above discussion)—must be scrutinized, and when appropriate, accommodations should be allowed such as accepting code-switching for DLLs when assessing their language development (Barreco et al., 2012).

Fourth, **those administering assessments should have cultural and linguistic competence.** This may be the most challenging of the recommendations. Professional development and training of teachers, school psychologists, speech pathologists, and related staff constitutes a long-term goal which will demand ongoing funding and constant vigilance. Those assessing DLLs should be bicultural, bilingual, and knowledgeable about second language acquisition.

Finally, **families should play critical roles in the assessment process.** Under federal law, parents have the right to be included in the decision making process regarding the educational placement for their child. Moreover, the educational benefit of the assessment process for a given child is optimal when parents’ wishes are voiced and considered throughout. Although family members should not administer formal assessments, they are encouraged to be involved in selecting, conducting, and interpreting assessment results. The process and results of assessment should be explained to parents in a way that is meaningful and easily understandable.

In summary, the principals for assessment stress that assessments must be used for appropriate purposes, caution should be used when interpreting assessment results and making educational decisions, and assessments used with DLLs must take into account the characteristics of the DLL population. This means that assessments must be culturally relevant and those administering assessments should have cultural and linguistic competencies representative of the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the population being assessed. Adherence to these principals allows DLLs the benefits of appropriate, valid assessments of their learning and development, leading to instructional improvements. As policies continue to emphasize and demand the use of these principals of assessment with and for the DLL population, an equal concern is the alignment between how DLLs are identified and assessed and how older language learners are assessed in K–12 school contexts.

Policy Gaps and Opportunities

Despite the movement towards what may seem like a continuum of education from birth to Kindergarten and beyond, ECE systems (birth to five) and K–12 public education frequently remain uniquely distinct. The ECE system has been increasingly transformed by the research calling for more enriched early learning experiences and the market demand for such pre-academic experiences. Increasing numbers of public school systems are providing full day Kindergartens and expanding into PreK early learning programs for students who eventually will attend K–12 public schools. Recently,

school districts have also begun to organize around a PreK–3RD grade continuum of coordinated systems of curriculum, assessment and professional development. Yet, early childhood services and the public schools typically are governed by different statutes, rules and regulations, and are overseen by their respective state and federal agencies. Although different licensing authorities and funding requirements govern each segment, the RT-ELC grant provisions are intended to help states move toward more integrated cohesive ECE systems that both reduce the school readiness gap and promote continued achievement of high-needs children.

Funding sources are typically distinct. Funding, particularly at the federal level, is authorized in different legislation and overseen by different agencies. While legislation may encourage coordination, the operational realities of administering federal programs call for the continuing operation within silos. Accountability for academic progress is the mission for Elementary and Secondary Education Act and is further strengthened in the legislative proposals and frameworks currently being considered in the nation's capital. Investing time and money from K–12 public education, e.g., Title I, to coordinate and make stronger linkages to early learning is a challenge in these economic times. However, a focus on coordinating and aligning ECE to K–12 systems would surely help schools meet their accountability requirements.

Five important areas lend themselves to exploring the possibilities of coordination between policies and practices. Each area is described below, followed by policy opportunities, and where applicable, examples of the policy recommendations. Currently, two policies offer examples of these recommendations in practice, the Early Education Initiative in Illinois (a state level policy) and efforts underway to improve the education of PreK–3RD grade DLLs in Maryland's Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) (a district level policy).

Include DLLs at the Outset

Too often, assessments of non-mainstream children and the experiences they are having in learning venues is an after-thought. The challenges and opportunities

in appropriately including this population at the outset of assessment policy and practice is critical. The initial commitment to be inclusive will pay significant benefits for all children.

Policy Opportunity. Any federal, state or local agencies involved in efforts to assess young children for any purpose **must include specific policies related to DLLs.** Those policies must address issues of assessment system development, administration, application of results, and links to decision making based on assessments. Absence of such policies places DLLs in a position of vulnerability in the assessment-to-practice context that is so prevalent in the early education environment of today. In Illinois, a state policy (initiated in 2008 with full implementation by 2014) extends language services for the DLL population beyond K–12 grades and into PreK with funds from the state funded program, Preschool for All. The policy intends to create a stronger connection between PreK and the early grades of school, with close attention to building DLLs' language skills necessary for school success (Severns, 2012). Similarly, the MCPS policy aims to decrease the achievement gaps between DLLs and their native-English speaking peers. In an effort to meet their goal that 80% of students will be college ready by 2014, and recognizing that the population of DLLs is rapidly growing, the district has included PreK DLLs in their efforts to increase student achievement. What resulted was a district-wide strategy, focusing on language learners beginning in PreK, that emphasized DLLs must not only acquire basic English, but also master the academic English needed to be college ready (p. 6, Marietta & Brookover, 2011).

Early and Accurate Identification of DLLs.

A significant percentage of children aged 0 to 5 years old come from homes where a language(s) other than English is/are spoken, yet it is rare to find formal coordination between the providers serving 0–5 year olds and the K–12 school districts in the early identification of such students. Identifying students that come from homes where a language other than English is spoken is the first step in recognizing which students need the



accommodations, supports, and services appropriate for DLLs. While a Home Language Survey is required for students entering K–12 (and PreK, in some states/districts) it is predominately not required in early learning programs. This policy gap needs to be addressed. Along with implementing a Home Language Survey Policy for ECE programs, additional policies that include formal assessment may be beneficial. When considering such, concerns about testing students at such a young age (i.e. appropriateness of assessing young students when their development is fluctuating) should be taken into account.

Policy opportunity. Identifying which children are DLLs and what their specific assets and needs are is essential. National, state, and local level policies should require the proper identification of DLLs within ECE settings. This early identification is the critical first step in meeting learning and developmental goals. MCPS has established an early identification policy. Recognizing that it would take weeks at the beginning of the kindergarten year to identify students in need of language assistance. MCPS now includes the DLL identification process naturally into the Kindergarten orientation, which takes place the spring prior to students entering Kindergarten (for specific information on this process, see pages 8-10 of the full report, which is accessible at <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/FCDCaseStudyMntgmryCityELLS.pdf>). This early identification allows the district to begin DLL testing and services right away at the start of the school year (Marietta & Brookover, 2011). In Illinois, the Preschool For All program utilizes the Proficiency Oral English Test (the pre-IPT) as a screening tool for assessing learner’s vocabu-

lary, comprehension, syntax, and verbal expression with specific criteria for identifying DLLs (p. 9).

Include Unique Instructional Needs of DLLs in State Early Learning and Development Standards

The learning and development expectations for young DLLs must reflect the unique aspects of linguistic and cognitive development associated with growing up with two languages as well as the social and cultural contexts that influence their overall development. State early learning standards and curriculum guidelines should explicitly address the expectations for DLLs as well as the instructional methods that have been empirically linked to English language development and academic achievement of these children (for specific recommendations, see chapter(s) four and five in *Language Development and the Education of Hispanic Children in the United States* by García & García, 2012).

Policy Opportunity. Review and expand current standards to address the unique features of dual language development and include instructional supports that explicitly promote English acquisition while supporting continued home language development. As has been articulated by the Office of Head Start, policies need to recognize the importance of assessing DLLs home language proficiency while also assessing and monitoring progress toward full English proficiency. The California Preschool Learning Foundations provide an example of how states can address both overall development in any language as well as English

language development for DLLs (accessed at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/psfoundations.asp>).

In addition, MCPS has developed a DLL curriculum that parallels the state standards and addresses the academic English development of PreK–3RD grade learners. This curriculum, aligned with MCPS standards, provides the structure and resources to teach language objectives in the context of the general education curriculum. As a continuum, the curriculum begins with attention to the oral competencies and language development at the PreK level, and then increases attention to the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills of various levels of language learners across grades K–3 (p. 6, Marietta & Brookover, 2011). Along with attention to home language and English language development, broader standards and practices related to learning (such as in the content areas) and development (e.g., social emotional) must also reflect the social and cultural aspects of DLL development.

Strengthen Human Capital in Early Childhood Assessment for DLLs

Assessments used with DLLs must be culturally appropriate; those developing, administering, and interpreting assessments should be culturally and linguistically competent in relation to the characteristics of the DLL population included in the assessments. However, despite the high proportion of DLLs among the nation's 0 to 5 year olds, there is no strategic effort to prepare, hire and train individuals with the linguistic, cultural and professional capacity to assess DLLs in early childhood programs. Even in local education agencies (LEAs) that operate PreK and Kindergarten programs, there is little coordination and targeted efforts in developing the required competencies for proper assessment of DLLs. Too often, instructional personnel or others not prepared to conduct and interpret assessments are given responsibilities for these important tasks. When assessors are not bilingual, bicultural, and knowledgeable about second language acquisition, the chances of misinterpreting assessment results and misusing assessments increase.

Policy opportunity. Local, state and national policies and programs must support the development of relevant competencies and skills in early learning assessment personnel for the DLL population. The state policy in Illinois and the MCPS district policy both address teacher preparation for working with the DLL population. Once the policy in Illinois is fully implemented, PreK teachers in schools with DLL populations will be required to be certified to teach both PreK and English language learners (Severns, 2012). In MCPS, the policy requires all teachers across the district to participate in ongoing professional development relate to language learners (Mariett & Brookover, 2011). While attention to knowledge and skills related to teaching DLLs and second language acquisition should help teachers to more accurately interpret assessment data, it is unclear whether either policy includes specific attention to assessment competencies. Policies that require specific professional development in assessment and interpretation with official certification are a must, particularly for DLL children. Any agency responsible for the oversight of child care and early childhood centers will need to invest funds to support such professional development opportunities and related certification.

Coherence of Assessments

K–12 public education systems typically lack coordination of the assessments for DLLs across their early childhood programs and the elementary grades, and lack coherence in standards for learning/development and measures of instructional quality. The movement towards PreK–3RD grade alignment must include assessment coherence throughout this continuum for both the individual child and the system of learning experiences available across settings and ages.

Policy opportunity. Future policies must encourage coherence of assessments, standards, and measures of quality across the fiscal divide that exists between most K–12 public school systems and ECE programs. The policy in MCPS offers an example of shared assessment practices. Aligned with their district wide curriculum for DLLs, MCPS developed their own language assessments across PreK–3RD grades. For example, in first

grade language learners are asked to “draw and label a picture of an animal and write to describe the animal, using a writing template and other print resources” (p. 11, Marietta & Brookover, 2011). Teachers use these assessments to discuss information about students in a manner that is specific to the identified goals and objectives within the district DLL curriculum. Additionally, teachers use these assessments to predict a student’s readiness to exit the language learner program. Using these district created language assessments alongside the standardized state language assessment provides educational partners with a broader view of students’ language abilities.

Beyond the MCPS example, further opportunities for sharing assessment information between early learning providers and K–12 schools would prove helpful. The Office of Head Start National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (NCCLR) is an example of a federal initiative that supports goals related to integrated PreK–3RD grade systems. More agencies need to follow the lead of NCCLR and make resources available to school districts and early childhood programs to support coordinating efforts to appropriately and accurately identify DLLs and support professional development, software purchase/re-design, data management activities, and valid assessment efforts.

Conclusion

DLLs have the right to benefit from the potential advantages of accurate assessment. The current empirical knowledge base and the legal and ethical standards are limited, yet sufficient to improve the assessment of young DLLs. Improvements will require commitments to critically evaluate current assessment tools and procedures, develop new tools that are psychometrically reliable and valid and to demonstrate the use of these tools leads to improved practices and outcomes for DLLs. This effort will require the utilization of trained staff competent in the design, administration and interpretation of linguistically appropriate assessments. Furthermore, related assessments of contextual conditions will be necessary if current assessment strategies, which largely focus on the individual, are to improve classroom instruction, curricu-

lum content, and child outcomes across a population of students (García & Nájuez, 2011).

Implementation research suggests that assessment practices with young DLLs continue to lag behind established legal requirements and ethical standards set forth by APA, AERA and NCME. In part, this is because of a lack of available instruments normed on representative samples of DLLs, because of inadequate professional development and training, and partly because of insufficient research to inform best practice. The gap between current practices in the assessment of young DLLs in the U. S. and the standards set forth through research, policy, and ethics is largely a function of the gap between practical and optimal realities. However, efforts are underway to bridge these realities. Barrueco and her colleagues have provided a useful compendium of available assessment instruments commonly utilized in an appropriate manner with DLLs/ELLs (Barrueco, Lopez, Ong & Lozano, 2012). In addition, the Center on Early Care and Education Research—Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL) is compiling a critical analysis of individual and related educational environment assessment tools relevant to this population (CECER-DLL, in press).

Given the large and increasing size of the young DLL population in the US, the current focus on testing and accountability, and the documented deficits in current assessment practices, continued efforts towards improvement are critical. Potentially, the design and use of KEAs is one way to improve the assessments used with DLLs. Close attention to the policies and practices surrounding the development and use of KEAs across states is necessary if KEAs are to be successful in identifying service gaps in ECE systems and improving the PreK–3 instruction for DLLs. ●

References

- Abedi, J. (2010). Linguistic factors in the assessment of English language learners. In G. Walford, E. Tucker, & M. Viswanathan (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of measurement* (pp. 129-150). Oxford: Sage Publications.
- American Educational Research Association (AERA), American Psychological Association (APA), & National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME). (1999). *Standards for educational and psychological testing*. Washington, DC: AERA.
- Barrueco, S., Lopez, M., Ong, C. A., & Lozano, P. (2012) *Assessing young children within and across two languages*. New York, NY: Brooks Publishing.
- Bialystok, E. (2009). Bilingualism: The good, the bad, and the indifferent. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 12(1), 3-11.
- Bialystok, E. (2010). Global-local and trail-making tasks by monolingual and bilingual children: Beyond inhibition. *Developmental Psychology*, 46(1), 93-105.
- Capps, R., Fix, M. E., Murray, J., Ost, J., Passel, J. S., & Hernandez, S. H. (2005). *The new demography of America's schools: Immigration and the No Child Left behind Act*. Accessed online from <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=311230>
- Center for Early Care and Education Research-Dual Language Learners. (in press). *Psychometric properties of dual language learners' assessments: A review of the research*. Author.
- CFDA # 84.412. (2009). *Race to the Top: Early Learning Challenge*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Daily, S., Burkhauser, M., & Halle, T. (2010). A review of school readiness practices in the states: Early learning guidelines and assessments. Early childhood highlights. *Child Trends*, 1(3), 1-12.
- Espinosa, L. M. (2007). English-language learners as they enter school. In R. C. Pianta, M. J. Cox & K. L. Snow (Eds.), *School readiness and the transition to Kindergarten in the era of accountability* (pp. 175-196). Baltimore, MD: Paul H Brookes.
- Espinosa, L. M. (2008). Challenging common myths about young English language learners. *FCD Policy Brief, Advancing PK-3*, No. 8, January. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.
- Espinosa, L. M. (2010). Classroom teaching and "best practices" for young English language learners. In E. E. García, & E. C. Frede, (Eds.), *Young English language learners* (pp. 143-164). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Espinosa, L. M., & Lopez, M. L. (2007). *Assessment considerations for young English language learners across different levels of accountability*. The Pew Charitable Trust. Available online at http://www.pewtrusts.org/our_work_report_detail.aspx?id=31164
- García, E. E. (2005). *Teaching and learning in two languages: Bilingualism and schooling in the United States*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- García, E. E., & García, E. H. (Eds.). (2012). Language development and the education of Hispanic children in the United States. In E. E. García (Ed.), *Teaching and learning in two languages: Bilingualism and schooling in the United States* (pp.44-58). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- García, E. E., & Nájuez Sr., J. E. (2011). *Bilingualism and cognition: Joining cognitive psychology and education to enhance bilingual research, pedagogy and policy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Genesee, F. (2010). Dual language development in preschool children. In E. E. García, & E. C. Frede (Eds.), *Young English language learners* (pp. 59-79). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. (2011). Arlington, VA: Head Start Resource Center. Available online at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/eecd/Assessment/Child%20Outcomes/revised-child-outcomes.html>
- Hernandez, D. J. (2006). *Young Hispanic children in the U.S.: A demographic portrait based on Census 2000*. A report to the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics. Tempe: Arizona State University.

- Hernandez, D. J., Macartney, S., & Denton, N. A. (2010). A demographic portrait of young English language learners. In E. E. García, & E. C. Frede (Eds.), *Young English language learners* (pp. 10–41). New York, NY: Teachers College Press
- Kauerz, K. (2006). *Ladders of learning: Fighting fade-out by advancing PK-3 alignment*. Washington, DC: The New America Foundation.
- Magnuson, K., & Waldfogel, J. (2005). Early childhood care and education: Effects of ethnic and racial gaps in school readiness. *The Future of Children*, 15(1), 177–198.
- Marietta, G., & Brookover, E. (2011). *Effectively educating PreK-3rd English language learners (ELLs) in Montgomery County public schools: A FCD case study*. New York, NY: The Foundation for Child Development.
- Matthews, M. (2011). *Meeting the early learning challenge: Supporting English language learners*. Washington DC: CLASP. Available online at <http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/ellsandeic.pdf>
- Meisels, S. J. (1999). Assessing readiness. In R. C. Pinata & M. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten: Research, policy, training and practice* (pp. 39–66). Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children and National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. (2003). Position Statement, *Early childhood curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation—Building an effective, accountable system in programs for children birth through age 8*. Available at www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/pscape.pdf
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2002). *Advanced standards*. Available online at www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/2002.pdf
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2005). *Screening and assessment of young English-language learners*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Resources (NCCLR). (2012). *Dual language learners in state early learning guidelines and standards*. Available online at http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/center/state-guidelines/dll_guidelines.html
- National Institute for Early Education Research. (2004). *The State of preschool*. Available online at <http://nieer.org/publications/state-preschool-2004-state-preschool-yearbook>
- Office of Head Start. (2012). *Early childhood learning and knowledge center: National center on cultural and linguistic responsiveness*. Available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic>
- Oller, D. K., & Eilers, R. E. (2002). *Language and literacy in bilingual children*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters Limited.
- Sánchez, M. T., & Brisk, M. E. (2004). Teachers' assessment practices and understandings in a bilingual program. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*, 2(1), pp. 193–214.
- Severns, M. (2012). *Starting early with English language learners: First lessons from Illinois*. New America Foundation. Available online at http://newamerica.net/publications/policy/starting_early_with_english_language_learners
- Snow, C. E., & Van Hemel, S. B. (Eds.). (2008). *Early childhood assessment: Why, what, and how*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- Snow, K. (2011). *Developing Kindergarten readiness and other large-scale assessment systems: Necessary considerations in the assessment of young children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Wong-Fillmore, L. (2000). Loss of family languages: Should educators be concerned? *Theory into Practice*. 39(4), 203–210.

Appendix

Matrix for the Language/Literacy Assessment of Young DLL Children

Purpose for Assessment	Types of Measures/Procedures Recommended
Determination of Language Dominance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent/Family Survey with questions about language usage, interaction patterns, and language proficiency Teacher observation of language usage across multiple contexts Possibly English language screener Team judgment: Assessment team that answers following for each DLL child: Which language does the child have the most experience with, uses more fluidly, and most often prefers to use? (Genesee et al., 2010)
Language Proficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language samples across multiple settings (in small groups, with peers, with family members, etc.) Standardized language narratives (e.g., Renfrew Bus Story) Standardized language measures of receptive and productive capacity used cautiously (e.g., preLAS English and Spanish; ROWVT and EOWVT; Pre-IPT; and/or Woodcock-Muñoz); at certain stages of English language development DLLs will know fewer vocabulary words in each language which is typical—not a language delay Teacher ratings/observations
Determination of Language/Learning Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect information in both languages (especially child's dominant language; delays will show up in both languages—if only delayed in English probably a part of process of English acquisition) Use appropriate standardized tests of language abilities cautiously Collaborate with native language speakers Observe language usage across multiple settings, in and out of school Team members make best professional judgment and update frequently
Kindergarten Entry Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent/family survey with information about child's early language learning exposure Observational assessments covering all domains of learning that are aligned with Early Learning and Development Standards Information from multiple sources, e.g., parents, teachers, staff, native language speakers Information about home language development as well as English language proficiency Selection of tools that meet basic psychometric requirements for use with DLLs
Language Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informal assessments aligned with curriculum goals in language of instruction (focused teacher-child language interactions) Observational assessments with items assessing English language development Language narrative samples in home language and English Standardized tests in English and home language aligned with curriculum goals (GOLD, WSS, CA. DRDP-R 2010 assessments)

About CECER-DLL

CECER-DLL is a national center that is building capacity for research with dual language learners (DLLs) ages birth through five years. CECER-DLL aims to improve the state of knowledge and measurement in early childhood research on DLLs, identify and advance research on best practices for early care and education programming, and develop and disseminate products to improve research on DLLs. CECER-DLL is a cooperative agreement between the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Office of Planning, Research, & Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children & Families (ACF), in collaboration with the Office of Head Start and the Office of Child Care.

Suggested citation

Espinosa, L. M., & García, E. (November, 2012). *Developmental assessment of young dual language learners with a focus on Kindergarten entry assessments: Implications for state policies. Working paper #1*. Center for Early Care and Education Research-Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute.



UNC

FRANK PORTER GRAHAM
CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE