

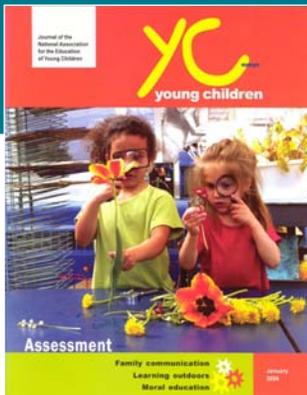
Developmentally
Appropriate
Practice



A reading from the CD accompanying
*Developmentally Appropriate Practice in
Early Childhood Programs Serving Children
from Birth through Age 8, Third Edition.*

READING #29 |

Ensuring Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Assessment of Young Children



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CATEGORIES:

Assessment
Curriculum: Language
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Ensuring Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Assessment of Young Children

Rosa Milagros Santos

Ensuring implementation of appropriate assessment procedures continues to be a struggle for early childhood researchers and practitioners. The negative ramifications for young children and their families of inappropriate assessment and testing procedures are well documented, particularly for those of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (National Research Council 2002). In most cases such inappropriate actions lead to misdiagnosis of learning needs and the mis- and overidentification of children for placement in special education programs (National Research Council 2002).

Assessment problems often stem from a lack of training, awareness, and sensitivity on the part of the professionals who plan and conduct the procedures. Lack of awareness and sensitivity can inadvertently lead to the selection and use of assessment materials and tools that do not take into account variations in children's skills and knowledge based on cultural and linguistic differences. For example, some language assessment tools ask the child to identify items that are unique to the primary U.S. culture, such as a

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picture of Raggedy Ann. A child unfamiliar with this toy may not be able to respond correctly, which may bias his or her score and misrepresent the child's abilities.

Researchers suggest that professionals need to deepen their understanding of the impact of culture and language on the assessment process (National Research Council 2002; McLean in press).

Several available resources can help professionals develop their knowledge of culturally and linguistically appropriate assessments. One source is the Early Childhood Research Institute on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS).

CLAS offers valuable Internet-based resource materials designed to assist professionals, family members, policy makers, and others in ensuring that assessments are culturally and linguistically appropriate. The goals of the CLAS Institute are "to identify, evaluate, and promote effective and appropriate early



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intervention practices and preschool practices that are sensitive and respectful to children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds” (Fowler, Santos, & Corso in press). Its Web site (<http://clas.uiuc.edu>) offers an easy-to-navigate search option for materials that can be individualized to one’s needs.

CLAS’s Web site includes information on more than four thousand materials collected from across the United States on various topics related to early childhood, including assessment. Many materials have been reviewed for cultural and linguistic appropriateness. Recommendations by CLAS reviewers regarding the appropriateness of many materials help potential users make informed decisions before they purchase or use these materials in their communities.

One useful tool accessible through the CLAS Web site is the set of review guidelines for individuals or early childhood teams to use in reflecting upon and discussing the cultural and linguistic appropriateness of specific materials. CLAS describes the guidelines as “developed through a collaborative effort of a diverse group of individuals from across the country, representing a variety of disciplines, cultures, races, languages, and ethnicity” and as “based on the current knowledge base in the fields of early childhood special education, early intervention, early childhood education, special education, medicine, and humanities” (Fowler, Santos, & Corso in press).

CLAS guidelines can be helpful to teams as they develop materials or decide whether or not to purchase or use materials. Review guidelines related to assessment include reflective

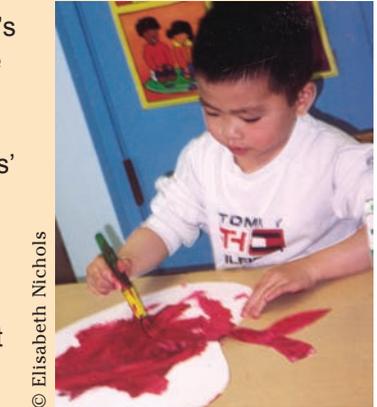
Some Considerations for Appropriate Assessment

Planning the assessment.

Seek each family’s view on native language maintenance and the learning of another language. Honor families’ preferred language or mode of communication by (1) having persons fluent in that language conduct the assessment or (2) reviewing the assessment tool to

identify if it is sensitive to or mismatched with cultural norms or language usage.

Choosing materials. Make sure the language in the material acknowledges diversity (e.g.,



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family structures, multigenerations, disabilities, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, and so on). Check the design, illustrations, and photos to determine whether they represent a nonstereotypical view of

cultural and linguistic groups (e.g., contemporary dress).

Conducting the assessment. Assessment includes determining eligibility, services, and monitoring procedures. Professionals should seek assistance from a family member or cultural guide to confirm their interpretations of the child’s behavior during the assessment process.

Analyzing and reporting. Results can be in written or oral format. Include a qualified representative of the child’s cultural and linguistic group to assist in the interpretation of the results when bilingual professionals are not available. Have the assessment team consider to what degree perceived developmental delays are related to cultural or childrearing practices, difficulties in translation, or other factors.

Professionals need to deepen their understanding of the impact of culture and language on the assessment process.



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statements and questions focusing on the overall quality of the material and practices around assessment planning, conducting assessments, and analyzing and reporting assessment results. Considerations in selecting culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment materials and tools are included. A total of 17 review guidelines are available online or can be ordered; a sampling is given here in "Some Considerations for Appropriate Assessment."

Review guidelines on other assessment-related topics are found on the CLAS Web site. Screening and family information gathering resources are also available.

Great strides have been made to ensure the appropriate assessment of young children and their families, but still larger challenges lie ahead. Recognizing the impact of culture and language on the assessment process is a first step. It starts us in a direction that assures children's access to a promising future.

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