

Assessing Young Dual Language Learners – What You Need to Know and Why

Carol Scheffner Hammer, Ph.D.
Communication Sciences & Disorders
The Pennsylvania State University

The National Head Start Dual Language Institute
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Young Dual Language Learners

- Are increasing
 - ▣ Numbers attending Head Start
 - ▣ Numbers of languages served by programs
- Provides a challenge to programs who are to
 - ▣ Support children's
 - Language development
 - Developing school readiness
 - ▣ Assess & monitor children's abilities in both languages
- Purpose of this presentation
 - ▣ Discuss what is known about young DLLs' development
 - ▣ Address the implications for assessment

Definition of Young DLLs

- Children who are learning 2 or more languages
 - ▣ Sequential Learners
 - Speak 1 language at home from birth &
 - Learn English later in life (usually at age 3 or when enter Head Start)
 - ▣ Simultaneous Learners
 - Learn two language at home
 - From birth

What do we know about young
DLLs' language development?

&

What does this mean for Head
Start programs?



1. Bilingual language development is not the same as monolingual development

- Young DLLs
 - ▣ Say 1st words
 - ▣ Begin producing 2-word combinations
 - ▣ Use sentences at same time as monolinguals
- But their path in each language may be different
 - ▣ Bilinguals are not “two monolinguals in one” (Grosjean, 1989)
 - ▣ Their language experiences are different than monolinguals
 - ▣ As a result, some aspects of language development may seem delayed compared to monolinguals

What does this mean for assessment?

- Cannot compare young DLLs' language development to monolinguals' development
- Need to understand the children's language system
 - ▣ Assess children's abilities in
 - their home language (L1) & English (L2)
 - ▣ If don't speak L1, need to gather information
 - From parents (through interpreters)
 - Through the help of classroom assistants who know L1
- Assess/monitor children's abilities over time
 - ▣ To make certain that development is occurring

2. Young DLLs need time to catch up to monolinguals

- On average, both sequential & simultaneous learners begin Head Start behind in
 - Vocabulary
 - Letter identification
 - Emergent writing
- In comparison to
 - Monolingual Head Start children
 - Average US preschoolers

Over time, catch up to monolinguals

- It takes
 - ▣ 2-3 years to catch up to monolinguals conversationally
 - ▣ 5-7 years to catch up to monolinguals academically
(Cummins, 1981)
- Our data supports this
 - ▣ Longitudinal study of young DLLs
 - Two years in Head Start through
 - Early elementary school

Abilities in Early Elementary School



- SE and SI had age appropriate English
 - ▣ Phonological awareness
 - ▣ Emergent literacy abilities
 - ▣ Letter knowledge and early word identification
 - ▣ Reading comprehension

What does this mean for assessment?

- Give young DLLs time to learn English
- Don't expect children to be fluent in 6 months
- Monitor/assess children's language development over time
 - ▣ Make certain increases are occurring
 - ▣ Support children's language development
 - Make certain that support is at the appropriate level for the children

3. Young DLLs' vocabulary is the same as monolinguals

- If look at young DLLs' vocabulary in each language,
 - ▣ may be behind monolinguals
- If combine vocabularies,
 - ▣ vocabulary size is the same as monolinguals
- Remember that young children's vocabulary is context specific
 - ▣ Home vocabulary different than school vocabulary
 - May not learn school vocabulary items at home
 - Colors, shapes, classroom items
 - May not learn home vocabulary at school
 - Furniture, rooms, culture specific foods

What does this mean for assessment?

- Do not judge children's vocabulary based on information in 1 language
 - ▣ Need to look at vocabulary in both languages
 - Obtain information from parents
- Do not expect that children will know “school” terms or concepts in their L1
 - ▣ These may not be taught at home (in either language)
or
 - ▣ May be taught in English at home

4. Young DLLs use knowledge of L1 to learn a second language

- Children are not starting from the beginning when learning English
 - Their knowledge of L1 is very beneficial
- Similar to learning how to play a 2nd instrument
- Young DLLs use what they know about language (through their knowledge of L1) to learn English
 - Vocabulary/conceptual knowledge
 - Transfer all they know about “gato” once they learn the English label “cat”
 - Nouns, verbs, adjectives
 - Purposes of language – to request, to express ideas

Language Transfer and Reading

- Children use knowledge of language when learning to read in two languages.
 - ▣ Transfer of phonological awareness between two languages
 - ▣ *Growth* in Spanish language development during Head Start predicted
 - Kindergarten letter knowledge in Spanish & English
 - 1st Grade
 - Letter knowledge & Reading Comprehension in Spanish & English
 - ▣ *Growth* in English language development also predicted
 - Kindergarten
 - 1st grade reading outcomes in Spanish & English

(Hammer, Lawrence & Miccio, 2007; Davison, Hammer, Lawrence & Miccio, 2008)

What does this mean?

- Important to support children's L1 as they learn English
 - ▣ Definitely, support parents' usage of L1 at home
 - ▣ When possible, support children's developing knowledge about the world in L1
 - as they learn English in the classroom
- Without support of the home language, children's abilities in L1 may not develop

What does this mean for assessment?

- Assess both languages to make certain L1 continues to develop
- If development of L1 slows, determine if there is a change in language exposure
 - ▣ At home
 - ▣ At school

5. Young DLLs differ in their abilities

- Wide range of individual differences
- Due to differences in
 - ▣ Age of exposure to two languages
 - ▣ Amount of exposure to two languages
 - which can vary based on
 - communicative context
 - Home v. school
 - Topic of conversation or the activity
 - communicative partner
 - which can vary based on language of instruction
 - over time
 - with entrance into Head Start
 - at home

What does this mean for assessment?

- Gather information from the family on
 - ▣ Ages child spoken to and expected to communicate in
 - L1 & L2
 - ▣ Languages spoken at home
 - What languages
 - Who speaks what language(s) to the child
 - Presence of older siblings
 - Communication with grandparents
 - What languages child speaks to others
 - ▣ Where child has lived (or extended stays in home country)
 - Length of time
 - How recent the stays were

6. Usage of L1 at home is not bad for children's English development

- We studied the effect of mothers' language usage
 - ▣ During 2 years in HS and kindergarten
- Increased use of English over time
 - ▣ had no effect on
 - English vocabulary development
 - Emergent literacy development (measured in English)
 - ▣ slowed Spanish vocabulary development
- Continued usage of Spanish
 - ▣ had no effect on English vocabulary/emergent literacy
 - ▣ promoted Spanish vocabulary development

7. Language of instruction affects children's language & literacy development

- Few studies in this area
- Dual language v. English immersion (Barnett et al., 2007)
 - No differences in English vocabulary & literacy development
 - Children in dual language made greater gains in Spanish vocabulary

What does this mean for assessment?

- Children make gains in English language and literacy during preschool
- Support of L1 is needed in order to observe gains in the child's home language
- When assessing L1, recall children's development may be slowed if
 - ▣ the children's home language is not supported

8. Young DLLs cannot have a language disorder in only 1 language

- Learning two languages does not cause a language disorder
- If a child has a language disorder, the child will have a problem in both languages.
 - A child cannot have normal language development in L1 and a language disorder in English.

What does this mean for assessment?

- It is important to gather information about children's abilities in both languages.
 - ▣ Without knowledge of L1, a child's development of English cannot be understood.
- Monitor children's abilities over time.
 - ▣ If you are concerned a child has a language disorder in English, determine if the child has a problem in L1.
 - If no problems in L1,
 - give the child time to learn English.
 - support the child's development of English
 - Perhaps language levels in classroom and/or expectations are too high.

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER



Recall:



- ❑ Young DLLs cannot be compared to monolinguals
- ❑ Young DLLs need time to catch up to monolinguals
- ❑ Differences exist among children based on age and amount of exposure to the two languages
- ❑ Children use knowledge of one language to learn a second language
- ❑ Home language usage does not hurt development of English
- ❑ A child does not have a language disorder unless there are concerns in both languages

Assess children's abilities in both languages

- Collect info about child's performance in the classroom
 - ▣ If you don't know the child's L1, employ the help of
 - a classroom assistant or
 - staff member who is fluent in L1

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- Include the family as part of the assessment
 - ▣ Gather background information
 - Languages spoken by family members & child
 - Ages child was exposed to the two languages
 - Amount and consistency of exposure
 - ▣ Family's opinion about the child's abilities in L1 (& L2)
 - Vocabulary
 - Examples of typical and longest sentences produced
 - Examples of questions and directions the child understands
 - How the child compares to other children

Assess children's abilities over time

- Young DLLs' abilities are changing
 - Due to changes in language learning environment
- Need to assess more frequently than just beginning and end of the year.
 - Need to assess regularly to make certain children's abilities are increasing

Benefits of Assessment

- The assessment will assist teachers determine what children need to work on in the classroom.
 - ▣ If child is not making progress, need to consider the language support provided in the classroom.
 - English language may be too complex
 - May need to adjust language to child's abilities in English
 - But will also want to advance children's world knowledge by supporting their abilities in L1.
 - Language may need to be more complex.
- Ultimately, the assessment can be used to maximize children's learning in the classroom.

THANK YOU! ¡GRACIAS!

CJH22@PSU.EDU

