

**Measuring What Children Can Do in All Languages: Developmental Assessment for Children Who Are  
Dual Language Learners  
Front Porch Webinar Series**

Sarah Lytle: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Front Porch Webinar, "Measuring What Children Can Do in All Languages: Developmental Assessment for Children Who Are Dual Language Learners," presented by the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning, NCECDTL. I'm Sarah Lytle from NCECDTL. Today's webinar will be presented by two guests, Ryan Pontier and Christine Hughes, who have done research on the topic of assessment for preschoolers and who are bilingual themselves. We'll hear from Ryan and Christine about their research and its implications for Head Start and childcare programs serving children who are bilingual. But before we begin, I'd like to go over some information regarding the webinar.

We'll be using some of the Adobe Connect features to help us interact. At times, we will ask you to type in the chat box located to the right of the PowerPoint slides in response to specific questions. We would also like to point out the Q&A box on the lower right. If at any time you have questions related to the presentation or other related topics, please type your question there.

We will be monitoring that box throughout. Supporting documents for this webinar, including a PDF of the presentation, can be found in the supporting documents box in the bottom right of your screen. If, for any reason, you get disconnected from the webinar, please use the same link that you used previously to rejoin the webinar. We also want to let you know that this session will be recorded. Finally, at the conclusion of the webinar, we will post a slide with a link to an evaluation form. We request that you complete the evaluation, as we use this information for improving our webinar presentations and planning for future webinars.

Upon completion of the evaluation, you can download a certificate of completion for your participation in the webinar. If you are viewing the webinar with colleagues on one computer and only one person is registered for the webinar, please forward the evaluation link to your colleagues who also viewed the webinar so that they can also complete the evaluation and they can also receive a certificate of completion. So without further ado, I will turn the webinar over to Ryan and Christine.

Ryan Pontier: All right. Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Ryan Pontier. I am currently an assistant professor at Florida International University here in Miami, as well as a dad to two bilingual daughters, one who's 2 and one who's 5, and a teacher and a trainer for professional development, more than anything, working with folks in the early-childhood field.

Christine Hughes: And I am Christine Hughes. I am also in Miami. Ryan and I share the fact that we have two daughters because we are, in fact, married.

Ryan: We are.

Christine: And I also am adjunct faculty at Florida International University in their School of Ed. I'm a developmental psychologist by training, and most of my research has really focused in early care and education settings around issues of quality. So we are so happy to be here today with you. So we're going to get started. We have, first, our session objectives that we are going to aim to cover today. So we are going to define bilingualism and what it means. We're going to identify language use that is actually typical and should be expected of dual language learners. You, as a participant, should be able to evaluate the options for assessment of dual-language learners and also demonstrate effective communication with families about assessment results. So our actual agenda today is obviously going to follow these objectives.

Ryan: So, today, there are five main buckets of talk that we'll engage in, and the first centers around the question of what it means to be bilingual, and couched within that, of course, is what it means to be a dual-language learner. And that said, we want to know what dual-language learners do, particularly how they use language, because that then is going to influence the way that we actually assess dual-language

learners, which is why the third area that we'll focus on is assessment for dual-language learners, what is out there, what's typically used, and what we suggest using. Fourth, we're going to talk more about those suggestions that we have and what it really means to assess bilingually when we're working with dual-language learners who, of course, are bilingual children.

And the last part that we're going to focus on is how we communicate with families, because so much of the work that we do in early childhood involves and requires interacting meaningfully with the families of the dual-language learners, and so we need to not only understand those results but also be able to effectively communicate them with families. We're going to jump right in now, and I'll fast-forward to the next slide, and we're going to start talking about what it means to be bilingual. So the first thing that I really want to ask you is exactly what you should be seeing in front of you right now, and I'm actually going to be silent for about 10 seconds on purpose because I want you to ask yourself, and if you happen to be lucky enough to be sitting next to somebody, ask that person, what does it mean to be bilingual? So go ahead.

Take 10 seconds and answer that for yourself or with a partner. All right. Hopefully you've had an opportunity to at least give your thoughts there, perhaps involving some of your own experience. A lot of times, when we have the privilege of doing a presentation like this in person, we get to ask the participants what they feel like it means to be bilingual, but because we don't necessarily have all of the responses right here, I'm going to actually jump right to a research-based definition. In other words, what does it mean to be bilingual?

And so you can see here that bilinguals, which, again, include dual-language learners, use more than one language to different degrees, and they use these languages for a variety of purposes. And I'm going to repeat that on purpose, because I really want this to sink in, right? Bilinguals, that includes dual-language learners, use more than one language to different degrees, and they use them for a variety of purposes. This means that how well I speak and understand and read and write one language is usually not the same as it is in another language. So, for example, I'm bilingual in English and in Spanish, and part of the reason that I'm not perfectly balanced in terms of how fluent or how well I use each language is because I use them a lot of times for different reasons, right, different purposes.

And to give an example, when I speak with my daughters, I only speak with them in Spanish. And as you are all very well aware, when we're speaking with 5-year-olds and 2-year-olds, our language tends not to usually center around the really abstract, really complex challenges that life has to offer. Yes, they come up sometimes, but for the most part, we're using language that's a little bit more simple. And so my Spanish is quite good around those baby-related things. I can talk to you about changing diapers. I can talk to you about using your hands for helping. I can talk to my daughters about actually knowing when it's their turn to talk or how to express themselves appropriately to say that they don't like something that their sister did.

And I can do that in English, too, but now, for English, I use it all of the time professionally, which means that I have to write academic papers, that I have to give academic talks with very specialized language, and it's relatively easy for me to do that at this point. However, even though I can do it in Spanish, it takes a little bit more effort, and I might not be quite as nuanced in everything, because, again, we tend to use our language for different purposes, and, therefore, we don't use them each perfectly as well. What I want to express is that's normal, and it's okay, and that's being bilingual.

So when you hear that somebody's not bilingual because they don't speak both perfectly, that's false, right? Being bilingual means that we use these languages to different degrees. So now, the next part of this is what it means to be bilingual when you are a child. As I've just talked about, it could be anybody who we're talking about being bilingual, but for a bilingual child, it's anyone who is exposed to two languages, no matter what their level of proficiency is in either language, right?

So also a dual-language learner would fit in here, because our definition of dual-language learner is any child that's learning both a home language and English. So here, we're expanding that to say that it's

anyone who is exposed to two or more languages, and the reason is because when we think of a child as bi- or multilingual, we tend to interact with them differently and think of them differently, and by that, I mean positively so.

And so here, what we're going to do, now that we have hopefully a good understanding of what it means to be bilingual, we're going to take a look at some examples of what bilingual children or dual-language learners might do or, specifically, what they might say, and Christine and I have compiled a list of things that our daughters, mostly our older daughter, has said to us before. And keep in mind that they use both English and Spanish.

So for some of you who speak Spanish -- Right. Both of them, since birth, Christine's reminding me, So - English and Spanish. So if you use Spanish, as well, these might make more sense to you. But so you can see, one day, our older daughter was looking at our younger daughter, and she looks up, and she says, "Mommy! Mommy! She's chuping her dedo!" And we were all excited because we heard an English word and we heard a Spanish word, and then we saw that, or we heard that, rather, chuping, and we noticed that it was just like the verb chupar in Spanish, which means to suck, like sucking her thumb, but it had that "ing" on there because it was happening right then, and so what she did is she used some English. She used some Spanish, and she made this bilingual word. And the second one, and she'll still say this sometimes to us.

She asks, "Am I going to bath myself tonight?" And for those of you who use Spanish, if you were to translate that into Spanish, that's exactly the way it sounds, is "Am I going to bath myself tonight?" instead of, "Am I going to bathe" or "Am I going to take a bath tonight?" And so what you see here is it's all English, but you get an influence from another language, because both languages are working at the same time. And then the third one, our daughter looked over at our dog. We have this cute, little pug, and he loves to snore, and as she's looking at the dog laying on his back snoring, she says, "He's ronking." And again, like the first example, you get roncar, which means to snore in Spanish, and that "ing," meaning it was happening right now, And so there a couple other examples there, too.

"I'm going to ganar you" means I'm going to win, but that's the same sentence structure or the same way you would say it in Spanish. And then, the next example, although it's all in English, and Rufus is our dog's name, she said, "Mom, look what Rufus made me," while she was pointing to her arm, because the dog had just scratched her after she was wrestling with him. And that's because in Spanish, there's a verb that can translate to either made or did, and she just happened to choose the word made. So she was not confused. Rather, she was being really intelligent and creative and just chose a different word for it, but she knew what she was saying, and so did we because we're bilingual, too. And the last one, she said, "I'm so sed."

Christine: This one was happening to me in the car a lot, and she was telling me, "I'm so sed. I'm so sed," and I thought she was saying, "I'm so sad," and it took me a few days of her saying this occasionally to really figure out that she was telling me that she was thirsty, because that is thirst, but she was using it in an English sort of structured sentence.

Ryan: Yeah. So again, the point of this slide now is to give some examples so that you see what bilinguals regularly do, especially young ones, right? So in other words, you should expect dual-language learners to say things like this. That's important to keep in mind as we move forward and talk about how we assess dual-language learners, especially because this last question on here has us thinking about how we actually raise bilingual children. At home, there are three main ways that that happens, right?

One is that, like our children, they're bilingual from birth, so they are exposed and use both a language other than English and English at home. One is that they learn a language other than English, often called a home language, at home, and then English in school or in the community, and then finally, it might be that they learn English at home and begin to learn another language at school, so a few different ways to become bilingual between home and school. So now that we know that, we want to push on a little bit more, and we are actually going to, I believe, have Judi say a couple of things about

assessment in general before we get a little bit more specialized. We're just waiting. I think Judi is about to come on. I'm going to forward to the next slide just so that you guys can take a look at it here.

Judi Stevenson-Garcia: Hi, everyone. Sorry about that. So, I'm Judi Stevenson-Garcia. I'm a senior manager for content development at NCECDTL, and I just wanted to take a few minutes to set the context for the assessment that we'll be talking about during the remainder of this presentation. So just in terms of the Head Start focus around assessment, we understand it as -- or define it as a process of making sure that we're measuring children's learning and development for several purposes.

One, obviously, is what you do every day when you work with young children, which is to monitor their development, to inform curriculum and decision-making, but then also, we use assessment tools to identify whether children may benefit from additional support services and then also to communicate information to others about children's progress toward learning goals.

So the main focus today is really going to be around identifying children who may or may not be at risk for delay and then how we can use tools appropriately for children who are dual-language learners so that we're really making sure we're identifying children who may be at risk, and then if we do identify a child who may be at risk, adding diagnostic tools that are used appropriately, so that we're interpreting them and using them as they're intended to be used.

And just for a little context setting, we do have the Head Start program performance standards that give us some guidance around the way that we want to approach developmental screening and diagnostic assessment of young children who are dual-language learners. Around developmental screening, the standards require that you use one or more research-based developmental standardized screenings to complete the screening, and obviously, the goal there is to identify any concerns, and this could be a broad range of concerns that focus on children's development, their behavior mode or language, social, cognitive, and emotional skills. And as you can imagine, when working with a child who speaks more than one language or understands more than one language, this can be a challenge.

So additional standards, and these are here for your reference. You can download the PowerPoint of this session presentation. You can also find these on the ECL KC, but we want to make sure that the screenings that we use and assessments for young children who are dual-language learners are valid and reliable for the specific populations that we're working with, and we want to make sure that they're age, developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate. So if you are -- It's likely that you're working in a program since you're on this webinar, in a program that serves children who speak languages other than English. You want to make sure that you have staff or some -- It could be a teacher or an assistant teacher.

It could be another staff person in the program. It could be someone from the community, or you could contract out with an interpreter, but we need to make sure that we do our very best to find someone who can understand the languages the child knows in order to be able to conduct the assessments and understand the child's whole development, both in their home language and in English.

We want to make sure that the culture is understood, as well, because sometimes, the screening tools will require, if they're being interpreted, they might require some cultural nuances or understanding of what might be expected in that child's culture. If it's not possible to conduct a screening with any staff in the program, then you do need to find an interpreter if possible, and it's really important to make sure that that interpreter is given some kind of background and understanding of what the tool is, how it should be used, you know, how to work with small children, how to communicate with families to make sure that the process is smooth and doesn't cause anxiety and gives you the results that you're looking for, which is really an understanding of the child's development. And there is an exception here.

So if you can demonstrate that you don't have a qualified bilingual staff person or an interpreter, you can conduct the screenings in English, and in that case, you want to make sure that you're really couching that screening within a larger context of understanding the family, gathering information about what the child's skills are in their home language so that you can really do your best to get a comprehensive picture of what

the child knows and is able to do. And we're going to talk further about how to go about this, but these are the standards that kind of give us our guidance, and I'll turn it back over to you guys.

Christine: Okay. Thanks so much. So, really, you know, there's a difference, I think, when we think about assessment in terms of the process versus assessment tools, right? So the process of assessment is really how we gather information about children to better understand their learning or their development, and so choosing an assessment that's appropriate for a dual-language learner requires a lot of intentional thought in making that decision of what to use, and so, you know, you have to think about the purpose of the assessment, the, you know, type of assessment, the method or the way that you're going to get this information from the child and, of course, then look to the tools, the actual assessment instruments that are available, right, to help us get to know more about young children.

And so we're going to talk now a little bit about the assessment piece and then jump a little bit into, you know, once we've assessed, how do we communicate with families and move on to that. So, you know, beyond observations of children and beyond the information that we can gather from families, it's also important to use screening and assessment tools to have an objective view of the child, and I always like to take this time to really differentiate the difference between screening and assessment. So a screening tool and an assessment tool are different, and they should be used for different purposes.

So, screening is not meant to be diagnostic. It is meant to catch or identify children with potential concerns or, you know, they may be on a developmental track that may not be typically developing, but screeners are actually built by the authors, and they are built in a psychometric way to catch many more children than actually do have a developmental concern, and so this is, you know, this is why, you know, my background is in psychology, and I have a lot of training in the psychometrics, the building of assessments.

This is why whenever I'm with professionals who work with young children, I love to emphasize the fact that screeners are meant to capture more children than actually do have an issue, because I think sometimes people think that the screening is not working because some child comes up with a red flag in something, and then, once the, you know, the further evaluation happens with developmental assessment, then it turns out that the child is actually typically developing, and so just something to remember. When you're talking about screening and assessment, they are not interchangeable.

And so then moving on to assessment, right, and we're going to talk about how assessment -- what to think about, how to choose when you're thinking about dual-language learners. There really are two different types of assessments, and really, it's just based on what kind of information you want to gather and how you want to use that assessment. So one type of assessment tool is a criterion reference assessment.

These scores from criterion reference assessments are based on a mastery of skills. So think about something like Teaching Strategies GOLD or the HighScope COR. These are things that are much more specific to seeing the child go through a set of skills, but they're not, you know, normed on a nationally representative sample in the way that the other type of assessment, norm-referenced assessments are, and so, you know, things like GOLD and COR can show you the developmental progression of a child, but some of the disadvantages of those are that you can't reliably compare scores across children. You know, assessments like that are much more suited and should be used for the purpose of observing the development of individual children in order to inform, let's say, your instruction in a classroom, the second type of assessment being norm-referenced or standardized assessments.

So scores from these assessments are based on activities that have been conducted with large numbers, hundreds, thousands, hopefully a representative sample of all the children, you know, in our country, and then the scores are then transformed to be able to compare to their same-aged peers, and so that's, you know, that's really referring to a standard score or a standardized assessment. Those are assessments that you don't necessarily want to give every month to see the development of a child over a school year.

Those are much better suited and should be used with the purpose of sitting the child down, working through the activities that are appropriate for their age, going as far as that child can go, and then what you learn from that score is really how that child is doing in comparison to other children their age, and so that can really give you, you know, with very established reliability and validity, you can see where the child is performing compared to what's typical for their age. You can track development over time to see whether maybe their development in one domain is faster or slower than typical growth rates, but, of course, this type of assessment, you know, things like using the PLS-5, you know, the Bayley Scales of Infant Development, these things can be expensive and time-consuming because you really do need trained staff to complete them.

Ryan: All right. So here's the challenge, right? Often, we have access to assessments in only one language, and in the United States, that tends to be English, and so we do the best that we can with any of the types of screeners or assessments that Christine was discussing. If we only measure or use an assessment in one language, though, we only see part of what a child knows or can do. So for example, if you think back to the sentences that our daughters have said, and you were assessing their language, their English language, you would think that they didn't yet have the number of vocabulary words in their repertoire that they should, because you're only counting English words. However, it's very possible that that child has all of the number of words that they need in their repertoire if we look at all actual languages that are represented. So when measurement of language development or proficiency occurs in only one language, the results are missing an entire set of skills or aspects of development from the other language or languages that the child uses, and you, as the person using this information to make decisions about this child, are missing a lot of information about them, right?

We need to know everything about the child. We need to know what languages are used at home, who that child interacts with. When Judi hopped on, she was talking about being culturally sensitive and responsive and understanding the different practices that the children and their families have at home so that they are assessed in similar ways in all of those languages, right? Now, even if languages are assessed using a lot of different standardized assessment tools, you know, so, for example, in English and in Spanish, the fact that those assessments were normed on monolingual children can be a problem, right? In other words, a lot of these standardized assessments that Christine was discussing, when they're creating them, they basically make sure that they work the way they're supposed to work by testing different children, and when they do that, oftentimes, they use children who only use English for the English assessments or who only use Spanish for the Spanish assessments, but then we use them on bilingual children, right, on dual-language learners, and when we do that, then we run the risk of making it look like our dual-language learners don't have what they're supposed to have, can't do what they're supposed to do because we're comparing our bilingual or our dual-language-learning children to monolingual children, so we need to be very aware of that, right?

In other words, it reinforces what we call a deficit perspective of one language or even of both separately, because it makes it look like we're weak or we're low when, really, the child might use both languages effectively to communicate. It's just when their ability to use each language is separated, and a lot of times artificially, that they seem to score lower, and then the decision-makers, who are you guys, sometimes believe that the child might have challenges or concerns with the language.

Christine Hughes: Right, and I want to jump in here, too, because, on the slide, we also have to make the distinction of whether we're talking about assessing language abilities or language development as in that top bullet or whether we're talking about assessing other developmental domains like a child's social-emotional development or cognitive development or motor development. We are talking mostly today about the implications of language assessment, but you still need to consider when you're not measuring language but whether you're measuring any other developmental domain, what are the implications of using assessments or tools in English or separately in the child's other language? You still need to think about what kind of picture that gives you and whether that picture is a complete picture or you will still need more information from other sources to complete it to give you a really good, solid understanding of that child's abilities and needs.

Ryan: So, like, why does this matter? Right? That's a big question, because we know that dual-language learners show what they know and can do across all of their languages. This means, for example, and you can look up top to the language-development part, that when we expect children to have approximately 10 words in their repertoire, they usually come out across both languages. So, for example, you might be able to say three words in English, but seven of them are in Portuguese, and that's fine. But if you're only assessing in English, it looks like that child only has three words in their repertoire. And if you're only assessing in Portuguese, it looks like that child only has seven words in their repertoire, which is why we need to assess, in this child's case, in English and in Portuguese and mark what they can do in English, what they can do in Portuguese, and what they can do in both languages.

Christine: And I think that's one of the things that we really want to highlight. You know, obviously, Head Start does an excellent job of being incredibly intentional in supporting programs and making sure that whatever assessment in languages other than English are out there you are using and supported in using in order to get a comprehensive picture of a child, but in some cases, that still separates the languages.

So, like, you know, if you see here the goal, I don't know, for a child is that they have 10 words, the fact that you're separating English and Portuguese and you have scores or you have counts that are separate, it still sort of reinforces the idea that children, you know, learning languages other than English or multiple languages have some kind of deficit, right, like they're missing something, and so what we really want to emphasize, too, is that, over time, we're hoping that more assessments are going to be actually bilingual assessments, not just a program like you're using an English assessment and a Portuguese assessment for this child to try to get that whole picture.

There are two out there, and we'll talk a little bit more about this in a minute, but, you know, I really wanted to emphasize that, ideally, we are going to move towards assessing a child holistically, actually assessing them rather than assessing them separately and then just trying to put the picture together to get the whole.

Ryan: Yeah, absolutely, and you can see that even once more in the second example that's on there for social-emotional development, because, if we were only assessing in English, right, what might happen is that it looks like the -- Well, it could show itself in the child knowing how to engage in certain activities in only one language, so for example, a show of great social-emotional maturity by saying, "Stop. I don't like that," after being hit but saying it in Haitian Creole, not in English. Right?

So if we're only assessing in English and you can see the Haitian Creole out there, we might not know what the child said if we don't use Haitian Creole, but if we're assessing bilingually or also in Haitian Creole, then we understand that not only does this child use language appropriately but can do it across languages. So just to kind of send the message home here, right, this means that we need to know what dual-language learners know and can do in the home languages, in English and across both of those languages.

All right. So we just wanted to break this down a little bit more and give some suggestions here for ways to informally assess, right, so forms of bilingual assessment that could be formal and informal. First of all, informally meaning that there's no necessary set of criteria that we're looking for but that it's ongoing, and it is in the moment, and it helps us to adjust our instruction and our interactions with children. So one of the things that we can and should do is ask and answer questions and to the extent possible across languages, because, as Head Start explicitly says, it's our responsibility to support the children's home-language development as well as their English development. This means perhaps that we need to bring in another teacher who uses that child's home language. This might mean bringing in a family member. This might mean bringing in a community member.

If none of those options is available, this might mean using some type of on-the-spot translation app such as Google Translate, which is not perfect and is not something I'm officially endorsing but is an example of an imperfect solution to some of these challenges. Another is to strategically partner children so if you're

lucky enough to have two or more children in the class that use the same home language, to have them intentionally work together, because then, especially if you don't use or understand that home language, they can support each other in their work.

Third, of course, is to be able to use bilingual materials. When we think about the classroom environment, something that should always be present is bilingual labels or multilingual labels. Many of you are in areas where you have children who represent a variety of languages, and again, through simple translation technology, through interaction with parents, we have the opportunity to create labels that are representative of all the languages from those families.

And of course, the last thing is involving family members, and we're going to spend a little bit more time after this delving deeper into what and how to do this, but being able to constantly work with them is important, right? So, parents can record their children at home speaking. Parents can record themselves at home reading books, telling stories, singing songs. Parents can take video of their children at home. Parents can take video of themselves at home.

Parents and family members can come into school to work with the children when possible, but all of these represent different opportunities to involve family members, and keeping in mind that it's not always possible for them to be physically present so, for us, thinking about ways for them to participate without having to be at school itself.

Christine: Mm-hmm. And, you know, and speaking about this, as informal assessment, right, these are really more informal ways of going about the process of assessment and the process of learning more about a child, because your questions may be about their language ability, but your questions about that child might have nothing to do with their language and be, you know, about any of the developmental domains, but if you can't communicate effectively, then you would want to use some of these informal strategies in order to gather that information that you need. I'm going to talk a little bit about, you know, what we call formal bilingual assessment, which really means assessment tools. Does it exist is the first question. It does but not really.

What does that mean? So the main two issues, like we mentioned before when I was talking about the types of assessment and the different, you know, reasons that you would use them, one is that, generally, for a bilingual or a dual-language-learning child, the formal assessment tools actually measure languages separately, and so it's not like there's really one excellent tool that gives you the entire picture.

I do have to mention that, you know, actually, there are two now out there, but those are not the only ones that people are using, and really, those are only -- the ones that I know of are only for Spanish-English bilingual children, so we clearly have very far to go. But the other issue with this is that most of the norm samples, so the samples of children that these assessments are tested on first in order to figure out, you know, how this 3-year-old compares to that 3-year-old across the country, are not actually bilingual children. Most of the norm samples, those sample groups from assessments, let's say, you know, often, like the PPVT, if the PPVT is in English, which is a test of receptive vocabulary -- Then there's a Spanish version. I think it's the TZPP, but that Spanish version is normed on Spanish monolingual children, and so that's not really the same as a bilingual child.

That's just comparing bilingual children to other monolingual children, and so there are -- So the PLS-5 actually -- The Spanish version of the PLS-5 is actually normed on Spanish-English bilingual, which is excellent and a step in the right direction for measurement of bilingual Spanish-English children. The other one I know of are the one-word picture vocabulary tests. There's an expressive one-word picture vocabulary test and a receptive one-word picture vocabulary test.

Ryan: Which is different from Peabody.

Christine: Right. Yes. That is the only other measure that I have seen that I know of that actually is a



bilingual measure. It doesn't say it's an English version. It doesn't say it's a Spanish version. It says it is a bilingual version because it was normed on a sample of bilingual children, and this is actually one that Head Start could, you know, certainly adopt. I believe it starts at age 2, and you can use it through adulthood, through the life span.

Ryan: And when she says it's bilingual, what she means is, especially in the expressive components, children are allowed and encouraged to respond in any language and can receive credit for the responses in any language.

Christine: Exactly. And so, you know, ideally, when we think about the research around bilingualism and how it is shifting significantly to be, you know, not looking at children who only know or not looking at one of their languages and thinking, "Oh, man, this language is pretty low," and then looking at their other language and saying, "Oh, man, this language is pretty low, too," but really having that entire view of the child and realizing that their vocabulary is just as large if not possibly larger than a monolingual child, and so, for me, from the assessment and the psychometric standpoint, what we need more of is actual bilingual assessments rather than having to use separate ones and, you know, using what we can from those scores.

I'm sort of seeing the future of, you know, early childhood, at least, language assessment in moving this way, and I think that can only help our children. So I'm thinking about, you know, this concept of, like, using research and what we want to move from the research into practice. Bilingual children, dual-language learners draw on all of their resources in all languages in their learning every moment of the day, and as professionals who support families and young children, we have to be aware of the ways that we are supporting these children and the implications of the limitations of the ways that we assess children in order to identify their skills and abilities and their strengths and their needs, right, so we obviously need to understand what we're doing in the classroom to support and learn about them, but we also, and, you know, this is especially for people who are supervisors, managers, you know, people in administration who may be making decisions about assessment.

We have to be really clear of the implications of the limitations of those assessment tools that we might be using. So, you know, just like I said before, research on bilingualism has really shifted our understanding of, you know, bi- and multilingualism, of multiliteracy, multiculturalism as strengths that we should support and celebrate, not deficits to overcome, and so now our commitment as professionals has to be to carry forward this understanding and infuse it in our work with all families.

And so if the formal evaluation of the direct assessment tools that your program is using aren't available in the many languages of the children in your program, you will need to rely on more of the informal methods of ongoing assessments, which I, you know, discussed before, to, you know, drawing upon information from the families, really, really using them as partners, drawing upon the children's interactions with peers and, of course, using bilingual materials.

Ryan: Let's push on here. All right. So, for early-learning settings, there should be discussion with parents and family members about the child's language use, the family's language use, what's typical and expected for dual-language-learning children, as well as how the teachers are going to be supporting the child's development and abilities for both their language development, as well as their development in all other areas. So some questions to consider. Is there support for learning in multiple languages in the classroom? Will children be supported in learning both languages or at least the home language in school? These should all be questions that a childcare program should have intentional answers to and should share with families explicitly.

Christine: And so a lot of Ryan and my work with programs, especially early-learning settings, has been helping them develop explicit language policies so that programs from the administrative level down to the practitioner level can think about some of these things. Think about the questions that you want to ask families, you know, some of those questions that Ryan asked. Programs should be talking about this. You should be asking. This should be standard, you know, with any new child that comes in. Obviously, thinking about how you use language in the classroom is more about reflection on your practice but also really

understanding how it is that, if a child walks in tomorrow with a home language that you know nothing about, what are your strategies, and what is your plan to support that child in the classroom and also support, you know, the child at home and your communication with the family?

And then, you know, also realizing that not all of you are in early care and education settings. For folks who are more within the home visiting or, you know, more therapeutic realms that support more directly the parent or the family unit and a little more indirectly support the child, it's really important that we as professionals know what is typical and what is expected of dual-language-learning children and what that interaction with family looks like so that you can support a family's interaction with their children. So, you know, maybe you don't know as much about bilingual language development as, you know, a toddler teacher in a childcare center.

But we aim to have everyone working with families and children to understand it to the degree of knowing what is typical and expected and being able to share that. And if you're working really with, you know, let's say, a mom in a home-visiting setting and enhancing her, you know, relationship and her interactions with her baby, then your understanding of bilingualism for a bilingual family will make you an even more effective professional in your work with them.

So now we're going to come to the piece about talking -- talking really about how we communicate with families, you know, assessment scores since this webinar has been really about issues of assessment. So just like we as professionals need to decide how to assess children's language and developmental abilities, we also must be sensitive and effective communicators of this information. And so a couple of things, you know, that we suggest, first, it is important always to maintain a strength-based understanding. It is helpful and important for you as the teacher, for you, you know, as the professional to know a child's strengths, as well as his needs for extra support.

Ryan: And to always focus first on those strengths, to be conscious, to ask yourself what that child brings with him or her to school.

Christine: Exactly. When we're really talking about sitting down with a family and having actual assessment scores in front of you and communicating what that means to them, it is really important to focus on the meaning of the score and not the number, right? So first, numbers might not mean anything to people, or numbers might really scare people if they have no real context for what it means. This is something that we really emphasize on, you know, to be sort of administrative management level listening today.

This is also really why it's so important to have whoever it is, whether it's the teacher or a curriculum specialist or a disability specialist, whoever the professional is who is communicating and having this conversation with the family, they really need to understand the assessment and what the score means because, if they don't really understand it, then we can't really expect them to do an excellent job at describing, you know, what this means for the child to the family.

It's also really important always to place this in the context of the whole child, so, you know, I've seen -- I've seen people sit down and say, "Okay. These two -- We gave these two assessments, and here are the scores, and this is what it is." We always need to think about, you know, this is just one piece of the child. It's not the entire child. Another important thing to consider is actually a philosophy or, you know, a sort of framework to have that's from, obviously, Brazelton's Touchpoints, which I love, but you have to know that the parent -- really understand and feel that the parent is the expert of the child.

Try to make it a two-way conversation, not a one-way, "This is what your child is, and this is how, you know, this is what his development looks like." You want to make it a conversation because of all the other pieces of information that we can get from the family. You should be ready to address any questions or concerns about the child honestly, and obviously, you know, Head Start being a really comprehensive program, you should always have information for follow-up or referral ready to give the parents right then. It's really important for them to feel prepared, especially if you're talking about a potential concern.

Ryan: And that said, there are some resources that are suggested. We definitely have some of our own, but we know that Head Start is very proud of its ECLKC site, which is extremely comprehensive, informative, and helpful. So here on the resource slide, you have a variety of ECLKC, which, of course, is through Head Start's website. If you are interested in some non-Head Start resources, you can always shoot us an e-mail, and we're happy to provide them. Actually, in the middle there, you can see Colorín Colorado, the third bullet down, so please, if you have not yet waded through these websites, they are chock-full of outstanding information.

And we do have a couple of questions. I'm not sure if it was our responsibility or not, but we want to make sure that you definitely take some time to complete the evaluation for this webinar. There is a link right there to click, and I know that there has been a significant amount of chatter in reference to the two assessments that were bilingual that Christine mentioned, and so we do want to take a minute to address what those were again so that you all can get the names for those.

Christine: So the two that I referred to was the PLS, the Preschool Learning Scale. They have an English version, but their Spanish version is actually not a bilingual sample. And the other one, it's technically two. One is called the Expressive One-word Picture Vocabulary Test, and the other is the Receptive One-word Picture Vocabulary Test.

Ryan: And keep in mind, those are some formal assessments, but when you are in the classroom from a day-to-day, hour-to-hour, minute-to-minute basis, you want to make sure that you're providing children, dual-language learners, the opportunity to use all of their languages in the freest way possible and that you have somebody who can support you in understanding them and in supporting them in using their home language and English.

Christine: I don't know if it would be Judi or Sarah if there have been questions from the chat box that you've seen go by that you'd like to have us answer.

Sarah: Yes, so first of all, thank you so much, Ryan and Christine, for sharing a lot of this fantastic information with us. There have been a ton of questions, so I will maybe just pepper some your way, and we'll try to get through as many as we can in our remaining three minutes here. So, Elva asks, "Do you recommend that screening tools like DENVER II in Spanish still be used even though they're no longer being sold?"

Christine: I would say, if it's going to help your understanding of the child, yes. Without knowing any more context to that question, I think, you know, you always have to think about the purpose. And if it's going to help you, then yes.

Ryan: And if it's not being sold, I would ask, "Is there another current assessment that does the same thing?"

Christine: Right.

Ryan: And if there is, you would probably want to go with that if for no other reason, availability.

Sarah: Wonderful. Thank you. Vincent asks, "Is there an advantage in a child being exposed to more than one language if doing so may cause assessments to be problematic?"

Ryan: Yes, 100%, not a doubt. Children should be exposed to and provided authentic, meaningful opportunities to engage with as many languages as possible, especially when they are young. It's not their fault that assessments don't accurately reflect what they know and what they can do. That's our problem, unfortunately, and something that we as the adults need to take the responsibility for figuring out. But children boast a variety of benefits for being bi- and multilingual. And Head Start language, dual-language learners have a host of benefits for being exposed to and using several languages.

Sarah: Great. Another question, "How do you recommend people address children or families' uses of different vernacular dialects?"

Ryan: That's a great question. So first of all, embrace them and value them, because they are valid ways of communicating, and they actually operate according to sets of rules just as standard dialects do, and so they should be treated just as if they were another language so that they can be continued, that there are opportunities to meaningfully use them, as well as to also add standard English to the mix, because those children and families are still going to have to use that home dialect in their daily life and probably in their community. So to take that away from them would be a real disservice.

Sarah: Great, and one final question, perhaps, quickly here. Could you talk about the difference between using an assessment designed for research versus using an assessment designed for informing educators and educational practice?

Christine: Absolutely. So it really comes down, again, to the question of purpose. You want to know what the assessment was created for, what it's stated purpose is, and think about what you need from it. Right? So what your purpose of assessing the child is, what you want to learn. So, you know, often when I talk about the difference between, you know, criterion referenced assessment and norm-referenced assessment, the difference really is in how you're using the information. You use things like core or goals in order to track development on a much more sort of fine-tuned minute level.

That kind of information is useful to teachers in the classroom so that they can see where the child is, where they need to go next, and use that information to scaffold their teaching and really look at the child's learning over time. Other assessments, like a standardized assessment that sometimes are created for research, you need to make sure that your purpose is the same purpose as the actual assessment. So if you want to just, you know, pick up the PLS-5 and assess all the children in your classroom to get a sense of where your children are compared to an average 3-year-old, then absolutely that's an appropriate use. So, really, you know, if everyone takes not much away, I really want to emphasize the fact that you always have to be thinking about how you're using this information, and it needs to match the type of assessment that it is.

Ryan: And, moving forward -- Christine: Go ahead.

Ryan: I was just going to say, if people have more questions, you have our e-mails listed on this last slide, here. Christine and I love talking about all of this.

Christine: Yes.

Ryan: As she said at the top, we are married. We live together, and we go to sleep talking about this stuff. So, please, feel very free to e-mail us, ask us, and we'll engage in conversation with you.

Sarah: Wonderful. That's a great way to end. Thank you, Ryan and Christine, for joining us, and thank you all for attending our Front Porch Webinar. Please fill out our evaluation and be in touch with any questions. Have a good afternoon. Bye-bye.