

SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT OF YOUNG ENGLISH- LANGUAGE LEARNERS

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS – NAEYC

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Introduction

Our language embraces us long before we are defined by any other medium of identity. In our mother's womb we hear and feel the sounds, the rhythms, the cadences of our "mother tongue." We learn to associate contentment with certain qualities of voice and physical disequilibrium with others. Our home language is as viscerally tied to our beings as existence itself...It is no wonder that our first language becomes intimately connected to our identity.

– Lisa Delpit

Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children Birth through Age 8, a joint position statement of NAEYC and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003), explains what good assessment looks like for young children. One of the indicators of good assessment is that it is linguistically and culturally responsive, even for those children whose home language is a language other than English. All aspects of the full position statement are important and relevant for young English-language learners. Yet certain aspects of screening and assessment are unique to this special and growing population of young children. This document serves as a supplement to the full position statement. As requested by experts in the field,¹ its intent is to explicate and expand on issues

¹ NAEYC's Governing Board, responding to a request from a group of experts in the field, decided to develop this supplement with the assistance of a work group, liaisons, and NAEYC staff. The work group included Dick Clifford, Linda Espinosa, Cristina Gillanders, Virginia Gonzalez, Jane Henderson, Luis Hernandez, Graciela Italiano-Thomas, Sharon Lynn Kagan, Sam Meisels, Kellie Rolstad, Catherine Scott-Little, and Patton Tabors. Annie Rooney French served as the liaison to the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE). Sara Hanhan served as NAEYC Board Liaison. NAEYC staff included Heather Biggar and Marilou Hyson. After incorporating feedback from the field, the NAEYC Governing Board will review the final draft for approval. Endorsement will be sought from NAECS/SDE, which co-developed the 2003 joint position statement on early childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation.

specifically related to the screening and assessment of young English-language learners.² A number of factors make the need for this document especially urgent.

The number of young children in the United States whose home language is not English continues to rise in dramatic ways. Millions of these “young English-language learners,” speaking hundreds of languages, are enrolled in child care, Head Start, family child care, and other early care and education settings across the country. Within the public schools, over 2 million English-language learners are in pre-kindergarten through grade 3 classrooms (Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord, 2004). Every one of these children has the right to experience ongoing, effective assessment that supports their learning and development.

Observing and documenting the progress of young children—including those who are learning English as a second language—is central to the practice of early childhood professionals for several reasons. Through assessments, teachers are able to appreciate children’s unique qualities and talents, determine appropriate learning goals, and plan and implement effective curriculum (Hyson, 2003; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003). Screening and assessment procedures guide classroom decision making, such as what books to read, what activities and experiences to provide, and what instructional strategies to use. Effective assessments allow professionals to identify children who might benefit from special services. Further, they allow professionals to be accountable to and communicate with other adults about the children for whom they are responsible. Some assessment information, for example, is to be shared with families; other information is shared among classroom staff, psychologists, researchers, and policymakers (McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova, 2004).

² Although all young children may be considered “language learners,” we use the term “English-language learner” to describe young children whose home language is not English because it is the term used in research and in public policy to describe children learning English as a second language. Many of the issues discussed in this document are relevant for children learning a second language other than English. They are also relevant to trilingual or multilingual young children.

When children are not regularly and appropriately assessed, they bear the costs of that privation; they can fail to receive beneficial special services, as well as optimally tailored activities and experiences in the classroom. Young English-language learners have the right to be assessed for the same reasons and benefits as all children. Moreover, they have the right to be assessed with high-quality assessments and under assessment conditions responsive to the needs of young English-language learners. The assessments should be valid and reliable, free of bias, and developmentally appropriate. Instruments and procedures that would not be used with monolingual English-speaking young children (e.g., group-administered paper and pencil tests), should not be used with young English-language learners.

Assessments for all children, including young English-language learners, are used to guide decisions about instruction and services. Unfortunately, there are very few appropriate assessments to use with most of the nation's young English-language learners, and those that are available are not always used appropriately. For the vast majority of the hundreds of languages represented, there simply are no assessments. For a few languages, such as Spanish, assessments exist, but they are not appropriate for a multitude of reasons. For example, they do not meet the technical standards of reliability and validity required of assessments, they do not match the child's language and dialect, or they contain cultural referents with which the child would be unfamiliar. Moreover, even when high-quality assessments exist, programs rarely have qualified bilingual staff to assess children in each language represented.

When assessments are linguistically and culturally inappropriate, psychometrically weak, or administered in incorrect ways or by the wrong people, they lead to invalid results. When there are no results or invalid results, staff and other decision makers do not have the opportunity to make the best decisions for children. Assessments for young English-language learners can

fail to accurately identify children's abilities, leading to poor results and bad decisions for children in several ways. First, teachers may be unable to make the best decisions about how and what to teach, because they are unable to gain a full and accurate picture of children's interests, abilities, and learning needs. Second, assessments sometimes underidentify children who actually have specific disabilities or other special needs, resulting in a failure to provide needed services. Third, they sometimes overidentify—that is, misdiagnose—language delays and other learning and developmental disabilities, resulting in services the child does not need and missed opportunities from which the child could benefit (Gutierrez-Clellen & Kreiter, 2003; NAEYC, 1995).

For young English-language learners as for all children, there are often enduring negative social consequences when a child is mislabeled. To subject a child to those consequences and the stigma associated with negative labels is particularly egregious when the label is wrongly applied, as happens when poor assessment practices are employed. Coping with the stigma of negative (mis)labels is an added stressor on vulnerable children and families that are already coping with multiple challenges. For this and other reasons, it is critical that the early childhood field improves its ability to screen, assess, and properly and effectively use the results of assessments with young English-language learners.

Acknowledging the challenges

NAEYC recognizes the profound challenges programs face in selecting and administering assessments appropriate to each English-language learner in their charge: Most teachers are not trained in conducting assessments with children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, they lack knowledge about psychometrics, and they often do

not speak the language(s) their children speak at home (Espinosa, in press). Furthermore, there are not many appropriate assessment instruments widely available for children from diverse backgrounds. These conditions will make it difficult for many early childhood professionals to implement the recommendations that follow. Nonetheless, it is important that anyone working with or on behalf of young English-language learners know what practices are appropriate and beneficial. The recommendations represent the ideal toward which early childhood educators, assessment specialists, administrators, and policymakers should move in the screening and assessment of young English-language learners.

Overview of Recommendations

Using research and professional consensus, this document presents a series of recommendations, summarized briefly herein, about the screening and assessment of young English-language learners. As with assessment of all young children, being clear about the purposes of assessment is key: Results should be used primarily to guide and monitor learning and to identify disabilities and other special needs. Results should also be used to inform the evaluation of programs—but only when the assessment procedures and instruments meet appropriate conditions. And as for all young children, appropriate assessments for young English-language learners should be ongoing, based on multiple methods and sources, age appropriate, and rarely standardized. In addition, however, they should be linguistically and culturally appropriate for the child's history and language proficiency. Translation instruments should be carefully reviewed before being approved.

Who should assess young English-language learners? Most often, assessors are the children's teachers, but paraprofessionals and consultants also play an important role. Assessors

should be bilingual and culturally aware, and they should know the child. They also should be knowledgeable about second-language acquisition about assessing young English-language learners. The role of family is critical in these assessments; family members are invaluable for the information they provide about their young English-language learning children. However, family members should not conduct formal assessments, interpret during formal assessments, or draw assessment conclusions.

There are many steps between the field's current ability to assess young English-language learners and the ideal toward which the field is moving. Scholars should continue their work to expand research and theory about second-language acquisition and the development of young English-language learners. More and better assessments are urgently needed. And early childhood professionals need opportunities for professional development in the area of assessing young English-language learners.

In the next sections of this document, recommendations will be discussed in each of the following six areas: (1) appropriate uses of screenings and assessments, (2) characteristics of appropriate assessments, (3) linguistic and cultural appropriateness, (4) characteristics of assessors, (5) the role of family, and (6) needs in the field. Table 1 (pp. 8 – 9) summarizes these recommendations.

Table 1

NAEYC Recommendations on screening and assessment of young English-language learners.

1. APPROPRIATE USES OF SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT
1a. Young English-language learners should be regularly screened, screening tools should be linguistically and culturally appropriate, and screenings should be followed up in appropriate ways.
1b. Young English-language learners should be assessed in order to monitor and guide learning in language development and other areas, and to identify disabilities.
1c. Young English-language learners should be included in program evaluation assessment procedures, but the assessment procedures and instruments must be appropriate.
2. CHARACTERISTICS OF APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENTS FOR YOUNG ENGLISH-LANGUAGE LEARNERS
2a. Assessments for young English-language learners are ongoing.
2b. Assessments for young English-language learners are based on multiple methods and measures.
2c. Assessments for young English-language learners involve multiple people.
2d. Assessments for young English-language learners are age appropriate.
2e. Assessments for young English-language learners are rarely standardized.
3. LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL APPROPRIATENESS
3a. All screenings and assessments used with young English-language learners must be linguistically appropriate.
3b. All assessments used with young English-language learners must be culturally appropriate.
3c. Translations of English-language instruments should be free of linguistic and cultural bias before being used with young English-language learners.

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSORS
<p>4a. Assessors most often are teachers, but paraprofessionals, assessment assistants, and specialized consultants also play an important role.</p> <p>4b. Assessors should be bilingual and culturally aware.</p> <p>4c. Assessors should know the child.</p> <p>4d. Assessors should be knowledgeable about second-language acquisition.</p> <p>4e. Assessors should be trained in and knowledgeable about assessing young English-language learners.</p>
5. THE ROLE OF FAMILY IN THE ASSESSMENT OF YOUNG ENGLISH-LANGUAGE LEARNERS
<p>5a. Family members are essential sources of information in conducting and interpreting assessments.</p> <p>5b. Programs refrain from using family members to conduct formal assessments, interpret during formal assessments, or draw assessment conclusions.</p>
6. NEEDS IN THE FIELD
<p>6a. Scholars should continue their work to expand research and theory about second-language acquisition and the development of young English-language learners.</p> <p>6b. More and better assessments are urgently needed.</p> <p>6c. Policymakers, institutions of higher education, and programs should continue to diversify the early childhood workforce, with a focus on increasing the number of bilingual early childhood professionals.</p> <p>6d. Early childhood professionals need opportunities for professional development in the assessment of young English-language learners.</p>

Recommendations

1. APPROPRIATE USES OF SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

Before considering the characteristics of appropriate assessments for young English-language learners, or who should assess them, it is important to understand how assessments with this group of children should be used. Consistent with the full position statement (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003), young children of all language abilities benefit from screening and assessment practices that are implemented in appropriate ways to monitor and guide learning, to identify areas of concern, and so forth. This section specifies appropriate uses of screening and assessment tools for young English-language learners.

1a. Young English-language learners should be regularly screened, screening tools should be linguistically and culturally appropriate, and screenings should be followed up in appropriate ways.

For all children, screening usually entails a brief, standardized procedure that can quickly determine whether a child may have a problem in some area that would require further assessment and possibly special services to address the problem (McAfee et al., 2004; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003). As with all children, young English-language learners should receive regular screenings. Screenings should be used with two ends in mind: (a) to detect a possible problem in the area of language development, and (b) to detect a possible problem in other areas, including health and physical development, social and emotional development, and cognitive development.

What should differentiate screening of young English-language learners from the screening of monolingual English-speaking children are the tools used and the patterns of follow-up after the screenings. Screenings should use linguistically and culturally appropriate tools that meet appropriate technical standards. As with other assessment procedures, about which recommendations are outlined in later sections of this document, screenings may occur in both of the child's languages, and screeners should accept a child's use of code-switching (i.e., using words and grammar rules from both languages).

As it is for all children, follow-up after screening is critical for English-language learners. If a potential problem is detected, further in-depth assessment with a specialist or team of specialists should be scheduled to determine whether a problem exists and, if so, how best to address it (McAfee et al., 2004). Because young English-language learners show variable paths to language development and because there is limited research regarding what levels of language proficiency should be expected (Gutiérrez-Clellan & Kreiter, 2003), program staff may want to create an individualized plan for each child, noting concerns and steps to take after screening to ensure appropriate follow-up. Appropriate follow-up to screenings for dual-language learners will require collaborating with professionals who have expertise in both the specific area of diagnostic assessment indicated and in communicating with children and families in the child's home language. Such a combination of expertise is often difficult to find.

1b. Young English-language learners should be assessed in order to monitor and guide learning in language development and other areas, and to identify disabilities.

As with all young children, assessment of young English-language learners should be used primarily as a tool to understand and improve a child's learning, as well as in response to

concerns raised by screenings. Specifically, assessment of young English-language learners should be used: (a) to determine language proficiency and ongoing language development in both the child’s home language and English, as appropriate; (b) to monitor development and learning in all domains—including children’s content knowledge, skills and capabilities; (c) to guide instruction and the provision of learning opportunities in all areas; and (d) to identify children with developmental disabilities or delays, emotional impairments, physical disabilities, and other conditions that indicate special services.

The results of assessments should guide teachers in planning appropriate and effective learning opportunities for bilingual children, as well as in seeking help from language experts when necessary, and referring children for special services when necessary.

1c. Young English-language learners should be included in program evaluation assessment procedures, but the assessment procedures and instruments must be appropriate.

The use of carefully designed evaluations that hold a program accountable for producing positive results can benefit all children, including young English-language learners. However, program-level evaluations often are attached to high stakes, such as decisions about funding for the program. Therefore, when child-level assessments are used as part of program evaluations, they are subject to particularly rigorous standards for their design, instrumentation, and analysis (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Clifford, 2003). The use of child assessment results for program evaluation and accountability purposes has become more prevalent in recent years—in Head Start and state pre-K programs, for example. It is noteworthy and of concern, therefore, that there are very few assessments developed for young English-language learners that meet the rigorous standards necessary for use as part of program evaluations.

Assessments designed to be used as part of program evaluation procedures may be used with young English-language learners if they: (1) reflect the indicators of effectiveness required of such assessments for all children (see NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003); (2) are linguistically and culturally appropriate, including being conducted (a) in the child's home language and dialect, if that is the language in which the child can best show what he or she knows and can do, (b) by a well-trained professional fluent in the child's home language and knowledgeable about the child's home culture, and (c) in a manner that allows code-switching; (3) meet the highest level of technical standards, including reliability and validity; and (4) are normed on similar populations of young English-language learners and do not compare the scores of young English-language learners to the scores of monolingual English-speaking children.

Typically, because program evaluation involves gathering information from many children, assessment procedures used as part of program evaluations and large-scale accountability systems are based on formal, norm-referenced assessments. At this time, few acceptable norm-referenced assessments are available for young English-language learners. Policymakers should, with the help of practitioners, proactively seek ways to include results from assessments other than norm-referenced instruments for these young children in their accountability systems. If appropriate formal or informal assessments are not available for children who are not proficient in English, these children should not be included in program-evaluation procedures that rely on English-language assessments. However, their participation should be a goal for program administrators and policymakers as more appropriate and valid assessment tools are developed.

The purpose of each assessment must be clear—to assessors, program administrators, and policymakers or other decision-makers who see the results. Each person who uses the results

must know for what purpose the assessment was designed, in order to avoid misusing the results (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Clifford, 2003). Although this tenet holds true for assessment of all children, it is especially important to emphasize for English-language learners because of the paucity of assessments that are both technically sound and linguistically and culturally appropriate. As emphasized earlier, assessments, and the results of those assessments, should be used only for the purpose for which they were designed.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENTS FOR YOUNG ENGLISH-LANGUAGE LEARNERS

With these recommendations about the purposes of assessment for young English-language learners in mind, the next set of recommendations focuses on what should be the specific characteristics of those assessments. The characteristics and indicators of effectiveness of assessments used with young English-language learners are the same in every respect as those used with other young children (see NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003). In other words, what makes screenings and assessments appropriate for all children makes them appropriate for young English-language learners. For example, for all young children, assessment practices are guided by ethical principles, instruments are used for their intended purposes, the assessments are appropriate for the ages of the children being assessed, what is assessed is developmentally and educationally appropriate, and so forth. Within these guidelines, there are certain indicators of effectiveness, highlighted in this section, that are especially important when considering the assessment of young English-language learners.

2a. Assessments for young English-language learners are ongoing.

Learning a new language takes time. There is a misconception among some that young children acquire language more easily and quickly than adults, when, in fact (with the exception of pronunciation), this is not the case (Soto, 1991). Children can—but will not necessarily—achieve social language proficiency in a second language within two to three years, and academic proficiency in four or more years (NAEYC, 1995). In addition, the path to second-language acquisition is variable and unpredictable. Complex interactions between children’s social, linguistic and cognitive domains determine what path language development might take, and individual differences among children lead to great variability in those paths (Genishi, 1989; Wong Fillmore, 1985).

Assessments used to evaluate young English-language learners, and to monitor and guide their development in language and other domains, should be ongoing (Duarte & Gutierrez, 2004; Santos, 2004; Trister Dodge, Heroman, Charles, & Maiorca, 2004). Ongoing assessment is important for all young children, whatever their language environment. However, because of the long-term nature of second-language development, and because paths to proficiency are uneven and unpredictable, a snapshot approach to assessment—in any domain—is particularly ineffective for young English-language learners. A more accurate picture of a child’s progress will reveal itself gradually, across time, as a child experiences a variety of social interactions and opportunities for growth in all domains. For the most valid results, these assessments should occur in everyday, naturalistic settings. “Authentic” assessments, which are monitored over time, are recommended as the primary tool for monitoring progress. Examples include portfolios, teacher ratings, observations, and interviews—valuable for all children, they are especially informative in the assessment of young English-language learners.

2b. Assessments for young English-language learners are based on multiple methods and measures.

There is no one assessment, measure, or method of collecting information about a child that will provide all the information educators and others want to know. This is especially true for young English-language learners, and assessments of any aspect of their development and learning should always include several methods and measures (Gonzales, Bauerle, & Felix-Holt, 1996). Purely verbal procedures tend to underestimate children's cognitive ability (Chapman, 1991; Gonzalez, 1994); therefore, assessments should include both verbal and non-verbal procedures.

Also, assessments should occur across all the diverse aspects of the curriculum, and should involve a range of activities. Allowing children to express themselves across the curriculum in areas as diverse as art, music, and block building gives them opportunities to display their intellect and knowledge in ways that exceed the boundaries of language (NAEYC, 1995). Again, these recommendations apply to good assessment practices for *all* young children, but the needs and circumstances of young English-language learners make these recommendations especially important for this population. Measures might include parent and teacher ratings, as well as child work samples or portfolios. Observations of the child across different settings, such as in the classroom, on the playground, and during interactions with peers, familiar adults, and strangers, should be central to all assessments of young English-language learners. Again, these methods should be systematic, valid and reliable for the purposes for which they are intended.

2c. Assessments for young English-language learners involve multiple people.

Assessments usually involve some interpretation and judgment on the part of the assessor. Because of this subjectivity, there is always room for error and bias in the assessment process (Espinosa, in press). With assessments of young English-language learners, assessors' backgrounds—their identity, cultural stereotypes, life experiences within linguistic and cultural milieus, conceptualizations of constructs measured, and so forth—can influence assessment decisions (Gonzalez, Bauerle, & Felix-Holt, 1996). Furthermore, because there are few appropriate instruments for young English-language learners, it is especially important to “triangulate” information, or verify it by getting information from a number of people. Observations or data about a child can more safely be assumed to be accurate if they are verified by, say, three people (such as a teacher, a parent, and a reading specialist), rather than by only one person.

For these reasons, assessments of young English-language learners should always be based on information from multiple sources (Gonzalez et al., 1996; Lewis, 1991; Pérez, 2004). More than one professional (teacher, paraprofessional, consultant, etc.) should be involved in assessment decisions about the child's progress. In addition, at least one of the informants providing input on the child's progress should be a family member. (As discussed further in Section 5, however, family members should not directly formally assess their child, nor should they act as interpreters during an assessment; but they should be relied upon substantially to provide information about the child's history and current behaviors and progress in the home setting.)

2d. Assessments for young English-language learners are age appropriate.

Age (for example, infancy vs. preschool age) is an important consideration in selecting assessment tools and procedures for all young children (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003). It is necessary to highlight the importance of this factor in selecting instruments and procedures for young English-language learners because there are few assessments—and in some cases, no assessments—available for young English-language learners that are psychometrically, linguistically, and culturally appropriate, *as well as* age appropriate. Assessors may, therefore, be tempted to use an assessment because it is linguistically and culturally appropriate for the child, even though it is designed for another age group. Assessors should not use an assessment for any group of English-language learners that is designed for children of ages different than the children being assessed. If appropriate verbal measures are not available, assessors should rely on nonverbal means of evaluating the child.

2e. Assessments for young English-language learners are rarely standardized.

Standardized assessments rely on previous experience and are often technically weak for the relevant population. There are times when using a standardized assessment is not only useful but also necessary, for example, when assessing for certain disabilities. Yet, as emphasized in the full position statement on curriculum, assessment and program evaluation (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003), the decision to use a standardized, norm-referenced assessment with any young child should be made cautiously. Assessors should apply extra caution when deciding to use a standardized assessment with young English-language learners for two reasons. First, standardized tests often contain a great deal of material for which comprehension depends on children's previous learning experiences and knowledge, rather than on their cognitive

functioning (Kozulin & Garb, 2001). Thus, true levels of cognitive ability tend to be underestimated for young English-language learners when using standardized tests (Gonzalez, 1994; Gonzalez, Brusca-Vega, & Yawkey, 1997). For example, a child recently emigrated to the U.S. from Armenia might have a very good grasp of mathematical concepts of measurement and size, but he might not demonstrate that knowledge during a standardized test because he does not fully understand what the assessor has asked him to do. Because standardized tests do not allow for much flexibility in how questions are asked, the assessor may not rephrase the instructions. Therefore, the child would not get “credit” for a concept that he actually does understand.

Second, there are concerns about the validity and norming of standardized assessments used with English-language learners (Abedi, 2002; Navarrette & Gustke, 1996; Zehler, Hopstock, Fleischman, & Greniuk, 1994). In many cases, there is simply no information about the validity of assessments used (Gutierrez-Clellan & Kreiter, 2003).

If assessors choose to use a standardized assessment to evaluate young English-language learners, the assessment must: (a) meet the highest psychometric or technical standards, showing clear evidence of validity and reliability; (b) be used only for the purpose for which the assessment was designed; and (c) be based on norms from similar populations of young English-language learners.

Instrument development and equivalence across versions. Ideally, standardized instruments used with populations of young English-language learners are developed through an iterative or concurrent process, in which items originate from both languages of the various versions being developed. Equivalence across versions of the instrument being developed must be established at several levels. First, they should have construct equivalence, or evidence that what the instrument measures for one child is the same as what it measures for another child (for

example, it measures academic knowledge for all children; it does not measure academic knowledge for monolingual English speakers and language proficiency for English-language learners). Second, they should have functional equivalence, meaning activities or behaviors measured have the same meaning in each cultural or linguistic group being evaluated. Third, they should have translation equivalence, meaning if instruments are translations, they are comparable in content. And fourth, they should have metric equivalence, meaning scores from each version of the instrument have comparable psychometric properties, such as reliability and validity (AERA et al., 1999).

The linguistic and cultural characteristics of each of the groups of children intended for the instrument should be reflected in the samples used throughout the processes of test design, validation, and norming (AERA et al., 1999). Norms should be based on the performance of other young English-language learners, rather than on the performance on monolingual children—including children monolingual in the child's home language (Mazzeo, Carlson, Voelkl, & Lutkus, 2000; Navarrett & Gustke, 1996; Zehler et al., 1994). Moreover, norms should be based on similar populations of children. If, for example, a Spanish-language version of an assessment will be used with Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, and Spanish children, norms, reliability and validity should be established with members of each of these groups (AERA et al., 1999).

Until young English-language learners achieve language proficiency in the language in which they are being assessed, they should not be evaluated on the basis of criterion-referenced standards. If standardized assessment instruments are used, they should emphasize the individual child's progress over time, and results should be interpreted in light of a child's progress or growth, rather than on an absolute basis. Also, it may be appropriate to incorporate

accommodations to allow the child to show a true picture of her or his ability. Assessors may consider whether it is appropriate to, for example, allow greater wait time for specific items, rephrase directions and questions so the child can understand, and ask for explanations to clarify the child's thinking. When using standardized assessments, then, programs should plan for additional time in the assessment process to (a) assess language proficiency before selecting measures to assess knowledge and abilities; (b) obtain background information about the child; and (c) conduct additional procedures that might be necessary (Páez, 2004).

3. LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL APPROPRIATENESS

As emphasized in the preceding section, effective assessments for all young children, regardless of language and cultural history, should meet the requirements described in the full NAEYC & NAECS/SDE (2003) position statement. One of the indicators of effective assessments is that "Assessments are designed for and validated for use with children whose...cultures [and] home languages...are similar to those of the children with whom the assessments will be used" (p. 2). In other words, assessments should be linguistically and culturally responsive. The following section expands on that recommendation by describing the characteristics of linguistically and culturally responsive or appropriate assessments, and related issues.

3a. All screenings and assessments used with young English-language learners must be linguistically appropriate.

Language history and proficiency. All assessments are, to some degree, measures of language (AERA et al., 1999; Shepard, Kagan, & Wurtz, 1998), making it especially important

for assessors to be sensitive to the linguistic appropriateness of assessments for young English-language learners. Every screening and assessment tool used with young English-language learners should be appropriate to the child's language history and ability.

In order to select linguistically appropriate assessments for a given child, assessors should first determine the child's language history and proficiency. This pre-assessment planning should begin with gathering of information about the child's history and family's history with language. Assessors will want to know, for example, what language the family primarily speaks at home and in the community, what other languages are spoken in the home, the family's country of origin, the length of time the family has lived in the United States, the child's age at first exposure to English, and who in the family speaks English and how well (CLAS Early Childhood Research Institute, 2000; Santos & Reese, 1999). (See Section 5 for more detail.)

Also, for children relatively advanced in their language development, assessors need to determine the child's language dominance (the language in which the child is most proficient) and language preference (the language in which the child prefers to speak) (Páez, 2004)—keeping in mind that these are difficult to determine with very young children whose language development in both their first and second language is rapid, variable, and dependent on the home language environment. Assessment of language proficiency is especially important for young English-language learners, because they may seem to be speaking English with ease when actually they are not fully capable of understanding or expressing themselves in complex ways and still lack vocabulary skills, auditory memory, ability to follow sequenced directions, and other markers of proficiency (NAEYC, 1995).

Cautions about language proficiency assessments. Caution must be applied when selecting instruments to evaluate language proficiency, as instruments designed for other purposes are sometimes misused as language-proficiency assessments. Only those assessments designed to evaluate proficiency or development in the language domain should be used for this purpose. Assessments designed to assess content knowledge, progress in non-language domains (e.g., social and emotional skills), or general developmental progress should not be used to determine language proficiency or skills.

In addition, there are concerns about the validity of English proficiency tests. For example, there is little evidence that content and construct validity of English proficiency tests align sufficiently with the standards put forth by experts in the field, such as Teachers of English as a Second Language (Bailey & Butler, 2003). Also, the correlations between English proficiency tests and other valid measures of English proficiency (e.g., teachers' ratings) are weak (Abedi, 2004).

Furthermore, many of the existing assessments are not consistent in how they measure various aspects of language, and they measure only a limited set of language components. For example, one assessment evaluating oral language proficiency might measure ability to follow instructions (a component of basic interpersonal communication skills), whereas another might measure knowledge of synonyms and antonyms (a cognitive-academic language proficiency). Or, an assessment might measure ability to repeat specific phonemes embedded in words or phrases (a component of communication skills), whereas another might measure ability to verbally complete a logical word relationship (a cognitive-academic proficiency). It is important not to assume that all assessments of language proficiency measure the same aspects of language

(Schrack, Fletcher, & Guajardo Alvarado, 1996). Assessors and decision-makers should review and select language proficiency assessments carefully.

Matching the method and purpose of assessment. After gathering information about the child's language history and language proficiency, the next step in selecting a linguistically appropriate assessment is to consider the purpose of the assessment. There are three avenues that might be appropriate, depending on the purpose of the assessment, and the child's level of proficiency. The first avenue is to assess only in the child's home language and dialect. The second avenue is to assess in a language in which the child is proficient, even if it is not the child's home language. The third avenue is to assess the child in both English and the child's home language. For some purposes, such as to evaluate a child's knowledge of content in a specific area (e.g., mathematics), it may be appropriate to assess in the home language and dialect only. For other purposes, such as to evaluate language development, it is appropriate to assess in an ongoing fashion in both English and the child's home language.

The dual-language approach. Whenever possible, young English-language learners should be assessed in both English and the child's home language. There are several reasons for a dual-language approach. First, assessment evidence for young children is used mainly to understand and improve children's learning, and language abilities are intimately connected to learning across domains. Language abilities change over time and children with emerging bilingual skills show varying rates of language acquisition—there is no one path to learning a new language (Wong Fillmore, 1985). Any individual child's development of concepts, content knowledge, language, and literacy development will be idiosyncratic (as is the case with all children), requiring assessment procedures tailored to the child, and following the child's progress in both English and the child's home language.

Second, children construct knowledge and gain abilities in relation to the cognitive, social, cultural, and linguistic characteristics of the content being learned; children do better when the language of the assessment matches the language of instruction (Abedi et al., 2004; Gonzalez et al., 1996). Children learn and receive instruction both at home and in the education setting, engendering strengths better revealed in assessments in either the home language or English—but not equally well revealed in both languages. For example, a grandfather might read to and discuss books in Vietnamese with his granddaughter on a nightly basis. This child might have better oral communication skills in Vietnamese than in English, a language that is new to her and relatively unpracticed. Yet this child might be learning about shapes in English in her pre-K classroom, so she will perform better when assessed in English on her knowledge of squares, triangles and circles.

Third, adults in one setting may not be good judges of children’s experiences with language in other settings; that is, teachers often are not able to accurately estimate exposure to and experiences with a language at home, and parents often are not able to accurately estimate exposure to and experiences with languages at school (Gutiérrez-Clellen & Kreiter, 2003). It is best to evaluate them in both languages in order to accurately determine their knowledge and skills.

Code-switching. When learning a second language, children often go through a period of “code-switching” or “code-mixing,” which is using rules and words of both languages between sentences or within sentences, respectively (Chamberlin & Medinos-Landurand, 1991). (Even as adults, bilingual individuals often mix languages in social conversation with others of the same group.) This behavior is not unusual and is not necessarily a sign of deficiency in language development (Garcia, 1990). It demonstrates children’s efforts not only to practice multiple

languages, but also to successfully navigate multiple cultural markers, norms, and values in order to communicate effectively (Celious & Oyserman, 2001). Having an inflexible approach to a child's correct grammar and vocabulary use, especially when assessing for development in domains other than language development, might actually interfere with getting accurate information about the child's knowledge, abilities, or both. Except when evaluating language proficiency for a specific language, assessors should accept answers that involve code-switching and code-mixing as an appropriate means of determining what children know and can do.

3b. All assessments used with young English-language learners must be culturally appropriate.

As defined in the full NAEYC and NAECS/SDE (2003) position statement, the term “culture” includes ethnicity, racial identity, economic class, family structure, language, and religious and political beliefs. Each of these aspects of a child's identity, heritage, and experience profoundly influence development and the child's relationship with the world. The issue of culture is relevant not only to English-language learners, but also to speakers of English who have a unique cultural heritage, and may have dialects, that differ from those of the prevailing U.S. culture. This group could include Appalachian children, Australian, English, or South African children, second-generation speakers of English who have a strong accent from their parents' home language, and so forth.

Every child deserves a learning and assessment environment that is welcoming and responsive to her or his culture (NAEYC, 1995). Teachers should create environments that respect diversity of language and culture and incorporate elements of children's home culture in the physical environment and in the activities of the class. All children should be made to feel at

ease sharing and explaining traditions and values of their family and community. A classroom climate that shows that teachers and children welcome and value children's cultures and home languages will reduce children's sense of intimidation and inhibition, and will encourage their attempts to communicate (NAEYC, 1995). This type of environment is important in assessing young English-language learners because it allows teachers greater opportunities to observe the child's abilities. It also reduces the chances that a teacher will prematurely or incorrectly conclude that the child's language errors demonstrate inability or problematic delay. Furthermore, assessments that occur in environments that allow children to exhibit all of their skills and capabilities are likely to lead to accurate information.

Assessors must be aware of how cultural values will affect young children's behavior and performance on assessments (Soto, 1991). Assessors should make a point of knowing about the child's culture generally, such as knowing important holidays, how customs of that culture differ from prevailing U.S. customs, major figures of that culture, and so forth. Yet this knowledge of the general culture is not enough; assessors should find out as much as possible about the child's community—for example, adaptations the community has made so as to continue traditions from the country of origin, and specific cultural concerns with which the community might be dealing. This and other information will allow assessors to individualize the assessment to make sure it is culturally appropriate—that is, compatible with the child's interaction and communication style (Bruns & Corso, 2001; Santos & Reese, 1999).

Culturally shaped expectations and values affect young children's ideas about interactive behaviors, such as when they are supposed to talk, to whom they should talk, and what kind of language to use in various contexts (Espinosa, in press). These factors will affect performance during assessments. For example, children from some cultures may be reluctant to use elaborate

language to adults, having been taught it is only appropriate to answer specific questions or to use formulaic responses. These children, as appropriate to their culture, might shrug or give only a short phrase in response to a question, although they are capable of providing a more sophisticated answer (AERA, APA & NCME, 1999). An assessor familiar with the cultural norms will understand this phenomenon and interpret it accordingly.

In addition to knowing about culturally specific behavior patterns, assessors well acquainted with the child's culture and community should carefully preview each assessment instrument for cultural appropriateness. This type of review should note ways that language might be used inappropriately (for example, a word or phrase can have different meanings in different communities), as well as inappropriate referents. An inappropriate referent might be an object with which a child would not be familiar because it is unique to the prevailing U.S. culture, such as a picture of Raggedy Ann (Santos, 2004). Or it may be something that has a different meaning to a child than may have been intended. For example, in some cultures bears are represented in a benign or even friendly way (for example, teddy bears); but in the Navajo culture, bears usually represent something wicked (Nissani, 1993). This difference in connotation can result in confusion, frustration, and misunderstood responses on the part of the child. Assessments should be free of such culturally inappropriate components.

If the assessor is not familiar with the child's culture, a cultural guide (a qualified representative of the child's cultural and linguistic group who can serve as a broker or mediator) should assist in the assessment process, including the interpretation of results. The presence of a person who knows the child's culture will help ensure that assessment methods and measures are appropriate, and that the child is able to communicate in a language, dialect, and interaction style that is comfortable for the child. A cultural guide also should ensure that neither translation

discrepancies nor cultural conventions nor differences in childrearing practices lead to misinterpreted results (Santos, 2004).

Interpretations of assessment results must not be made without consideration of the child's language history and cultural background. Assessors must consider the role of a child's culture, home context, social history, and prior experiences and learning opportunities before drawing conclusions about a child's performance on assessment procedures, and before making decisions that will affect the child's education and receipt of services.

3c. Translations of English-language instruments should be free of linguistic and cultural bias before being used with young English-language learners.

Assessments used with English-language learners are often translations of assessments developed for monolingual English-speaking children. There is frequently an implicit assumption that the translated assessment is appropriate for the second population, simply because the language of the assessment is in the child's home language. This assumption might not be correct. Translated materials are likely to differ from the original version in both content and construct, and one should not assume a translation produces a version of the instrument that is equivalent to the original version in difficulty, content, and reliability and validity (AERA et al., 1999; Kopriva, 2000). Translations might use a dialect, colloquialisms, and unfamiliar referents that are inappropriate, in both linguistic and cultural components, for the child being assessed. Spanish-translated materials appropriate for a child from a Mexican American community, for example, may not be appropriate for a child from a Puerto Rican community.

Translated material should be carefully reviewed for cultural and linguistic appropriateness by a native speaker who is familiar with assessment constructs, and early

education professionals must be aware of issues related to the use of translated materials (Ohtake, Santos, & Fowler, 2000; Santos & Reese, 1999). Translation equivalence—evidence that the adapted instrument is comparable in content and difficulty—should be established before assessors use translated instruments (AERA et al., 1999). Methods of checking for appropriateness could include “back-translating” the translated version of the assessment from the home language back into English to determine whether the home-language and English-language versions are the same; however, back-translation alone is not sufficient. “On-the-spot” translations of standardized assessments should not be used (Páez, 2004).

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSORS

Even the most linguistically and culturally appropriate assessments, used for their intended purposes, may be ineffective if the adults who are implementing the assessments and interpreting their results lack relevant experience and preparation. This section explains who should be responsible for assessing young English-language learners, and what these adults should know and be able to do.

4a. Assessors most often are teachers, but paraprofessionals, assessment assistants, and specialized consultants also play an important role.

The term “assessor” denotes the person or team of people conducting and interpreting the results of assessments. Depending on the purpose of the assessment, a variety of individuals may take this role. Because the primary purpose of early childhood assessment is to help teachers make classroom-level decisions, however, most often these assessors will be—and should be--children’s teachers, who are assessing children continuously through everyday

observations analyses of children's work and other methods. However, paraprofessionals (e.g., teachers' aides), "assessment assistants" from the community, and specialized professional consultants also play an essential role in the assessment of young English-language learners. Programs should be proactive in establishing a pool of assessment assistants on whom they can call as need arises (Páez, 2004). Depending on the roles for which they are needed, this pool might include community leaders, business leaders, and members of the clergy who are from the child's cultural and language community (Bruns & Corso, 2001). Before collaboration, programs should determine potential assistants' personal history related to the target language and culture, as well as other qualifications, including written and oral language proficiency (Páez, 2004).

These assistants, who should be fluent in the child's home language (and English) and familiar with the child's community, may be excellent resources to serve as cultural guides, or cultural-linguistic mediators between home and school (Lynch & Hanson, 1998). They can facilitate communication and understanding between program staff and families, and can teach staff unfamiliar with a child's culture about appropriate ways to interact with family members and about community beliefs and values (Dennis & Giangreco, 1996; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). Depending on their qualifications and skills, they also can serve essential roles in translating materials and reviewing already translated materials, and in interpreting before, during, and after assessments.

Finally, assessors with specialized professional training also play a part in assessment of young English-language learners—for example, when screening results indicate the need for in-depth diagnostic assessment, or when certain assessments are externally administered as part of an accountability system. These individuals, too, require knowledge relevant to the assessment

of young English-language learners, and the ability to conduct assessments in the child's home language as needed. In some situations, community assessment assistants may serve as helpful partners in this effort.

Whatever their role, it is important that teachers, paraprofessionals, and consultants who assist in any way with assessments know the relevant laws and ethical issues, the purpose of each assessment, and the importance of using correct procedures to administer measures. They should not be solely responsible for administering assessments or interpreting results unless they have been specifically trained to do so.

4b. Assessors should be bilingual and culturally aware.

Ideally, all assessors should be not only fluent in the child's home language, but also familiar with the dialect spoken in the child's community. Those who assess young English-language learners must appreciate diversity and show respect for the dignity and uniqueness of people from all backgrounds. People who hold prejudices or negative stereotypes about groups of children based on their background should not assess young English-language learners.

Assessors should know the cultural traditions, values, and beliefs of the children they assess, and should be aware of generally preferred interaction styles for people from that culture. They should not only know about the child's culture generally, but also should know the child's current community—its goals, challenges, and unique circumstances—specifically.

4c. Assessors should know the child.

Children tend to perform better when they know and feel comfortable with the person assessing them (Gonzalez et al., 1996). Assessors should know about the child's history of

residences and language, current living situation, the family's goals and concerns about the child, and so forth. In addition, the assessor should be someone with whom the child is familiar and comfortable. She or he should spend time with and develop rapport with the child before the assessment.

4d. Assessors should be knowledgeable about second-language acquisition.

Teachers and other professionals assessing young English-language learners should know about the development of language proficiency, and specifically second-language acquisition, both sequential and simultaneous. Too often, children from diverse backgrounds are over-represented in special education programs, so it is important for assessors to be aware that language errors as a function of learning stage might incorrectly lead to diagnosis of a disorder or developmental disability (Espinosa, in press). For example, an untrained teacher might mistake low language assessment scores for a reading disability, when in fact the child is simply not proficient in English, the language of the assessment. Although it can be difficult in the beginning stages of second-language acquisition to separate mere learning errors from possible disability or delay, awareness of how the paths look similar will reduce the frequency of incorrect conclusions. Also, assessors should know which specialists—including English as a Second Language teachers, speech and language pathologists, and reading specialists—to consult for assistance.

4e. Assessors should be trained in and knowledgeable about assessing young English-language learners.

As emphasized in NAEYC's standards for early childhood professional preparation, well-prepared early childhood professionals understand the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment, and they practice responsible assessment (Hyson, 2003). The goals and benefits of assessment remain constant for all children, but issues of "responsible assessment" have specific application to young English-language learners. All those who are being prepared to work with young children should be trained in and knowledgeable about the assessment of young English-language learners. They should know about selecting appropriate assessments, soliciting information from family members, consulting with cultural guides, using translators, how to interpret results, and for what purposes which assessments may be used.

5. THE ROLE OF FAMILY IN THE ASSESSMENT OF YOUNG ENGLISH-LANGUAGE LEARNERS

For all children, it is important that family members be part of the assessment process; for English-language learners, communication with family members is critical. Teachers' and program directors' efforts to gather information and build positive relationships with families whose home language is not English are essential for many reasons, one of which is to enhance assessment procedures. Yet family members should not be exceptionally burdened or asked to take on special roles in assessment for which they are neither prepared nor responsible. Early childhood professionals are ultimately responsible for the assessment process, although they should seek critical information from parents, grandparents, and other caregivers in the home.

5a. Family members are essential sources of information in conducting and interpreting assessments.

Although assessors need to reach out to families of young English-language learners to gather information before selecting assessment tools, conducting assessments, and interpreting results, cross-cultural differences too often interfere. Providers' lack of experience with diverse families often disrupts the process of developing positive, respectful relationships between assessors and family members, resulting in lack of family input (McLean, 1997). Even if an assessor is generally familiar with a culture, there are significant within-culture differences and within-family differences about which assessors should become aware.

If program staff unwittingly offend families, families are likely not to be forthcoming with important information (Dennis & Giangreco, 1996). One of the first things assessors should determine is a family's preferred communication style. For example, assessors should determine whether a family prefers an informal, friendly relationship with program staff, as do many traditional Hispanic families (Gonzalez-Alvarez, 1998), or whether the family prefers a more formal, professional relationship with program staff, as do some traditional Asian families (Schwartz, 1995). Each family is unique, so although sensitivity to general cultural differences is an important foundation for good communication, assessors will need to learn about the characteristics and preferences that describe the particular family in question.

Once a comfortable pattern of communication between families and staff has been established, assessors will want to gather as much information as possible about the family's history and current situation, which could affect the child's performance, and should affect

interpretation of results. Assessors should keep in mind that many factors work together to influence family functioning, so looking at specific factors in isolation may be misleading.

Teachers and other assessors should know the family's country of origin, where the family currently lives, how long the family has lived in the U.S., and the primary language the family speaks at home and in the community. It is especially important to determine whether the family has any concerns about the child's language development. They also will want to find out, in a sensitive manner, the family's education, religious affiliation, and degree of acculturation. If possible, assessors should sensitively seek additional information as well, such as whether there are specific accomplishments the family is proud of, what the family believes are the most important things children should learn, and how the parents see their role (Santos & Reese, 1999). Assessors should determine families' concerns about stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Assessors should also, if possible, find out about families' experiences with educational, health, and other institutions. These concerns and experiences are likely to affect families' involvement and interactions with their child's educational program and teachers, as well as their willingness to share assessment-related information.

5b. Programs refrain from using family members to conduct formal assessments, interpret during formal assessments, or draw assessment conclusions.

Situations arise in which there seems to be no one other than a family member who speaks the child's language and dialect, and program staff might feel they have no option but to rely on family to assess the child, or at least to interpret during the assessment. There are some types of assessment practices in which it is appropriate to involve family members; for example, in completing observation charts used to record behaviors in the home, in completing parent-

rating scales or questionnaires, or in dynamic and family-centered assessments that involve observations of parent-child interactions. Yet family members are not trained in administering formal or standardized assessment instruments, and they also are less likely than professionals to be objective about the performance of their child. Family members should not conduct formal assessments with their child, nor should they serve as interpreters during formal assessments of their child. Regardless of whether formal or informal assessment procedures are being used, family members should not be responsible for interpreting assessment results or drawing conclusions from the assessments. Because of confidentiality issues and the sensitive nature of assessment results, it is also recommended that close friends of the child's family do not become involved in assessment procedures.

Program staff might find themselves in situations where the only person available who speaks both English and the child's home language is an older sibling (or another older child in the community). Children of any age might be linguistically and cognitively ill equipped to participate, even as interpreters, in assessment procedures; they also might be burdened emotionally by participating in an assessment of their younger sibling. Instead of relying on siblings or other older children in the community, every effort should be made to collaborate with a professional consultant or an assessment assistant who is familiar with the child's community, but not intimately involved with the child's family. If it is simply not feasible to collaborate with a professional consultant or cultural guide, decisions about involving older children should be made cautiously on a case-by-case basis.

6. NEEDS IN THE FIELD

The supports and resources available to those working with young English-language learners have not kept pace with the rapidly increasing needs in early childhood settings. Many adjustments and advances are needed, including more information about second-language acquisition in the early years, more and better assessments for the various groups of young English-language learners, greater diversity within the early childhood workforce, and enhanced opportunities for access to information and training on second-language acquisition and assessment of young English-language learners.

6a. Scholars should continue their work to expand research and theory about second-language acquisition and the development of young English-language learners.

Scholars and researchers must help the field move forward with further information about second language acquisition as it pertains to young children in general, and specifically as it relates to children from various language and cultural groups. Teachers, other program staff, psychologists, and other professionals and paraprofessionals who work with young English-language learners need practical information about second language acquisition. They need to know how it relates to cognitive, emotional, cultural, and social factors, and how to monitor it effectively. Continued efforts to develop expanded theoretical frameworks and empirical information in this area are encouraged.

6b. More and better assessments are urgently needed.

Assessors of young children have few, and sometimes no, appropriate assessments to choose from in assessing young English-language learners. Appropriate assessments—that is, assessments that are psychometrically, linguistically, culturally, and developmentally appropriate—are urgently needed in each of the hundreds of languages represented in early education settings in the U.S. Because, however, the resources are not available to develop assessments in the hundreds of languages spoken by young English-language learners in the U.S., priority should go to those languages spoken by the greatest number of young children. Developing assessments in Spanish is the highest priority; 79 percent of English-language learners in U.S. public schools are Spanish speakers (Abedi et al., 2004). In developing these assessments, assessment designers should be responsive to the within-group differences in dialect and culture that will be represented among Spanish speaking children.

6c. Policymakers, institutions of higher education, and programs should continue to diversify the early childhood workforce, with a focus on increasing the number of bilingual early childhood professionals.

The field should continue to diversify, seeking culturally sensitive, bilingual early childhood professionals who are able to communicate with children and family members in their home languages, and who are able to translate when necessary. As the demographics of the U.S. shift to include greater and greater numbers of bilingual and multilingual children, the early childhood workforce will need to diversify. So far, the workforce has not kept pace with the diversity of children served (Lynch & Hanson, 1998). Furthermore, many early childhood

professionals have little preparation for working with families from a wide range of cultures and linguistic backgrounds (Garcia, McLaughlin, Spodek, & Sarancho, 1995).

Specifically, the field needs to increase the number of well-prepared bilingual professionals. Bilingual teachers will be able to create environments that encourage young English-language learners to participate in social interactions, as well as have empathy for children's frustrations and challenges as they attempt to learn a new language.

Even those teachers who are not able to become fully bilingual will benefit from learning even the basics of a second language. Besides enhancing communication with children and families, professionals who have experienced the process of learning a second language may be more sensitive to the challenges and processes experienced by young children who are learning a new language. However, teachers or other potential assessors who are not fluent in the child's home language should not attempt to conduct formal assessments of the child.

To implement this recommendation, programs should recruit and retain qualified bilingual professionals and encourage monolingual staff to learn a second language; colleges and universities should offer more coursework and training on language acquisition, particularly as it pertains to screening and assessment; and policymakers should increase the access to and affordability of training for current and potential bilingual early childhood professionals.

6d. Early childhood professionals need opportunities for professional development in the assessment of young English-language learners.

In order to improve the quality of assessment practices with young English-language learners, the early childhood field needs a workforce that knows what second-language acquisition looks like, and how it reveals itself in the assessment process. Early childhood

professionals should become more knowledgeable about second-language acquisition, and higher education faculty and program administrators should ensure high-quality pre- and in-service training opportunities in this area. Teacher educators, program administrators, and policymakers also should continue to emphasize the importance of assessment training for early childhood professionals, specifically as it relates to young English-language learners. Colleges, community-based trainers, programs, and other professional development specialists should ensure that early childhood professionals know how to assess young English-language learners, from selecting appropriate assessments, to collaborating with family and other professionals, to interpreting and using results.

Conclusions

Many of the recommendations presented in this paper assume a more ideal environment than currently exists in many settings, one in which technically sound and culturally appropriate assessments are available for each of the millions of young children in this country whose home language is not English. The recommendations reflect a vision of the field that includes early childhood professionals well prepared to assess the diverse children in their programs in ways that support their learning and development. The recommendations also assume that the nation has policymakers with both the resources and political will to support the needs of young English-language learners and their families. At present, such resources are not being directed toward these ends. Until more resources—financial, scientific and professional—are made available, early childhood professionals will have to continue to use their professional judgment and wisdom to make the best possible decisions about how to effectively assess and use

assessment results for each child in their care, within the limited means currently available to them. Meanwhile, early childhood professionals who work with the millions of young English-language learners also must continue to advocate for the support and resources they need in order to fully implement these recommendations.

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