

Bilingualism and Assessment in Early Childhood Special Education
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Rather than looking at a specific assessment or special education evaluation tool, I look on it as what are some of the processes or procedures that we would use in an assessment to ensure that we are learning the most we can about young children who are dual language learners who have a suspected disability. With that, one of the primary approaches that we need to make is to look at children's abilities in and across or through their different languages, if that is two or three. An assessment process, an evaluation process, needs to ensure that they understand children's abilities in the multiple languages across different context and in that way we can better understand their skills and when they need to use languages and how they use languages to decide whether there is some difficulty there with language or cognition or something like that. As far as more about the process then it would be assessment teams can use different assessment data collection methods, including informal and formal assessment tools, but also interviews with family members, interviews with others who know about this particular child and observations within the home, community, early childhood program or school. All of these will provide information about the language the child use in those contexts, as well if they are meeting their communication needs in the given context that we would like to know about. One important part that people, researchers point to, is if there is a disability often it's the case that the disability is evident in both languages.

Families and professionals can better partner when they have a positive relationship and when they know about each other, including cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It's important for educators to seek out information about individual families, their perspectives, their priorities, their belief systems in order to understand when advice is or is not appropriate. That is an important part rather than assuming, as a professional for example, that I have the answers that all families need to follow in order to have the best or appropriate development for my child. In fact, all families, including those from diverse cultural backgrounds have expertise about their children. They know about their priorities, they understand long-term goals so it's an interactive discussion with families. Certainly teachers can discuss the needs that children have within the classroom school program kinds of environments. Likewise, educators need to engage in those kinds of discussions for families around the context in the environments in the expectations they have for children and families within those. In that discussion is the place to talk about culture based perspectives and then decide and determine together what the best course of action to facilitate the development of young children's skills.