

# Using Parent and Teacher Authentic Assessment Results to Guide Preschool to Kindergarten Transition for Multilingual Learners

*A Research to Practice Summary*

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## ABSTRACT

Most traditional assessment tools often have shortcomings supporting children who are multilingual during their transition from preschool to kindergarten. Teachers' and family's active collaboration during assessments supports children during the transition process. The results from a study conducted with Head Start teachers and families highlighted possible areas in which transition practices could be strengthened through individualized child assessment by parents and teachers. The implication of the similarities and differences of scores across domains highlighted potential needs in assessments and transition practices. This paper shares research to practice connections by looking at several key challenges in assessing children during kindergarten transition, and specific strategies for implementing authentic assessment with multilingual learners. The paper also shares specific recommendations for program implementation that emerged from current research.

## KEYWORDS

**Transition to kindergarten, bilingual, authentic assessment, parents, practitioners, practices**

**T**ransitioning from preschool to kindergarten is a remarkable period in young children's life. The transition becomes more complex when it involves children who speak languages other than English at home, as they switch between different contexts, languages, and/or cultures (Carotta et al., 2023; Cook & Coley, 2017; Fan et al., 2024; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Suskind et al., 2015). High quality transition practices can have an impact on children's learning (Sands & Meadan, 2022; Sheridan et al., 2020; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2019). The transition from preschool to kindergarten has received a lot of attention over the years, with particular attention to the need to cater to the whole child using individualized assessments. Translating research to practice is important for practitioners in supporting evidence-based transition assessment with children and their

families. This research to practice paper will share some ideas for preschool to kindergarten transition.

### Transition

The use of authentic assessment tools in assessing preschoolers' transition to kindergarten has been increasingly recognized (Bagnato et al., 2024; de Sam Lazaro, 2017; Zyskind & Macy, 2024). Authentic assessment involves the practice of assessing children in their familiar environments and settings, like with their familiar caregivers and their peers (Bagnato & Macy, 2010; de Sam Lazaro, 2017; Washington-Nortey et al., 2022). This definition underpins the need to observe and evaluate children in their natural environments, which aligns with recommended practices for early childhood assessment (DEC/NAEYC, 2009).

Challenges exist in assessing children, especially with consideration to linguistic awareness and resources. With the increase in the number of children who speak languages other than English at home, the need for Head Start programs to adapt their assessment practices has become imperative (Harvey & Wennerstrom, 2023; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015; Pianta et al., 2007; Xu et al., 2022). This adaptation has become particularly necessary, especially during the transition from Head Start to kindergarten (Cook & Coley, 2021). Next, we will share an overview of a study we conducted on individualized assessment practices that support children with collaboration from educators and families during transitions from preschool to kindergarten.

### Overview of the Study

Our study (Macy, Edokhamhen, & Burke, 2025) examined the relationship between how parents whose children speak Spanish, and their Head Start teachers viewed the development of their children during the kindergarten transition period. Two components of the Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System (AEPS-3; Bricker et al., 2022a) were used. The *AEPS-3 Family Assessment of Child Skills (FACS)* (Bricker et al., 2022b) was used by the parents, while the teachers used the *AEPS-3 Ready Set* (Bricker et al., 2022c).

The study included nine Head Start teachers

and nine families of children who speak Spanish at home, who are enrolled in rural Head Start preschool and transitioning into kindergarten. The children were assessed across eight developmental domains (adaptive, cognitive, fine motor, gross motor, social emotional, social communication, literacy, and math skills). Congruency between parent and teacher perceptions was explored.

Findings from the study revealed that there were significant agreements between teachers and parents in skills like adaptive, cognitive, fine motor, gross motor, literacy, and social emotional. However, there were discrepancies between parent and teacher ratings in the areas of math and social communication skills. Parents in our study tended to rate their children higher in math skills than teachers. Teachers tended to rate children higher in social communication skills compared to parents. These differences between parents and teachers' ratings highlight the need for a collaborative assessment approach to reconcile and address potential gaps. Parents' responses to open-ended questions on these skills revealed diverse aspirations for their children. Parents expressed a desire for personalized learning goals for their children that reflect family values and cultural contexts.

### Research to Practice Connections

The need for authentic assessment tools in assessing preschoolers' transition to kindergarten has been receiving some attention (Bagnato et al., 2024; D'Amico et al., 2024; Fan et al., 2024; Shaul & Schwartz, 2014). Recent research has identified some key challenges in assessing multilingual learners during transition and specific strategies for implementing authentic assessment with multilingual learners (Crowe et al., 2021; Harvey & Wennerstrom, 2023). We will share research to practice connections related to: (a) access, (b) collaboration, (c) assessment, and (d) individualization.

### Access to Linguistically Appropriate Assessment Services

Access to linguistically appropriate assessment services remains a persistent barrier, particularly in rural areas where resources may be limited (Shapiro & Derrington, 2004; Williams et al., 2013; Zys-

kind & Macy, 2024). According to Smith and Clegg (2021), many communities are faced with a shortage of professionals who can conduct assessments in children's home languages, which can potentially lead to inaccurate evaluations of children's abilities. This limitation affects children whose primary language is not English, as they may struggle to fully participate in the assessment process when services are not available in their preferred language.

By providing access to linguistically appropriate assessment tools, professionals need to understand and value the need for bilingual development. Skills should be assessed in both English and home language. For example, Carotta et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of assessing skills in both the home language and English to understand children's full linguistic inventory. Bilingual assessment tools should be made available while incorporating cultural contexts which can affect children's communication styles and behavior. When such tools are not readily available, qualified interpreters should be utilized to interpret and convey children's responses and behavior.

### **Collaboration Between Professionals and Families**

The collaboration between professionals and families represents another critical area of concern. Macy et al. (2019b) suggested that traditional assessment approaches often fail to meaningfully incorporate family perspectives and knowledge. When families who speak languages other than English attempt to engage with early childhood programs, they often encounter systems that may not be designed to facilitate their full participation. This can discourage parental participation and then result in missed opportunities to gather valuable information about children's development.

It is worthy to note that parents are vital observers of their own children's development. It is useful to build or establish a strong relationship with families (Barnard-Brak et al., 2021; Fan et al., 2022; Sheridan et al., 2020; Xu, 2020). There should be regular opportunities for a two-way dialogue between professionals and families. Family members should be included as equal partners in assessment decisions. This should be done in the family's preferred language to ease communication barriers.

Crane et al. (2011) emphasizes that consistent communication in families' preferred language breeds successful collaboration.

### **Assessment Practices That Do Not Account for Cultural Differences**

Another key challenge in assessing multilingual learners during transition is lack of cultural responsiveness in assessment practices. Beasley et al. (2023) demonstrated how assessment tools and procedures that do not account for cultural differences may lead to inaccurate results and misinterpretation of children's abilities. Traditional standardized assessments often reflect mainstream cultural expectations and may not account for children from other cultural backgrounds.

Assessment tools should be developed and selected for practitioner use with cultural considerations in mind. Some cultural undertones may make some of these tests biased when not accounted for. The use of culturally appropriate materials should be considered when administering these tests. Lee et al. (2015) suggests that children demonstrate knowledge and skills more effectively when culturally familiar materials and activities are used during assessment. Family routines and practices should also be considered during the development and administration of these assessments.

*“Assessment tools should be developed and selected for practitioner use with cultural considerations in mind.”*

### **Individualization in Transition Planning**

The individualization of the transition process is another significant challenge identified in recent research. According to Sands et al. (2024), many transition practices follow a one-size-fits-all approach that may fail to address the unique needs of multilingual learners and their families. This approach can be problematic when children are navigating between different linguistic environments.

## SITUATING LITERACY-RICH ENGAGEMENTS

Effective individualized transition should begin early before the actual transition occurs. Mickelson et al. (2022) recommend that the transition process should begin at least six months before the transition. This transition process should be tailored to meet the individual child's needs. Studies show that individualized transition practices lead to better outcomes for children and families (Mickelson et al., 2022; Sands & Meadan, 2022). Next, we will share ideas for implementing recommendations.

### Recommendations for Implementation

To serve children in optimal ways, it is important to use effective assessment practices for children who have multiple languages. The implementation requires both immediate actions and long-term planning. During children's transition to kindergarten, programs need to take specific steps towards the implementation of effective assessment practices for multilingual children and their families. Now, let us look at specific recommendations for program implementation that emerged from current research related to: (a) assessment tools, and (b) program planning.

#### Assessment Tools

Programs need to recognize that some traditional assessments may fall short in providing adequate support for multilingual learners. It is recommended that programs should review their current assessment practices for cultural responsiveness. Programs need to examine their assessment tools and processes for assessing children who are multilingual and collecting information (Bagnato & Macy, forthcoming). By such examinations, programs can identify where they are and what improvements or changes that are needed to better serve multilingual children and their families.

The next immediate action is for programs to identify and obtain relevant or appropriate assessment tools. Without the right tools, it will be difficult for programs to effectively assess multilingual children. According to Macy et al. (2019b), many programs may lack assessment tools that have been validated for use with children who speak multiple languages.

Family input represents another crucial com-

ponent that programs should address immediately. Programs can encourage family engagement when they include parents in the assessment process. This form of engagement will enable the program to gather meaningful input about children's development. Such inputs can be vital when deciding the right form of assessment for multilingual children.

#### Long-term Planning

In supporting multilingual learners, programs should provide professional development on authentic assessment for staff. According to Sheridan et al. (2009), many programs provide very few professional development experiences, which proves insufficient for building lasting capacity. Programs should provide on-going training opportunities for professionals to develop relevant cultural competence in bilingual assessment.

Programs need to partner with qualified experts in the areas of authentic assessment. To create a pipeline of bilingual professionals, Dionne et al. (2021) suggests that programs should establish partnerships with local universities and colleges. This will ensure there are long-term strategies put in place to build capacities to conduct assessment in other languages other than English.

A system for ongoing family engagement should be developed by programs. Macy and Bagnato (2023) assert that many programs struggle to maintain consistent family engagement over time. There should be a structure set in place by programs that support family engagement and participation in the assessment process. These can be in the form of a family advisory committee, or the establishment of regular communication channels between the parents and the program.

Additionally, programs should regularly evaluate and if need be, adjust their practices. Bagnato et al. (2024) demonstrated that despite the recognized importance of authentic assessment, many programs often fail to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of their assessment practices. There should be a system for the collection of data that evaluates the effectiveness of assessment and its impact on children and families (Bagnato et al., 2024; Bagnato & Macy, 2010; Beasley et al., 2023).

The implementation of the above recommendations requires ongoing commitment from program

leadership and practitioner advocacy. Research has shown that investing in these areas leads to better outcomes for children with multiple languages and their families during the transition to kindergarten (Bagnato et al., 2024; DEC/NAEYC, 2009; McWilliam, 2005). The implementation of culturally relevant assessment practices for multilingual learners poses both a challenge and an opportunity for the advancement of the field of early childhood education. Although the process requires huge commitment and allocation of resources, the end product is beneficial for children, families, and programs.

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