

Chapter 17

Using Technology to Address the Challenges to Effective Assessment of Young Learners who are Immigrants

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ABSTRACT

Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning. Assessment data is gathered to monitor progress and developmental gains in child development and learning, to guide curriculum planning and decision making, to identify special needs, and to evaluate the effectiveness of early childhood programs. Current research indicates that assessment data gathered from children who are immigrants does not always lead to the development of effective curriculum and instruction, and the data is not reliable in identifying immigrant children with special needs. This chapter discusses the possible technologies available to mitigate the threats and challenges that continue to affect the gathering of effective assessment data from young learners who are immigrants.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education curriculum sets the foundation for future learning and success (American Federation of Teachers, 2002; Young, 1996). All children deserve high quality early childhood

education as foundational knowledge. Prominent scholars such as John Dewey have advocated quality early childhood education. In responding to this understanding, countries such as the United States of America started programs such as “Head Start” in the 1900s, as a way to provide quality early childhood education to disadvantaged children. Early childhood curriculum that supports

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developmental gains in all the domains such as language, cognitive, social and emotional, and physical development is guided by assessment (NAEYC, 2003; Eliason and Jenkins, 2008; Kolstelnik, Soderman, and Whiren, 2011).

Assessment is an integral component of teaching and learning in early childhood education. Early childhood assessment is defined as the process of gathering information about children from several forms of evidence, then organizing and interpreting that information (McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova, 2004; McLean, Wolery, and Bailey, 2004). Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992) defined early childhood assessment as “the process of observing, recording, and otherwise documenting the work children do and how they do it, as a basis for variety of educational decisions that affect the child” (p.22). Similarly, Bagnato and Neisworth (1991) also note that early childhood assessment “is a flexible, collaborative decision-making process in which teams of parents and professionals repeatedly revise their judgments and make decisions about children’s learning and developmental progress” (p. 29). Ntuli, Nyarambi, and Traore (2012) note that the above definitions suggest that early childhood assessment is a dynamic, ongoing process, which only becomes effective when there is collaboration between families, parents and early childhood professionals.

Assessment in early childhood education serves diverse purposes. The most valued purposes of assessment in early childhood education comprise the following: to monitor child development and learning, to guide curriculum planning and decision making, to identify children who may have developmental delays and special needs, and to report and communicate with others, such as parents, interventionists, and other stake holders (Eliason and Jenkins, 2008; Kolstelnik, Soderman, and Whiren, 2011; McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova, 2004; McLean, Wolery, and Bailey, 2004; Ntuli, Nyarambi, and Traore, 2012). If assessment is not done effectively, it would be difficult to plan successful learning programs that meet individual children’s needs within the different developmental domains.

The authors suggest several modes of technologies in order to mitigate some of the challenges associated with ineffective assessment of children who are immigrants. These include virtual field trips (VFTs), Digital Dialects for foreign language lessons, E-portfolio assessment, Wikis, Google sites, Pbworks, Edmodo, Mahara, Moodle etc. These technologies help accessing and assessing young immigrant learners.

BACKGROUND

Young Immigrant Learners Falling Behind in Education

Current literature points out that children who are immigrants are falling behind the mainstream American children. Children who are immigrants have low achievement assessment scores as compared with mainstream American children; also children who are immigrants enter kindergarten already behind their mainstream American peers (Deiner, 2010; Fry, 2008). It has been documented that when children enter kindergarten and they are already behind, it causes other glitches as teachers try to help them reach the same level as their mainstream counterparts. Labeling of young learners who are immigrants begins as they are consistently pulled-out of the classrooms for remedial lessons, and further assessments. This affects the learner’s confidence among peers and eventually destroys self-esteem (Ntuli, Nyarambi, & Traore, 2012). There is need to help young learners who are immigrants with extra lessons, and further assessments that help them in the development of individualized curriculum and or culturally responsive curricula. Use of technology helps with private lessons and assessments that help the teachers to access effective assessment data and provision of extra lessons without labeling young children who are immigrants. This will be discussed further under the topic: Technology and Responsive Assessments in this paper.

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