



A Systematic Review of Research on Assessment of Children's Oral Language

❖ What you need to know

Children use language not only to communicate feelings and understandings, but also to formulate, clarify, extend, and reflect on ideas and experiences. Oral language is foundational to literacy as well as to social and conceptual learning.

❖ Why this research is important

The important role played by oral language in literacy and all learning is recognized both in research and curricula for language arts in around the world. Supporting children's use of language should be an essential focus of classroom teaching and assessment. There is a lack of resources available to teachers for supporting and assessing children's oral language in culturally relevant ways.

❖ How this research was conducted

With the aim of informing development of research-supported tools and practices for assessing children's oral language in classrooms, we conducted a systematic review of research studies on oral language assessment in three online databases published from 1980 to 2015.

❖ What the researcher found

We identified three language features most commonly assessed: vocabulary, narrative comprehension, and syntax. Some of the available assessment tools are culturally biased in providing pictures and images that do not take cultural understandings and experiences of nonmainstream students into account. They do not capture children's "real talk" in everyday interactions in various communicative contexts. In the research studies examined, assessments were carried out primarily through adult-child interactions. They assessed children's receptive language use as they answered adults' standardized questions or prompts.

❖ How this research can be used

Teachers can use the culturally-appropriate oral language assessment approach developed in the NOW Play project to assess children's real talk in everyday classroom activities. This research can be used by policy makers to create forums where literacy educators, speech language pathologists, and teachers collaborate and work towards supporting children's language by drawing on the expertise of each. They can create policies on teacher education and classroom assessment, as well as the provision of speech and language services in schools, that recognize the fundamental nature of oral language to children's literacy and learning.

Keywords: children's oral language use, language assessment, systematic review

Publications based on the research

Malec, A., Peterson, S.S., & Elshereif, H. (2017). Assessing young children's oral language: Recommendations for classroom practice and policy. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 40(3), 1-31.

Peterson, S.S., & Malec, A. (2016). Oral language assessment in dramatic play contexts. *Florida Reading Journal*, 51(3), 7-13.