Cultural and Practice Perspectives on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System: Voices from American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Programs

2016 BRIEF REPORT

www.tribalearlychildhood.org
The CLASS CoL

Jessica V. Barnes-Najor
Michigan State University & The Tribal Early Childhood Research Center

Ann Belleau
Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan, Inc.

Teresa Smith
Kenaitze Early Childhood Center

Mavany Verdugo
Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians

Nicole Thompson
University of Memphis

Patty Brown
Community Development Institute

Michelle Sarche
University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus & The Tribal Early Childhood Research Center
Agenda

Introduction

Methods

Results

Conclusions
Introduction
The CLASS as a Research Tool

- Evaluation
- Prediction
- Theory
The CLASS in the Multicultural Context

A significant contribution of our work is that ‘cultural accommodations’ (Goldenberg, 2008) are not treated as indifferent to or somehow separate from classroom interactions deemed as universal in quality. Rather, we suggest that culturally responsive interactions can actually support, even underlie, high-quality interactions. In other words, equally high-quality interactions in the classroom might come in different varieties, as discussed in the CLASS manual (Pianta et al., 2008). Those variations, unmeasured in extant research, could be consequential to the development and learning of culturally diverse students. (Reese et al., 2014, p. 520)
Characteristics of Coders

Trainees with the following characteristics were more likely to be reliable:

• Child centric beliefs
• Held intention teaching beliefs
• White
Multicultural Measurement

1. The Universality-Cultural Specific Specific Continua

2. Etic versus Emic approaches to measurement
Th Universality Cultural Specific Continua

Gross Motor Skills: The ability to control the large muscles of the body

Universal

Contextually specific

Measurement Question

Does your child exhibit age appropriate gross motor skills?

Does your child climb?

Does your child climb steps?

Low accuracy in measurement

High accuracy in measurement
Etic and Emic Approaches to Multicultural Measurement

Definition of Etic

Of, relating to, or involving analysis of cultural phenomena from the perspective of one who does not participate in the culture being studied — compare EMIC

Definition of Emic

Of, relating to, or involving analysis of cultural phenomena from the perspective of one who participates in the culture being studied — compare ETIC
Methods
How did we work together?
Who participated in our study?

**Role in Head Start**
- Director (76%)
- Education Manager (21%)
- Other (3%)

**Program Represented**
- HS (56%)
- EHS (3%)
- Both HS and EHS (41%)
Centers & Classrooms

Number of Centers Represented

- Head Start: 185
- Early Head Start: 47

Number of Classrooms Represented

- Head Start: 402
- Early Head Start: 170
What information did we gather?

Data sources for the study included the following:

- CLASS CoL survey included items regarding cultural inclusion in the program, use of the CLASS, and perceptions of the CLASS
- Reflections from the CLASS CoL group members
- Notes from the CoL discussions
How did we examine our data?

1. Articulate how central constructs have been defined and operationalized.

2. Identify the groups from which these definitions have been derived and to which the constructs have either not been applied or with which surprising results have been found.

3. Identify the relevant dimensions underlying cultural variability.

4. Evaluate the definitions/operationalizations of the central constructs (step 1) in the context of broader cultural knowledge about those groups (step 3).

5. Derive research questions and specific hypotheses based on the answers from step 4.
Results
Research Question 1: How do directors of AI/AN Head Start programs use the CLASS?

Prepare for federal monitoring

“We want our teachers to be informed on what is expected during a CLASS review. We have had several trainings on CLASS but feel that we need to always remind our teachers what is expected from this tool.”

- Head Start Director

Improve program services

“We are required to use CLASS. We also use it to design training. I see CLASS as a way of getting a picture of where our staff is at: what strengths they have and what areas we could assist by providing additional training. We utilize this information to discuss with staff what they feel they need to learn and to make suggestions on how to accomplish this.”

- Head Start Director
Research Question 2: How do directors of AI/AN Head Start programs perceive the CLASS instrument and training?

1. Cultural responsiveness of the CLASS training

2. Strengths and limitations of using the CLASS
### How was your experience with CLASS training?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>62%</td>
<td>had a very positive or positive experience</td>
<td>&quot;I think all of the CLASS trainings I have been to, the trainers acknowledge Head Start classrooms may look different due to culture or regional aspects. But if they focus on engaging children in learning, asking questions, being curious, and being respectful — this is what CLASS is wanting to document during observations. If this is not being observed, then working with teachers so learning for children can be optimized.&quot; — Head Start Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18%</td>
<td>had a somewhat positive experience</td>
<td>&quot;I attended 3 different trainings. The first training was a negative experience. The trainer &quot;taught to the test&quot; and there was no opportunity to understand the tool. The second training was more helpful, but was expensive because we had to travel to another location and pay a fee for the training. The third training was provided to our program and was extremely beneficial.&quot; — Head Start Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>had an experience that was a little positive or not at all positive</td>
<td>&quot;I disagree with the position of the training. It does not take into account the quietness of our community and how it is inappropriate to be as vocal as they desire us to be. Difficulty to create scaffolding in our native language.&quot; — Head Start Director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Was the trainer sensitive to any cultural implications of using the CLASS in tribal programs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>49% thought the trainer(s) were very sensitive or sensitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“All trainers acknowledge that Native teachers may not be as verbal or speak out as much—but we have to practice using as much vocabulary as possible with children. We have to be intentional in using vocabulary, using open-ended questions and having relevant conversations with children.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Head Start Director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>24% thought the trainer(s) were somewhat sensitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The trainer is only aware of cultural implications if they are informed by the program, however, there should be some level of assumption made that there are cultural implications for any tribal grantee.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Head Start Director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>27% thought the trainer(s) were a little sensitive or not sensitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The trainer simply used a script provided and did not deviate from it to include how this could impact tribal programs nor how tribal programs could be different.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Head Start Education Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Tribal situations were not discussed.”
- Head Start Education Manager
What are the advantages of using the CLASS?

“Relationships between child/teacher are critical. Overall classroom environments are also critical. Historically, we have children from families who do not have an abundance of printed materials in the home (books, newspapers, magazines, etc.). We also have a huge percent of children with speech and language delays and impairments. So the language modeling and feedback loops are important as well.”

- Head Start Director

“I think it is important to have the VERY BEST quality of classrooms across the country as we can. We need supportive documentation to be able to prove that.”

- Head Start Education Manager
Challenges of Using the CLASS: What is missed?

“Cultural nuances – for example – less verbal – more/facial eye expressions, gestures. Also respect for the teacher may look/sound like they are being negative. Listening cultures do not talk constantly – talking back to elders or teachers may be viewed as disrespectful. Children learn as a community and whole body style.”

- Head Start Director
Challenges of Using the CLASS: What is missed?

“It doesn't catch subtle, visual, or non-verbal interaction. It does not understand cultural components that include listening, reflection, and quiet as being more important.”

- Head Start Education Manager
Research Question 3: How do directors’ perceptions of the CLASS inform us about our understanding of the cultural appropriateness of the CLASS?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Articulate how central constructs have been defined and operationalized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Identify the groups from which these definitions have been derived and to which the constructs have either not been applied or with which surprising results have been found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Identify the relevant dimensions underlying cultural variability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Evaluate the definitions/operationalizations of the central constructs (step 1) in the context of broader cultural knowledge about those groups (step 3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Derive research questions and specific hypotheses based on the answers from step 4.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Articulate how central constructs have been defined and operationalized.
Identify the groups from which these definitions have been derived and to which the constructs have either not been applied or with which surprising results have been found.
3 Identify the relevant dimensions underlying cultural variability.
Evaluate the definitions/operationalizations of the central constructs (step 1) in the context of broader cultural knowledge about those groups (step 3).
Derive research questions and specific hypotheses based on the answers from step 4.
Do the CLASS domains, dimensions, indicators, and behavioral markers fit within the cultural context of AI/AN early childhood education programs?

Hypothesis 1:
We believe that the domains and dimensions will fit well within the cultural context since these constructs are more abstract and thus apt to be universal.

Hypothesis 2:
We believe that there will be indicators and behavioral markers that will not fit within the cultural context.

Hypothesis 3:
We believe that there will be indicators and behavioral markers important to the dimensions for young AI/AN children that are currently not present in the instrument.
What are the processes needed for the CLASS to be conducted effectively in AI/AN early childhood education programs?

Hypothesis:

We believe that a CLASS coder who do not have an in-depth knowledge of the tribe’s culture will be unable to provide accurate data about an AI/AN classroom.
1. A qualitative study should be conducted to identify the culture-specific variations of the CLASS domains, dimensions, indicators, and behavioral markers. While we know it would be unrealistic to expect a study such as this to include all tribes with early childhood education classrooms, very careful design strategies would need to be employed to ensure adequate representation from different tribes.

2. Information from the qualitative study of culture-specific variations should be used to either modify the CLASS’s structure or develop a new instrument with etic and emic structural equivalence.

3. A full quantitative and qualitative study should be conducted to evaluate the tool’s use in AI/AN communities. This study should mirror the studies conducted to establish the initial validity and reliability of the instrument. Again, very careful design strategies would need to be employed to ensure adequate representation from different tribes.

4. Coders of the newly revised or developed system should have strong cross-cultural understanding as well as an in-depth knowledge of the cultural context of the classrooms in which they are observing.
Thank you!
An Examination of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System in Tribal Head Start Programs

Jessica Barnes-Najor, Ann Belleau, Patty Brown, Michelle Sarche, Teresa Smith, Nicole Thompson, Mavany Verdugo

Setting the Stage:
In 2012, the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center gathered a team of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Head Start program representatives and researchers working in AI/AN early childhood education to examine the cultural appropriateness of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) in AI/AN Head Start programs.

The team, called the CLASS Community of Learning (CoL), was formed in response to concerns raised during Office of Head Start tribal consultations regarding the cultural appropriateness of the CLASS as an evaluation tool in the federal monitoring of AI/AN programs.

Using the CLASS in Tribal Communities:
The CLASS is an observation tool that has been scientifically proven to measure the quality of the classroom environment and predict children's social and academic outcomes. However, the tool's appropriateness in American Indian and Alaska Native communities has not been determined.

Multicultural Measurement:
There are two concepts discussed in the field of cross-cultural measurement important in our work:
1. The universality cultural specific continua
2. Etic/emic approaches to measurement

Research Questions:
How do directors of AI/AN Head Start use the CLASS?
How do directors perceive the CLASS instrument and training?
How do directors' perceptions of the CLASS inform us about our understanding of the cultural appropriateness of the CLASS?

Methods:
How did we work together?
The members of the Col. met via video conferencing to determine the research questions, develop the methods and survey to address the research questions, analyze the data, interpret the findings, and review drafts of products describing our work.

Who participated in our study?
A survey was administered at the 2013 NIHSDA conference and via email to AI/AN program administrators from July through October of 2013. A total of 66 program administrators completed the survey.

What data did we gather?
The survey consisted of open- and closed-ended questions in four categories:
♦ CLASS CoL survey
♦ Reflections from the CLASS CoL group members
♦ Notes from the CoL discussions

How did we analyze our data?
Three of the CoL members worked together to analyze the qualitative data. Data were coded individually and collectively into themes. Complete agreement was achieved, and results were presented to the full CoL to review findings and engage in a detailed analysis using the Cultural Lens Approach (Hardin et al., 2014).

Results:
Question 1: How is the CLASS used?
Results from our study suggest that the vast majority of AI/AN Head Start programs were using the CLASS (n=53, 80%) in the 2013/2014 program year. In analyzing the qualitative data about why programs used the CLASS, we found two categories of reasons for using the CLASS: 1.) to improve services, and 2.) to prepare for federal monitoring.

Question 2: How is the CLASS instrument and training perceived?
Cultural responsiveness of the CLASS training

Question 3: How do perceptions of the CLASS inform us about the cultural appropriateness of the CLASS?
Using the Cultural Lens Approach, our CoL developed a series of questions for further research. These questions are incorporated within our recommendations.

Recommendations:
1. Cultural training and professional development opportunities should be provided to directors to ensure that they understand the cultural context of the CLASS and how to use it effectively.
2. Further research should be conducted to explore the cultural sensitivity and responsiveness of the CLASS.
3. The CLASS should be continually updated to reflect the cultural needs of AI/AN communities.
4. Collaboration between AI/AN communities and those implementing the CLASS should be encouraged to ensure cultural appropriateness.

Strengths and Limitations of the CLASS in AI/AN Programs