

# CHILD ASSESSMENT BRIEF

February 2009

**WELCOME** to the first issue of the **CHILD ASSESSMENT BRIEF** produced by Early Childhood Associates for the MA Department of Early Education and Care. Each issue of the *Brief* will include these features:

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-  Promising practices, child assessment resources and web links.

## USING CHILD ASSESSMENT TO GUIDE INSTRUCTION

**Assessment is an ongoing process to answer questions about children's growth and learning so we can support their development.** Ongoing assessment and teaching go hand in hand. Effective accurate assessments help us to individualize instruction and document children's progress toward identified goals and outcomes.

**To assess a child's knowledge and skills we must document what we see.** Ideally programs will use established assessment instruments as well as other methods to gather ongoing assessment information. Observation notes, portfolios, and checklists are all documentation methods that programs can use. These methods provide the information necessary to rate the developmental skills and learning needs of individual children.

**One of the best ways to assess young children is to observe them while they are doing typical tasks.** For example, we might observe children while they are playing with other children, completing puzzles, building in the block corner or listening to stories.

**A key question is how will you use the information.** Once you have gathered assessment information, rated each child's development in all domains and developed profiles of their strengths and skills, it is critical to share this information with parents and use the information to plan appropriate activities.

**In early childhood programs, quality is never an accident.** It is always the result of careful planning, consistent effort and thoughtful teaching. Often children's knowledge and skills do not improve simply by engaging in classroom activities and routines –teachers and providers must provide the necessary materials, supportive environment, intentional instruction, and appropriate classroom supports to ensure the school readiness of all children.

Good assessment must be integrated into good teaching across developmental domains. One developmental area of assessment is **fine motor development**. Children need to develop certain fine motor skills so they can become independent at dressing and feeding themselves and, eventually, to communicate their ideas through writing. The preschool years are a time for all children to participate in daily activities that require using and strengthening their hands. Children need to learn to use their hands as a tool. Children also need to develop good eye hand coordination or the ability to control the direction that their hands move.



Most children entering kindergarten can hold a pencil appropriately, cut with scissors, put together simple puzzles, turn the pages of a book, copy shapes (circle, square, triangle) and write their name. If a preschooler in your classroom has difficulty with fine motor tasks or avoids drawing activities, you can support his/her development by engaging him/her in activities that strengthen eye-hand skills. Building with blocks, playing with toy cars, shaking noise makers, ripping and folding paper, catching a ball, bowling, typing on a keyboard and banging a peg board are all activities that improve children's hand skills. Some children who avoid drawing activities may be interested in tearing pictures out of a magazine, making a collage or finger painting a mural.

Parents can support their child's fine motor development by encouraging them to dress and eat independently and asking them to help with chores (cooking, clean up) that require manual activity.



## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: USING TECHNOLOGY TO MANAGE ASSESSMENT DATA

*Technology has its own language which is constantly growing and changing.*

*Teachers need enough technology literacy to ask what is required to access and participate in the online version of a child assessment system. (Catherine Harvey, Young Children, 2004)*

*This article highlights one UPK Assessment Planning grantee that has started to integrate technology in its child assessment system.*

The Daniel Feeney Preschool Center in Walpole includes five inclusive classrooms that serve up to 80 children between the ages of 3 and 5. Since receiving a *UPK Assessment Planning Grant* in the spring of 2008, Director Jennifer Bernard has been providing training, support and resources to enhance the skills her staff needs to effectively and efficiently use technology to manage child assessment data.

Funding from the grant allowed the center to purchase two new PCs, a printer, and five Palm Pilots for the preschool teachers. The staff were involved in the decision to use High Scope COR as their child assessment system and a CD version of the COR was installed on computers. The first training on the COR was held in the spring and was followed-up by a workshop and practice session for staff in the Fall.

The expectation for this school year is for teachers to enter anecdotal data about children using the CD version of the COR and to generate a printout of child skills for the Parent Conference in Spring 2009. While teachers were uncomfortable at first with entering data, they had an opportunity at the Fall refresher training to work in teams and practice this skill. Staff were impressed by the professional look of the reports generated by the electronic version of COR. But there have been challenges. In addition to dealing with time constraints, staff had to make the switch from using Apple computers to PCs.

Reflecting on the process, Jennifer recommends giving staff an opportunity to review all four assessment instrument options prior to choosing which they would implement and ample time to learn and practice using the computer software. From an administrative point of view, careful allocation of time, money and effort is essential. Staff must understand the purposes of assessment and be clear on their respective roles and responsibilities in the assessment process. Professional development is a crucial support in the UPK Assessment Planning initiative. Teachers need time to administer and interpret child assessments and reflect on the implication of child assessment information on program quality and practice.

This year, teachers continue to focus on systematic collection of assessment information and data analysis. They are using Palm Pilots (hand held computers) to capture anecdotal observations of children. If additional funding becomes available, Walpole plans to purchase additional computers and upgrade the online version of the COR to allow universal access by teachers and specialists.

Jennifer can be reached at [jbernard@walpole.K12.ma.us](mailto:jbernard@walpole.K12.ma.us).



### TIPS FOR INCREASING TECHNOLOGY ACCESS TO MANAGE CHILD ASSESSMENT DATA

Determine the level of access staff has to technology at home, work and/or in their community. Is the technology easily accessible?

Assess whether users have the knowledge, literacy and technology skills necessary to make effective use of the technology.

Consider whether users are able to create child and class profiles and share assessment results through technology. How are the data being used?

## Q & A

### SHOULD I ASSESS A CHILD WHO ALREADY HAS AN IEP?

*The goal of special education in the early childhood years is to “enable young children to be active and successful participants ...in their homes with their families, in child care, in preschool or school programs, and in the community (from Early Childhood Outcomes Center, 2008)*

**YES, you should assess the skills and monitor the progress of all preschool children in your program, including children with disabilities and special needs.**

Massachusetts programs that are participating in the UPK program are using a developmental assessment instrument to monitor the progress of all of the children in their programs. The four (4) instruments that are being used (Work Sampling, High Scope, Creative Curriculum and Ages and Stages) assess children’s language, cognitive, motor and social skills.

If a child has an IEP, the special education department of the public school assumes primary responsibility for monitoring the child’s performance, particularly in the area(s) s/he has a delay. The special education team meets periodically and may ask staff (with parent permission) for your participation, including your observations or assessments of the child. The information you collect for the developmental assessment will be valuable data to share with the special education team and parent.



**Look at the whole child and not just the disability.** It is important to assess all areas of a child’s development to identify strengths and any other learning challenges.

For example, a preschool child may have speech and language delays which effect his daily conversations and interactions. However, the same child may have age appropriate cognitive and motor skills. All of the information is necessary to effectively plan daily activities.



Ideally you will have access to the child's IEP and can carryover recommended strategies or modifications into your classroom. You may also provide accommodations for the child, such as using simple sign language, a picture schedule or choice cards, which will provide an alternative avenue of communication.

The time you spend observing the child's behavior and performance in learning and play situations with typically developing peers will be valuable information for the special education team.



## SHARING INFORMATION WITH PARENTS: DO'S AND DON'TS

### DO

Involve parents in the assessment process. Discussing children's progress with their parents is an important part of ongoing assessment. Parents provide a unique perspective on their child's functioning. Involve them in conversations about their child. Avoid questions that can be answered with yes or no. Ask questions that allow parents to tell you what they have seen.

### DO

Be a good listener. Provide parents time and a comfortable environment in which to share their assessment of their child's skills, interests, preferences and challenges.

### DO

Engage parents in supporting their child's development by suggesting learning activities to do at home. (Example: Suggest that parents read the same story book over time and ask the child to predict what will happen. Encourage parents to teach their child new vocabulary words).

### DO

Build a relationship with parents based on honesty, respect, open communication, confidentiality and support. Working with parents is a "craft that can be learned and perfected." (Dunst, 1988).

### DON'T

Assume that children's challenging behaviors are the fault of "bad parenting". Children who are impulsive, have short attention spans, communication and social skill problems may be impacted by a neurological or biochemical disability (ADHD, PDD, Surgeon General's Report 1999) or something that is not completely in the family's control.



## 2009 CHILD ASSESSMENT INSTITUTE - March 20, 2009

Plans for the second annual **Child Assessment Institute** are underway for the spring of 2009. The Assessment Institute will be a full day professional development opportunity for enhancing your skills in implementing a child assessment system. Please help us in creating an Institute that will be most meaningful and helpful to you. Send your ideas and preferences to Linda Warren at Early Childhood Associates (ECA) for topics to address, successes or challenges you face in gathering and using child assessment data, and what you hope to learn from the Institute. The e-mail address is [lwarren@earlychildhoodassociates.com](mailto:lwarren@earlychildhoodassociates.com) or call (508) 788 3444. All UPK grantees will be receiving detailed information about the institute via e-mail in mid-February.

### WEB SITE BOOKMARKS



#### Early Childhood News [www.earlychildhoodnews.com](http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com)

Presents latest news and ideas about child development, developmentally appropriate practices, health and safety, behavior and guidance, assessment and much more. Distributes a FREE newsletter including new articles, events impacting early childhood education, developmentally appropriate classroom activities, and arts and crafts projects.



#### National Child Care Information Center

[www.nccic.org/pubs/goodstart/assess-eval1.html](http://www.nccic.org/pubs/goodstart/assess-eval1.html)

Provides comprehensive child care information resources.



#### Early Childhood Outcomes Center [www.the-ECO-center.org](http://www.the-ECO-center.org)

Provides leadership in the implementation of high-quality outcome systems for early intervention and early childhood special education programs. Offers a framework for addressing key components of an early childhood outcomes measurement system, including data collection, quality assurance procedures, data analysis, interpretation and use, and professional development.



#### Division of Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children

[www.dec-sped.org](http://www.dec-sped.org)

Promotes policies and advances evidence-based practices that support families and enhance the optimal development of young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays and disabilities.



#### Harvard Family Research Project [www.hfrp.org](http://www.hfrp.org)

Offers information on effective ways to support family involvement in children's learning and development.





**National Association for the Education of Young Children**  
[www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org) Dedicated to improving the well-being of all young children, with particular focus on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age 8.

**NCELA**

**National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA)** offers information about language instruction for English language learners and related programs. [www.ncela.gwu.edu](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu)

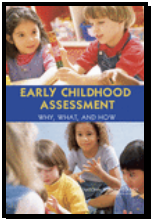


**The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC)** Ensures that children with disabilities (birth through 5 years) and their families receive and benefit from high quality, culturally appropriate and family-centered supports and services. [www.nectac.org](http://www.nectac.org)

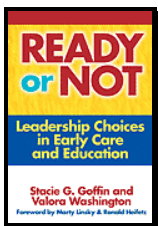


**Family Ties of Massachusetts** offers information about early intervention and support for families of children with special needs and chronic illness. <http://massfamilyties.org>

## BOOKSHELF



Offers comprehensive guidelines and strategies for assessing children with tools that provide useful information for fostering their development and learning. See *Snow, C. & Van Hemel, S. (2008) Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What and How*. Washington, D.C.: National Research Council of the National Academies. [www.nap.edu](http://www.nap.edu)



Examines leadership roles in the early care and education field and illustrates how better defined leadership can improve outcomes for children. See *Goffin, S. and Washington, V. (2007) Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education*. New York: Teachers College Press. <http://nieer.org/docs/?DocID=239>

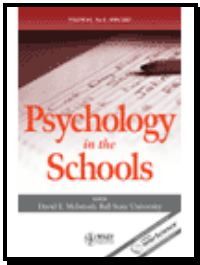


## FILE DRAWER



Presents strategies supported by research to enhance interactions and build relationships with families from diverse and linguistic backgrounds. See *Bruns, D. & Corso, R. (2001) Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

<http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests.html>



Reviews the relevant research on effective teaching and assessment practices for young children from diverse backgrounds and offers recommendations for practitioners. See *Espinosa, L M (2005) Curriculum and assessment considerations for young children from culturally, linguistically and economically diverse backgrounds* *Psychology in the Schools*, (8), 837-853.

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/112101260/issue>



Provides a framework to use in evaluating preschool curriculum and examines the role of child assessment in measuring learning objectives, designing meaningful instruction and documenting changes over time. See *Frede E. and Ackerman, D. (2007) Preschool Curriculum Decision-Making: Dimensions to Consider* National Institute for Early Education Research. New Jersey: Rutgers University.

[www.nieer.org](http://www.nieer.org)



A comprehensive resource of educational and therapeutic terms used in the early intervention and special education fields. Designed to help parents and professionals. See *Kahn, L. & Fixsen, D. (2008) Speaking the Language: Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education Terms* National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center. NC: FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[www.nectac.org/~pdfs/pubs/acronyms.pdf](http://www.nectac.org/~pdfs/pubs/acronyms.pdf)



Focuses on linguistically and culturally responsive assessment of children whose home language is not English. Builds on the 2003 joint position statement that presents what effective assessment looks like for all young children. See *Supplement to the NAEYC Position Statement on Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation. (2005)* Washington DC: NAEYC.

[www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/ELL\\_Supplement\\_Shorter\\_Version.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/ELL_Supplement_Shorter_Version.pdf)

If you have any questions about the *CHILD ASSESSMENT BRIEF* or suggestions for articles please call Early Childhood Associates, Inc. at (508) 788 3444. We look forward to answering your needs and questions and creating a way for you and your colleagues to share your challenges and successes and communicate with one another.

