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Assessment of Young Children NAEYC 2003

Assessment components and purposes

Often people think of assessment as formal testing only, but assessment has many components and many purposes. Assessment methods include observation, documentation of children's work, checklists and rating scales, and portfolios, as well as norm-referenced tests. Consensus has developed around the four primary and distinctive purposes of early childhood assessment, best articulated in the work of the National Education Goals Panel (Shepard, Kagan & Wurtz 1998).

1. **Assessment to support learning and instruction:** For young bilingual children, instructionally embedded assessments using observational methods and samples of children's performance can provide a much fuller and more accurate picture of children's abilities than other methods. Individually, culturally, and linguistically appropriate assessment of all children's strengths, developmental status, progress, and needs, provides essential information to early childhood professionals as they attempt to promote children's development and learning (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett 2000).
2. **Assessment to identify children who may need additional services:** When assessment is directed toward a narrow set of skills, programs may ignore the very competencies that have been shown to build a strong foundation for success in areas including but not limited to academics. Furthermore,

poor quality or poorly administered assessments, or assessments that are culturally inappropriate may obscure children's true intellectual capacities. Many factors, including anxiety, hunger, inability to understand the language of the instructions, culturally-learned hesitation in initiating conversation with adults, and so on, may influence a child's *performance*. This creates a gap between performance and the child's actual ability, and causes staff to draw inaccurate conclusions that can limit the child's future opportunities.

3. **Assessment for program evaluation and monitoring trends:** Programs have a responsibility to deliver what they have been designed to do, and in most cases what they have been funded to do. Accountability usually is emphasized when programs such as pre-kindergartens, public school programs, or Head Start have received local, state, or federal funds. In those cases, the public has a legitimate interest in receiving information about the results obtained.
4. **Assessment for high stakes accountability:** Implementing recommendations for curriculum, child assessment, and program evaluation requires a solid foundation of support. Calls for better results and greater accountability from programs for children in preschool, kindergarten, and the primary grades have not been backed up by essential supports. All early childhood programs need greater resources and supportive public policies to allow the position statement's recommendations to have their intended effects.

GOALS FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

- * Goals focus on children's exploration, inquiry, and expanding vocabularies.
- * Goals address children's physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development, and cognition and general knowledge.
- * Experiences provide for knowledge and skill learning in literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and the visual and performing arts.
- * Curriculum facilitates children's construction of knowledge through their interactions with materials, each other, and adults.
- * Curriculum promotes experiences in which children's thinking moves from the simple to the complex, from the concrete to the abstract.
- * Curriculum provides opportunities for children to initiate activities, as well as for teacher initiation and scaffolding.



The NM Developmental Disabilities Planning Council Announces...

Availability of funding for eligible NM organizations that are holding in-state conferences in 2004 addressing issues affecting persons with developmental disabilities.

Up to \$2,500 per organization per conference is available to provide stipends for attendees with developmental disabilities and family members to cover the cost of registration and/or travel to the conference.

NMDDPC is currently accepting applications from eligible organizations. To request an application form, contact NMDDPC at 505/476-7331 or by email to crutland@state.nm.us.

Childhood Terminology in Navajo Now on the Web

Our CSPD project of the Bureau of Indian Affairs with the Navajo Nation has launched the **Early Childhood Glossary for Special Education Terminology in Navajo** on the internet. This web tool provides definitions of terms in English and Navajo, with the auditory component to hear the terms spoken in both English and Navajo. As a tool for Navajo speaking staff, interpreters, and families, the glossary was developed from the earlier Project Na'nitin here at the CDD. It has been expanded to support understanding of terms in the Navajo language for better service and communication. Check it out at: <http://cdd.unm.edu/ec/cspd>, and go to Tools and Documents on the menu options.