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In This Issue:

Feature Article: <i>Early Childhood Evaluation and Assessment</i>	1, 2
<i>The Family's Role in the Evaluation and Assessment Process</i>	2, 3
Ida's Corner.....	3
Book Review.....	4
Professional Development Opportunities.....	4
Classroom Activity.....	5

Early Childhood Evaluation and Assessment

By Kathleen Trumbull

Evaluation and assessment systems are necessary to identify young children who are in need of services and to show that young children are learning, growing, and developing. Evaluation and assessment are terms that often appear together in the literature and while they are connected, we generally differentiate these terms based on their individual purposes. **Evaluation** is the first step in the intervention process. An evaluation determines whether a problem exists, identifies the nature of the problem, and ascertains whether a child is eligible for special education services as defined by IDEA.

Assessment refers to the ongoing process of observing and gathering information for the purpose of measuring a child's growth and development over time in order to enhance the child's learning and developmental outcomes.

Two different perspectives guide the methodology that will be used in an evaluation and assessment system. The **quantitative perspective** is an objective measurement process that results in a numerical representation of children's behaviors and abilities.

The process uses formal procedures that identify well-defined target behaviors, which are usually tested in pre-specified and standardized conditions. The **qualitative perspective** uses informal procedures to document complex and holistic behaviors as they occur in natural environments and impact a child's ability to participate in everyday life. Methods such as observation, interviews, and questionnaires provide information on qualitative aspects of a child's behavior such as their strengths and weaknesses, their learning style, and how their social/emotional development affects their learning. Often, the more formal *quantitative* evaluation approach is used when a program is attempting to determine eligibility for services. However, the *qualitative* perspective must also guide the chosen methodology in order to generate information that will be helpful in generating and attaining IEP goals.

Evaluation and assessment of young children presents special challenges. The younger the child, the more difficult it is to obtain valid assessments. Early development is rapid, dynamic, episodic, and highly influenced by experience. Young children are easily distracted by assessment procedures and they have little or no personal interest in being assessed. Young children have little test-taking experience and short attention spans. Early childhood evaluation and assessment must be consistent with an integrated and holistic view of child development while K-12 assessment considers academic knowledge paramount.

Because of these challenges, evaluation and assessment procedures must be developmentally appropriate in order to obtain valid and reliable results. The concept of developmental appropriateness is applied to evaluation and assessment in the following way: "*Children can demonstrate skills, knowledge, and attitudes that truly represent their attainments when they are in familiar environments with adults and children they know and trust and when they are*(Continued on next page)

(Continued from Page 2)

liaison explains to parents that the people taking part in the assessment will be looking at the way their child plays, the way their child moves big and little muscles, the sounds their child makes or the words he/she uses, and what their child seems to understand. If the family has questions about the child's eating, drinking, or sleeping patterns, there will be time to look at those as well. Parents should be consulted about the best time of day for their child and family to participate in the process, and a location where the child will most likely feel comfortable during the evaluation and assessment. Work schedules, transportation, and childcare needs must be addressed so as to facilitate parent participation in the process. Parents may have developmental history, medical reports, and perhaps other evaluations that will definitely impact the team's decision regarding eligibility and intervention services. This information must be solicited and discussed with the family.



Because the family knows their child better than anyone else, their information is very important in gathering the **qualitative** information needed to develop and attain appropriate IEP goals. Observations, checklists, interviews, and actual participation in conducting the evaluation and assessment are various ways that parents can be involved. Because the evaluation and assessment may be in a strange environment with new people, children sometimes do not do the things they typically do at home. If at all possible, parents and caregivers should be present during any formal evaluation procedures in order to give their input regarding how characteristic the child's responses are in the evaluation setting when compared to his/her participation in everyday life at home or school.

When the formal evaluation session is over, parents need to be asked if there is anything the child can do that wasn't seen during the evaluation and if there was anything that they saw during the evaluation that surprised them. A discussion about the session, preliminary findings, and the child's strengths and weaknesses should be held immediately after the session is completed so that parents understand what the evaluators were doing and why, as well as the next steps in the process.

If the child is determined eligible for services, a discussion about IEP goals, placement and services and their relation to the evaluation and assessment findings must be held with the family before the IEP is developed. Based on on-going assessment over time, continuous communication with the family about a child's progress occurs once IEP goals have been identified. At each annual IEP, families must be consulted about their concerns and priorities as well as their impressions of their child's skills and abilities, and strengths and weaknesses. Their opinions and observations provide necessary guidance to the IEP team as they consider academic knowledge and skills in the context of the child's total development and participation in everyday life.

Ida's Corner... Notes from Ida Tewa,
619 Coordinator, Special Education Bureau, New
Mexico Public Education Department

The *Measuring Child and Family Outcomes Conference* was held on April 25—27, 2006 at the Albuquerque Marriot Pyramid North. The conference provided opportunities for participants to learn about other states' strategies and ideas for measuring child and family outcomes; to meet and discuss common challenges and best practices; and to hear the latest guidance from the Early Childhood Outcome Center (ECO) and the Office of Special Programs (OSEP). Presentations from consultants lent itself for questions and answers to the many inquiries about collecting data, assessment tools, and reporting to OSEP in a timely manner. The conference was well attended and allowed its participants to leave with information and a sense of support from their cohorts!

General Supervision Enhancement Grant Recipients (GSEG)

Recipients of the GSEG were awarded to the following states: Georgia, Indiana, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas/ Illinois, Washington, and Wisconsin.



Alternative Approaches to Assessing Young Children

Losardo, A., Ph.D., & Notari-Syverson, A., Ph.D. (2001). Paul H. Brookes Publishing, Inc.: Baltimore, MD.

BOOK REVIEW

If you are looking for ways to meet the needs of young children who are culturally, linguistically, or developmentally diverse, this book is for you. If traditional assessment methods are too confining to accurately assess the needs of all your students, this book can help you find alternative approaches to assessing the young children in your setting.

The reader will be introduced to the historical perspectives on alternative assessment. The authors also provide information about working within a transdisciplinary framework when administering assessment procedures. A chapter on future directions reviews major themes including issues related to providing a holistic view of child development and the caregiver's

involvement in the assessment process. Other chapters of this book explore each of six alternative assessment methods including:

- Naturalistic Assessment
- Focused Assessment
- Performance Assessment
- Portfolio Assessment
- Dynamic Assessment
- Curriculum-Based Language Assessment

The book offers a detailed description of each assessment approach, a summary of the advantages and limitations, specific guidelines for implementation, suggestions for working in inclusive environments, and samples of data collection forms for each method.

This book will help the early childhood teacher build on existing traditional assessment skills and provide more comprehensive assessments for young children and their families. It offers a free course companion that includes a course syllabus that outlines chapters, provides learning objectives, lists key concepts, and suggests supplemental readings.



Professional Development Opportunities

Check out the early childhood training calendar on the CDD Early Childhood Division website at: <http://cdd.unm.edu/ec/calendar.html>

The Developmental Evaluation: An Ebb & Flow Process. Wednesday, May 31, 2006 at the United Way of Central NM Training Center, Albuquerque, NM. To register, contact Carla Arnold at (505) 272-8728.

NAEYC's 15th National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development. June 4—7, 2006 in San Antonio, TX. For more information or to register online go to www.naeyc.org/conferences/institute.

The Sixth National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute. July 25—27, 2006, Chapel Hill, NC. For more information or to register online go to www.nectas.unc.edu/~meetings/InclusionMtg2006/mtghomepage.asp.

DEC's 22nd Annual International Conference on Young Children with Special Needs and Their Families. October 19—22, 2006, Little Rock, Arkansas. Register online at www.dec-sped.org/conference_05/about_the_conference.html.



Classroom Activity



Counting 1 to 12

Use this activity to use those plastic eggs that you have left over from the holiday.



Materials needed:

- 12 plastic Easter eggs
- Egg carton
- Objects suitable for counting such as beads, buttons, pennies, Cheerios, paper clips, etc. that will fit into the plastic eggs and a plastic container to put the objects in.
- Permanent marking pen

Procedure:

1. Use the marking pen to number each egg from 1 to 12. Mark the same number of dots on the other half of each egg to correspond to the numeral written on the plastic egg.
2. Number the spaces in the bottom of the egg carton 1 through 12.
3. Place the eggs in the egg carton in their proper numbered space, or have the child match the numbers on the eggs to the numbers in the egg carton. (You can place any number of eggs in the carton depending upon the ability of the child.)
4. Have the child place the correct number of objects in the egg to correspond to the number indicated on the plastic egg.
5. Be sure to check for correct counting after the child has placed the objects into the plastic eggs.
6. As the child becomes more capable, add different numbers and mix the eggs up by putting them into a carton that does not have the spaces numbered in the bottom.
7. Addition and subtraction problems can also be carried out in the same way.

Still have more plastic eggs left? Make this Listening Activity for your preschoolers.

Materials needed:

- 12 plastic eggs – all the same color
- Egg Carton
- Super Glue
- Permanent Marker
- Objects to fill the eggs with: pennies, rice, pebbles, paper clips, marbles, and coffee.



Procedure:

1. Fill 2 eggs with an equal number of pennies in each egg, 2 eggs with equal amounts of rice, 2 eggs with an equal number of marbles, 2 eggs with an equal number of paper clips, 2 eggs with an equal number of pebbles and 2 eggs with the same amount of coffee.
2. Super glue the egg halves together.
3. Mark the bottom of the egg of each matching pair with a similar symbol so children can check their answers. For example, mark the two eggs containing pennies with an “X” on the bottom, the two eggs with the rice with a Circle on the bottom, the two eggs with the pebbles with a square, etc.

Children shake the eggs and try to pair the eggs that make the same sound when shaken and place the matching eggs side-by-side in the egg carton.



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