

Presentation Handout

Using Assessments to Enhance Teaching and Improve Learning

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Assessment Defined

The process of obtaining information for the purpose of making evaluative decisions

High-Stakes Tests

Tests that are:

- directly linked to decisions regarding promotion or retention
- used for evaluating or rewarding teachers or administrators
- associated with the allocation of resources to school districts
- connected to changes in the curriculum

Measurement-Driven Instruction

In which testing programs result in:

- a narrowing of the curriculum
- a concentration on those skills most amenable to testing
- a constraint on the creativity and flexibility of teachers
- a demeaning of teachers' professional judgment

Why I Oppose Conventional Testing in Early Childhood

- Young children are not experienced test takers;
- High stakes tests may have long-term negative consequences for children;
- Currently available tests are narrow and one-dimensional;
- Teaching and learning can be negatively affected by a focus on test results;
- Children's opportunities to learn are vastly different in the early childhood years.

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The Purpose of Assessment

A tool for answering specific questions about various aspects of children's knowledge, skill, behavior, or personality

Types of Assessments Used With Young Children

Developmental Screening

Identifies children who are likely to be at high-risk for school failure

Diagnostic Evaluation

Confirms the presence and extent of a disability

Readiness Test

Ascertain a child's relative knowledge of specific skills and information

Observational/Performance Assessment

Provides ongoing information for instructional or program development purposes and for documenting children's learning

Developmental Screening

A brief assessment procedure designed to identify children at high risk for delayed development or school failure. Screening tests should be:

What Screening is *NOT*

- Source of a diagnostic label
- School entry test
- Achievement test
- Pre/post accountability exam

Practices to Avoid in Assessment

1. Young children should not be separated from their parents or familiar caregivers during assessment.
2. Young children should not be assessed by a strange examiner.
3. Assessments are incomplete if they are limited to easily measurable areas, such as certain motor or cognitive skills.
4. Normative tests or milestone scales should not be the cornerstone of the assessment of an infant or young child.

Our Challenge

To transform assessment information into instructional solutions



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Assessment as a Continuing Process

Assessment should be an ongoing, collaborative process of systematic observation and analysis. This process involves formulating questions, gathering information, sharing observations, and making interpretations in order to form new questions.

Functional Assessment

Focuses on everyday, naturally occurring, practical behaviors and accomplishments:

- Easily recognized by parents and service providers
- Central to the emergence of infant and toddler competence
- Learned and assessed in context
- Part of the fabric of the relationships between infants and their primary caregivers
- Elicit, support, and extend children's skills, abilities, and accomplishments

Performance Assessment

Methods that enable children to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and personality through performing tasks that are part of their daily experience.

Performance Assessment and Intervention

Performance assessments do not call for the application of one set of assessment procedures in order to determine "correct" interventions. Rather, in authentic performance assessment we assess within the context of intervention or teaching in order to learn how to intervene or teach still more effectively.

Purposes of the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework

- A guide for Head Start programs in their ongoing assessment of the progress and accomplishments of children.
- A means for helping Head Start programs analyze and use data on child outcomes for program self-assessment and continuous improvement.

Characteristics of the Head Start Outcomes Framework

- Reflects a developmental continuum
- Shows progress over time
- Aligned with curriculum
- Covers 8 domains of development and learning
- Includes data on child progress and child performance
- Incorporates legislatively mandated indicators
- Makes use of such multiple sources as teacher observations, analysis of children's work samples, documentation of performance, parent reports, and direct assessment

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Assessment and Intervention (cont.)

By linking assessment and intervention, more information is available to answer our questions about children's learning, and the questions themselves are embedded in a process of continuous refinement.

The best way to evaluate a child's performance is to study performance, not something else.

Some Maxims for Early Childhood Assessment

- Testing is not a monolith.
- Tests should only be used for their intended purposes.
- High stakes testing does not promote learning in early childhood.
- Understanding the child within context is key to understanding the child.

Well Begun is Half Done

"The importance of early childhood for the intellectual, social, and emotional growth of human beings is probably . . . one of the most revolutionary discoveries of modern times. . . . *where emotional and mental growth are concerned, well begun is indeed half done.*"

Jerome Bruner, 1980

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