Early Childhood Assessment

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Child Trends
October 11, 2017
Committee for Early Grade Success
Tallahassee, Florida
About Child Trends

Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that improves the lives and prospects of children and youth by **conducting high-quality research** and **sharing the resulting knowledge** with practitioners and policymakers.

We...

- Study children in the real world
- Value objectivity and rigor
- Take a whole child approach
- Want children to flourish
- Pursue knowledge development and knowledge transfer
Overview

Purposes of assessing young children (and why it matters)
  • Overview of major purposes

Considerations and guidelines
  • Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How?

State efforts
Purposes of Assessment
Purpose: There are fundamentally different purposes for conducting early childhood assessments. The purpose of the assessment is critical to how the measure is designed, which measure is selected, how it is implemented and how results are reported and used.

Slide from Halle (2010) and Zaslow (2009); presentations summarizing Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How
Assessment is Part of a Bigger System

Systems: Conducting the assessments is only one part of a system with multiple components that together can inform progress towards high quality ECE.

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Slide from Halle (2010) and Zaslow (2009); presentations summarizing Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How
Four Major Purposes of Assessment

- Guide children’s care and instruction
- Identify special needs
- Monitor trends/Evaluate services (in aggregate)
- High-stakes accountability

From Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments (1998)
Purpose 1: Guide Care and Instruction

• Who uses the data? teachers
• Methods: observation, work samples
• Aligned with the curriculum
• Low stakes; used to make day-to-day decisions in classroom
• All children in classroom or program need to be assessed in order to inform care and instruction
Purpose 2: Identify Special Needs

• Who uses the data? parent, teachers, specialists
• 2-stages of data collection
  • brief screening (or referral)
  • In-depth assessment (if needed)
• Not aligned with curriculum
• Screenings used for referral for further assessment only
  • Not used to exclude children from programs or group children of low ability (tracking)
Purpose 3: Monitor Trends/Evaluating Services in Aggregate

- Examples: kindergarten skills every 3 years; quality of early care and education collectively
- *Who uses the data?* policymakers, public
- Moderate stakes
  - No decisions about individual children, teachers, programs
- Do not need to assess every child; sampling is sufficient
- Child assessments should not be the only source of data used to evaluate services
Purpose 4: High Stakes Accountability

- Who uses the data? Policymakers, public
- “High stakes” = consequences for individual children, teachers, or programs/schools
- Principles & Recommendations report suggests delaying high-stakes assessment of children until 3rd grade
- Accountability Testing
- Require monitoring of children’s skills
- Require an intervention plan to support children who need extra help
Considerations
Perspectives on Assessing Young Children

- Children vary widely in their development
- The younger the child, the fewer the assessment tools—and the harder to find a tool with good reliability and validity
- Paper and pencil tests won’t work
- Assessing younger children is harder than assessing older children
- School readiness or kindergarten entry assessments should cover multiple domains of development (e.g. cognitive, social-emotional, physical and motor development, language/literacy, approaches to learning)
  - Though we have more measures in some domains (e.g., language) than others (e.g., approaches to learning)
- Our assessment tools are very limited for children who do not speak English or have disabilities
Direct vs. Observational Assessments

Direct

• Presenting child with common set of questions
• Recording their responses
• Standardized and highly objective
• Often used in large-scale research

Observational

• Observations or ratings of children’s knowledge, skills, or abilities based on performance, behavior, or work in the classroom
• Often criterion-referenced to determine whether the child knows particular content

Adapted from Daily (2013)
**Objective 19** Demonstrates emergent writing skills

### a. Writes name

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Yet</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scribbles or marks</td>
<td>Controlled linear scribbles</td>
<td>Mock letters or letter-like forms</td>
<td>Letter strings</td>
<td>Partially accurate name</td>
<td>Accurate name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scribble writes deliberately</td>
<td>• Scribbles lines, circles, or zigzags in rows</td>
<td>• Writes segments of letter forms, e.g., lines, curves</td>
<td>• Writes letters in unconventional order</td>
<td>• Writes all the letters of own name, although some may not be sequenced correctly</td>
<td>• Writes all the letters of own name, although they are not formed or oriented correctly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Makes marks that appear to adults to be in random order</td>
<td>• Often repeats action and forms</td>
<td>• May use too many segments to create a letter, e.g., five horizontal lines on the letter E</td>
<td>• May not orient letter segments correctly</td>
<td>• Uses uppercase or lowercase letters (or a combination of both) when writing name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Caroline**

**Lilly**

**Paula**

**Emma**

**Vicky**

**Brooke**
How many apples do you see:

Name these letters:

G W I K Y
Observational/Rating Assessments

Advantages

• No disruption in child’s ongoing routine
• Multiple opportunities to demonstrate skills

Disadvantages

• Difficult to achieve agreement between 2 teachers/observers
• Usually does not allow for comparisons of child to others her age
• Teacher/observe bias if there are perceived consequences
Direct/Standardized Assessments

Advantages

• Usually allow comparisons of child to others her age
• Higher consistency across assessors
• Less teacher/observer bias

Disadvantages

• May not accurately reflect skills
  • One chance to demonstrate skills
  • Outside of the classroom routine
• Format may be unusual for child
  • May not stay engaged
  • May not be comfortable verbally responding to questions
Requirements for *Either* Type of Assessment

Slide from Halle (2010) and Zaslow (2009); presentations summarizing Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How
Early Childhood Assessment System Pieces

- **Standards**: for program quality and children’s learning and development
- **Assessments**: of program quality and children’s skills
- **Reporting**: Data and results available to stakeholders
- **Professional development**: Ongoing support for assessments and use of information
- **Opportunity to learn**: Procedures for assessing whether environments are high quality
- **Inclusion**: assessment works for all children
- **Resources**: ongoing financial support
- **Monitoring and evaluation**: Monitoring to ensure that assessment & other pieces are working as intended

Some Considerations from *Early Childhood Assessment: What, Why, and How*

- The assessment strategy should match the purpose (p. 5)
- Consider the burden on children and teachers (p. 5)
- An assessment tool should have evidence of its reliability and validity for the intended purpose and population of children (p. 6)
- Decision-makers should provide an “audit trail” (i.e., documentation) for decisions made (p. 7)
- High-stakes decisions about teachers or programs should not be based on a single source of information (p. 356)
Use of Child Assessments in Program-Level Accountability

Should happen only when (p. 11)

- Progress in children’s skills is measured (not just gathered at 1 point in time, at the end of the program; p. 344)
- Data about inputs are taken into account (e.g., child and family risk factors)
- Information about program quality is also used along with child assessment data
- Programs have the support they need to improve

What are other states doing?
16 states use commercially developed tools
• Teaching Strategies GOLD used in 9 states
  • Alabama, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Washington
• Other tools:
  • Brigance Early Childhood Kindergarten Screen, Desired Results Developmental Profile, Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening, Qualls Early Learning Inventory, STAR Early Literacy

13 states have developed their own tools
• Alaska, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont

http://ceelo.org/ceelo-products/assessment/
Enhanced Assessment Grant Consortia

• Maryland-Ohio Consortium: Connecticut, Maryland, Ohio, and Tennessee
  • Kindergarten Readiness Assessment plus Early Learning Assessment (36-72 months)
  • Designed to inform instruction
  • Teacher/computer-administered and observations

• North Carolina Consortium: Arizona, Delaware, DC, Iowa, Maine, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island
  • Formative K-3 assessment based
  • Designed to inform instruction
  • Observations

• Texas Consortium TX KEA
  • Designed to inform instruction
  • Mix of teacher-administered assessment and teacher surveys/observations

http://ceelo.org/ceelo-products/assessment/
Final Thoughts

- No one “right” way
- Attend to the recommendations/guidelines/best practices as best you can
- Think about unintended negative consequences and what you might do to safeguard against them
- Invest in the assessment system, not just the tool(s)
- Give it time: Don’t use the data until there is evidence that it implemented at scale and as intended
- Include teachers, administrators, and families throughout the process
- More likely to succeed in the long term if you start small with changes or anything new
The Ideal (from Kelly’s perspective)

- To understand whether programs are effective:
  - Revise monitoring of individual programs: Focus monitoring on key standards, including documentation that the program uses data to guide care and instruction. Do not use 1-time assessment of children for program accountability.
  - Fund program evaluations: Fund program evaluations that include data from a sample of programs, families, and children. Do not need to evaluate every type of service every year. Develop a long-term plan.

- To support care and instruction of children:
  - Approve 1 or set of assessments to guide care and instruction: Approve 1 or a small list of assessments that are aligned with FL early learning and development standards. Require programs receiving state funds to use one of these assessments.
To help identify children with special needs early:

**Review tools used to screen for possible special needs:** Identify organizations responsible for screening children B-5 and ensure that they are using screening tools that have evidence for their reliability and validity. Encourage other organizations to partner, not duplicate.
Resources

Principals and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessment (1998)
https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED416033
