The Power of Assessment

Instructor’s Manual

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Introduction to the Instructor’s Manual

*The Power of Assessment* is a practical guide to early childhood classroom assessment written for undergraduate students and practicing educators. This *Instructor’s Manual* is designed to be equally practical.

Organization of Each Chapter

Except the introductory and concluding chapters, each chapter of this *Manual* includes the following sections:

**Overview**—Summarizes the essential knowledge, concepts, and skills presented in the corresponding chapter of *The Power of Assessment*.

**Instructor to Instructor**—Explains my approach to teaching the corresponding chapter, what I emphasize, and the ideas with which my students have struggled.

**Chapter Outline**—Lists the corresponding chapter’s major ideas.

**Important Vocabulary**—Shows the definitions of important terms used in the corresponding chapter. (This section is included for most but not all chapters.)

**Activities**—Briefly describes several activities. I assume that you have your own style and approach to teaching assessment, so I provide only essential information. Each activity can be implemented in a variety of ways, depending on your students, the amount of time you have, your teaching preferences, etc. Most can be done in pairs, in small or large groups, as jigsaw activities, as round robins, as gallery walks, and so on. Some activities also appear as assignments.

**Discussion Questions**—Presents questions that have engaged my students in spirited classroom discussions.

**Assignments**—Only some chapters of this *Manual* include assignments because most of my assignments integrate learning from multiple chapters. I describe the main idea of an assignment so that you can modify it to reflect the way you teach the content. More assignments are presented in the appendices.

**Suggested Resources**—Lists position statements, journal articles, and books related to chapter-specific topics. These resources can be assigned as additional readings to provide a foundation for discussion, or they may become the basis for a different assignment.
Terminology
I refer to college students, whether graduate or undergraduate, as students. I refer to infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and kindergartners as children.

My Approach
I have taught undergraduate early childhood assessment courses in both short and long formats. Some semesters, the class is scheduled to meet once a week for 2 1/2 hours. Other semesters, we meet twice a week for 1 1/4 hours. During the allotted time, I use a variety of pedagogical methods, including short lectures, discussions of readings and assessment issues, and small- and large-group activities.

I generally introduce a new topic with an activity or a discussion that helps students consider their prior knowledge of the subject and that stimulates their interest. I present important points in a lecture or have students participate in a focused discussion based on assigned reading. I try to provide a hands-on activity for each main topic, employing an array of activity structures and approaches. I have students work alone, in pairs, in small groups (both stable and changing), and large groups. At the end of each topic, I either summarize the important points or ask students to do quick-writes or exit papers (quickly responding to a question in a minute or 2). These and other activities help them summarize and integrate their learning.

I regularly ask students about previously covered topics. At the beginning of class, I often pose a question about the previous course session. This reminds them of my expectation that they accept responsibility for acquiring the skills and knowledge presented in the course.

I prefer to assess students the same way I want them to assess young children, so I rarely give tests. Instead, the course uses performance-based assessments that require students to be involved in an early childhood classroom for 6–8 hours over two to three visits.

Using the Book
Should you need more ideas, you may choose to expand on the “Reflect on Your Practice” questions embedded in each chapter. Consider assigning some of the suggested resources and base activities or discussions around them. You might also expand on the scenarios, vignettes, and illustrations in the book.
Introduction

Overview  Chapter 1 begins by illustrating ways we use assessment in our daily lives, both personally and professionally. It then situates assessment in the classroom and shows that assessment originates from a teacher’s need for information about children’s learning to guide his or her teaching. It introduces the concept of *formative assessment*, which is the systematic collection, interpretation, and use of information to enhance children’s learning. Finally, chapter 1 explains the overall organization of the book and briefly summarizes each chapter.

Students often think of assessment courses as being difficult. It is therefore important for students to read the introduction to the *The Power of Assessment*, which will help them realize that they frequently engage in assessment activities in their personal and professional lives.

Instructor to Instructor

I introduce assessment on the first day of class by helping students consider their own experiences. In chapter 1, I point out, “When you collect information in order to make good decisions, you are using an assessment process.” I want students to understand that, at its heart, assessment is straightforward and essential to effective teaching.

Chapter Outline

*A Personal Look at Assessment*
- Beyond Paperwork: Intentional Assessment to Support Learning
- What information should I collect?
- How should I gather information? How much do I need?
- What am I learning about each child?
- How do I use what I learn?

What Lies Ahead
Activities

1. Defining assessment. On the first day of class, ask students to talk about what assessment means to them. Give them a few minutes to think about their own experiences with being assessed both in and out of school. Have them write words and phrases that express the thoughts and feelings they have when they hear the word assessment.

After students list relevant words and phrases, ask volunteers to share their work. Write their ideas on a whiteboard or type them into a PowerPoint® slide.

When you think that everyone’s ideas have been shared, give students time to review the words and phrases. What do they notice? Do some belong together? Do some of the words and phrases summarize concepts? Do others focus on emotions?

End the activity by concluding that the complexity of assessment is one of the reasons that it is interesting. Everyone has been assessed and has feelings about it. Moreover, teachers may feel overwhelmed by requirements and mandates related to assessment. It is important for students to understand that assessment can help teachers think about children’s learning.

2. Learning from previous assessment experiences and knowledge. Think-Pair-Share about past and current assessment experiences at school or work. Encourage students to reflect on both positive and negative experiences. Ask volunteers to share their stories. Ask the group to draw general conclusions about the factors that contribute to positive and negative assessment experiences.

Discussion Questions

Ask students to think about their own experiences while being assessed. Then ask them to respond to the following questions:

1. Were any assessment experiences negative? Why were they negative?
2. Have you had positive assessment experiences? What made them positive?
3. When an experience was positive for you, was it also positive for others being assessed?
4. What are some of the characteristics of positive assessment experiences? Of negative assessment experiences?
Overview  Chapter 2 introduces the broader field of assessment. Although *The Power of Assessment* focuses on classroom and formative assessment, early childhood teachers need to be aware of other purposes for assessment and the various types of assessment tools and processes. This chapter also introduces assessment as an iterative cycle. Several terms are defined, including *formative assessment*, *summative assessment*, *curriculum-embedded assessment*, *performance*, and *progress*.

Instructor to Instructor

When teaching this chapter, I emphasize two main points. First, teachers use the various types of assessment tools for particular purposes. Educators need a working knowledge of the major types of assessment tools and processes.

Second, assessment results are only valid when the instruments are used for their intended purposes and administered by a qualified examiner. For example, screening tools should not be used for the pre–post assessment of learning over time or to measure the success of a program. They should only be used to identify children who need further, in-depth evaluation.

Although reliability and validity are not discussed until chapter 12, I introduce these concepts as I present the overview of assessment so that we can use them as we discuss assessment issues.
Chapter Outline

Defining Assessment as a Cycle
• Ask questions
• Collect data
• Interpret data
• Take action

Purposes of Assessment
• Promote children's learning and development
• Identify children who may have special needs
• Determine whether a child has a disability and how that disability affects the child's development and learning
• Evaluate the effectiveness of programs for young children (accountability)

Types of Assessment and Assessment Tools
• Learning and development
• Formative assessment tools help you adjust your teaching to improve children's learning
• Summative assessment tools are used at the end of a period of time or a unit of learning

Screening
• Developmental screening tools identify children who may have developmental disabilities or learning problems
• Follow-up is essential
• Misuse may be a problem

Readiness
• The quality and trustworthiness of results is often in question
• The validity of some tests is in doubt

Diagnostic Evaluation

Program Quality

Using a Variety of Assessment Tools
Activities

1. **Identifying and classifying assessment tools and processes.** Ask small groups of students to list the types of assessment tools and approaches mentioned in the three vignettes in the section “Using a Variety of Assessment Tools.” Have them determine whether or not each tool or process was used formatively or summatively, whether or not it measured performance or progress, and whether or not the assessment could be described as curriculum-embedded.

2. **Observation of standardized administration of a screening test.** Arrange for students to observe the standardized administration of a screening tool. Many screening instruments have demonstration or training videos that can be used for this purpose. Train students to administer several items of the tool. Classroom teachers often administer these instruments, so it is important for them to recognize how carefully examiners must follow the test protocols.

3. **School-readiness expectations.** Gather information from local kindergarten programs about the skills and knowledge they expect entering kindergartners to demonstrate. Have students evaluate whether or not the programs’ expectations are developmentally appropriate.
Discussion Questions

1. Have students read the 2003 position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS-SDC), *Early childhood curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation: Building an effective, accountable system in programs for children birth through age 8*. I usually tell students to skim the first part of the statement and carefully read the sections on assessment.

Describe and discuss the NAEYC/NAECS-SDC indicators of effective early childhood assessments. Ask, “How do these indicators align with the information presented in chapter 2?

2. Have a class discussion about school readiness. Ask, “What makes a child ready for school?” This discussion can be enriched by having students read Marshall (2003) and Maxwell & Clifford (2004). (See the suggested resources for chapter 2.)

Suggested Resources


CHAPTER 3

Classroom-Based Assessment: The Cycle in Use

Overview  Chapter 3 provides an overview of each phase of the assessment cycle by presenting classroom vignettes. (Each phase of the cycle is discussed in greater depth in later chapters.) It describes how the cycle repeats over time, explaining that taking action leads to new questions and that collecting data to answer them begins again.

Instructor to Instructor
This chapter emphasizes the ways in which the assessment cycle links assessment with curriculum and instruction. Assessment, curriculum, and instruction are inextricably interwoven, so they should be conceptualized together as teachers plan.

Assessment information should be used to benefit children through improved teaching and learning. If teachers decide what they want to know but do not continue the assessment cycle after collecting and interpreting data, their efforts are wasted. Instead, the goal is to use assessment results to differentiate teaching in ways that support each child’s learning and development.

Finally, chapter 3 presents the assessment cycle as a process in which teachers actively collect information to learn about the children in their classrooms. In my experience, observation is too often presented as a passive process by which teachers somehow spontaneously—magically—witness everything they want to know about children. Clearly, that is not the case. This chapter gives many examples of teachers actively and intentionally looking for information and establishing situations in which children can reveal their skills and knowledge. These teachers interact, facilitate, and assess simultaneously.

Chapter Outline

Asking Questions
Collecting Data
Interpreting Data
Taking Action
The Cycle in Use
Activities

1. **Brainstorming teachers’ questions and decisions.** Discuss the types of questions teachers have and decisions they must make. Make a two-column chart and brainstorm a list of questions and decisions. Write them in the left column. Sometimes undergraduate students who do not have a great deal of classroom teaching experience have difficulty getting started. Be ready with some examples. For example, you might suggest these: Who can follow directions? Who needs help with transitions? Who can communicate wants and needs? How should I arrange seating when I read a story? Why has Jake’s behavior changed? Has it really changed?

Once you have a list, ask whether or not the questions can be organized in some way. Do they fall into categories? If so, note categories in the right column.

Discuss how questions and decisions change over time.

2. **Brainstorming types of data.** Brainstorm types of data, or evidence of children’s learning, that teachers might collect. Be sure that students consider sources outside the classroom and information from people other than the classroom teacher.

3. **Linking questions and data.** Now have students consider the types of data that have the greatest probability of answering the questions raised during Activity 1 for this chapter.

4. **Sources of data.** As an example, Ms. Mackey has observed repeated instances of Aaron’s physical and verbal aggression. She wants to know whether or not Aaron behaves aggressively in other environments. What other data sources and settings should she consider?

5. **Imagining use of the assessment cycle.** Ask students to think of classrooms in which they have observed. Help them identify one or two questions they had about a child or a group of children in the classroom. Then ask them to complete the following chart by a) describing the type of data they would want to collect, and how and when they might collect it; b) offering possible explanations of the data; and c) detailing the actions they might take in response to their interpretations. Think of ways to scaffold students’ learning as they participate in this activity, especially if they do not have much experience with teaching young children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Data Collection (type of data, how, when, where)</th>
<th>Possible Interpretations</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Important Vocabulary**

**interpret**

explain or tell the meaning of something; make inferences or draw conclusions on the basis of evidence
Discussion Question

1. Have students reread the chapter 1 examples about assessment in daily life. Encourage them to think about situations such as selecting melons or deciding which car to buy. Ask, “How do such decisions relate to the assessment cycle?”

Suggested Resources


Asking Questions

Overview  Chapter 4 focuses in greater depth on the first phase of the assessment cycle: asking questions. This relates to the content of assessment. What are we trying to learn? Teachers’ questions and decisions center on children’s knowledge, skills, and approaches to learning as well as the resolution of classroom problems and challenges. The way teachers’ questions change over time is also addressed.

Instructor to Instructor

In this chapter, I focus on helping students clarify what they are trying to assess. When students are clear about what and why they are assessing, it is more likely that they will be able to collect the evidence they need. Part of this clarity results from having a detailed picture of what a specific skill looks like and what constitutes its mastery. For example, at some point in elementary school, most students are expected to “know” state capitals. However, if you poll your class, you will find that your students’ teachers had different expectations about how that knowledge should be demonstrated. Some students had to fill in a chart with the name of each state’s capital. Others had to locate and name the capitals on a map that did not include state names. Still others had to recite every state and its capital. Which performance did a particular teacher accept as adequate evidence that a child knew the state capitals?

When discussing the content of assessment, assessing accomplishment of curricular content, goals, and objectives becomes a focus. Because there are so many different approaches to writing goals and objectives, I often ask students to gather materials from other classes and reflect on their prior knowledge. For assessment, learning must be described clearly so teachers can be confident that they will know when it has occurred.

Standards play a large role in this chapter. All states have standards for preschool children, and many have them for infants and toddlers. It is important for teachers to understand children’s acquisition of the specified knowledge and skills and for them to be able to assess children’s learning in developmentally appropriate ways. Make sure students know the standards that guide the work of early childhood teachers in your state. For example,
early childhood educators in Michigan should know about the Michigan Career and College Ready Common Core State Standards, the Grade Level Content Expectations for Social Studies, the Grade Level Content Expectations for Science, the Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten, the Standards of Quality for Infants and Toddlers, and the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework.

I also emphasize that teachers should focus on important information rather than fixate on easily collected information such as shapes, colors, rote counting, etc. Using Bloom’s taxonomy, we discuss complexity of thinking and the ease of collecting data that illustrates knowledge, comprehension, and application. Although more challenging, it is critical to obtain information about children’s abilities to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate.

Chapter Outline

Assessing What Children Know and Can Do
- Child development
- Curricular content
- Standards

Assessing Children as Learners
- Working approach
- Multiple intelligences
- Dispositions

Assessing to Solve Problems

How Teachers’ Questions Change Over Time
- Before the school year begins or before meeting a child
- During the first few weeks of school
- Throughout the year
- Before progress reports are due
- At the end of the year

Guidelines for Deciding What to Assess
- Only assess learning that is important enough to teach
- Focus on your fundamental questions, not specific activities
- Think about how much information is enough
- Be realistic about how many different items you can assess
- Consider how timing affects what you assess
- Assess learning and development that is important to a child’s life
- Be sure the information is useful
Activities

1. **Review state standards.** (This can be a small-group activity or a written assignment for individuals.) Have students search the Internet for your state's standards for early childhood education. Ask them to answer the following questions: What ages do the standards cover? What domains or subject areas are included? Are performance standards presented?

2. **Compare standards.** Have students research another state's standards. Ask them to answer these questions: What ages are covered? What domains or subject areas are included? Are performance standards presented?

Then have students compare and contrast the two sets of standards. Encourage them to consider some of the following questions:

- How are they organized?
- Are they clearly written?
- Do they measure meaningful content?
- How many standards are there?
- Are they general or specific?
- Are they measurable?
- Are they broad enough to allow teachers to teach the content in different ways that accord with children's needs?
- Do the standards require children to think critically, or do they concentrate on rote skills that are easy to measure?
- Are useful extra materials included?
- Are they user friendly?
- Are they developmentally appropriate?
3. **Review a lesson/activity plan.** Find sample lesson or activity plans. Remove the objectives. Have students list what children might learn from the experiences. How might a teacher collect data about the children’s learning?

4. **Relate objectives and evidence.** Give students a learning objective. Ask, “What evidence would you need in order to think that the child has accomplished the objective?”

5. **Analyze a task.** This chapter emphasizes the need to be clear about what you are assessing. One way to do this is to teach students about task analysis. Assign each small group a simple task to analyze. Have students identify each step or skill that must be mastered before the entire task can be accomplished.

**Discussion Question**

Some teachers review all available information about a particular child before the child enters the classroom. Others prefer to meet the child first and, with the exception of some basic safety information (e.g., allergies, who may pick the child up from school, etc.), let their impressions be guided only by their interactions with and observations of the child. Ask, “What are the pros and cons of each approach?”

**Suggested Resources**


Three books that present methods for using early learning standards to guide teaching and that provide general information about standards-based assessment are


Two articles that present ways to integrate standards into child-centered, play-based teaching are


**Standards**


**Position Statement**


**Web Sites**

**Common Core State Standards Initiative**

http://www.corestandards.org

At the time of this printing, 45 states and the District of Columbia had adopted the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics and the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. The standards were developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association.

**Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**

http://www.mcrel.org:80/topics/Standards/

McREL is a nonprofit organization created to help educators bridge the gap between research and practice. The staff creates research-based, practical, user-friendly products that help educators establish classrooms that provide all students with opportunities for success. Among other topics, they address early childhood education, standards, and assessment.
Collecting Data: Observing Young Children

Overview  Chapter 5 is the first of three chapters that address the second phase of the assessment cycle: data collection. Various forms of data provide teachers with the evidence they need to make decisions and answer questions about children’s learning. It is critical that students develop the ability to be objective, effective, and efficient observers because observation is part of many different assessment approaches. The chapter begins with eight guidelines for observing effectively, and it discusses issues related to recording observations. Once teachers have data, the next challenge is to organize it so that it can be regularly reviewed to enhance and facilitate classroom instruction.

Instructor to Instructor

From my experience working with pre-service and in-service teachers, I emphasize the following points:

• Teachers need to be realistic about how much time they can spend observing and how much data they can collect. Given the complex, multidimensional nature of the early childhood classroom, teachers cannot see everything that goes on. Teachers can spend a few minutes a day out of the action, but they cannot take more time out than that. They must therefore think strategically and set realistic observation goals. Teachers need to develop an array of observation methods and tools to effectively capture diverse information types at different times of the day and in various situations.

• Good observers keep notes in multiple ways. If you are working with experienced teachers who have effective techniques for recording data, they should continue to use those. In contrast, pre-service teachers need experience with different methods in order to figure out what works for them. The six methods I emphasize are the ones I observe teachers using most frequently. Encourage students to develop simple, targeted observation techniques and tools. Complicated, color-coded systems are often too complex for most teachers to maintain.
When I have reviewed the observation materials of beginning teachers, I have often noticed that they have multiple records of easily collected data (i.e. naming shapes, colors, rote counting, and transitions). Once students or practicing teachers learn that they do not need to record every instance of a frequently demonstrated skill, they begin to use their time more efficiently.

Many teachers are excellent observers and note takers, but they lose track of their observation records or do not have an organized way of storing them. This is a crucial point. If teachers cannot access their observations, they will not be able to review and use them as evidence for making instructional decisions and writing progress reports.

The teachers who are most successful at using observation for assessment purposes plan what they will observe each week at the same time that they plan their curriculum. Their observations are targeted and purposeful. Encourage beginning teachers to develop the habit of building assessment plans into their lesson plans.

Chapter Outline

Guidelines for Observing
- Be objective
- Listen
- Observe at different times and in different situations
- Observe over time
- Record what you observe
- Date observation notes, photos, and video clips
- Maintain confidentiality
- Create realistic goals for observing

Recording Observations
- When to record
  - In the action
  - Out of the action
  - After the fact
- How to record
  - Brief notes
  - Anecdotal notes
  - Running records
  - Diagrams, sketches, and photographs
  - Matrices
  - Tallies
  - Other technology
  - A streamlined recording process
- Recording Tools
  - Legal pads
  - Labels
  - Index cards
  - Sticky notes
  - Teacher-made observation forms
  - Pen or pencil
Managing Observation Data
- Designate a place to put your documentation at the end of each day
- Allocate a few minutes at the end of each day to make sure your observation records are in the designated place
- Sort your observation records by child every 2 or 3 days
- Organize your observation records to learn about individual children and the group

Planning for Observation and Documentation
- Observing development, curricular objectives, and standards
  - Focus on curricular goals as you plan learning activities
  - Focus on assessment goals as you plan instructional activities
- Observing individuals
- Observing to solve problems

Talking With Children About Observation
- Talk about learning
- Talk about your writing
- Communicate caring and respect
- Balance observation and interaction

Activities
1. **Distinguishing facts from interpretations.** Use short, 2- to 4-minute videos of children in classroom settings to teach students to observe objectively. Play a video and ask students to write notes about what they see and hear. Chart their responses. Then review those responses, asking students to identify which are facts and which are interpretations. For each interpretation, ask students to describe the facts that led to the interpretation. When students disagree about facts and interpretations, discuss them until the group reaches consensus. Watch the video a second time, asking students to record only facts. See “Suggested Resources” for excellent observation DVDs.

2. **Recording facts.** Discuss how writing only the facts changes the experience. Is it easier? More difficult? For some students, studying to be a teacher means learning to make interpretations. For them, writing only facts seems purposeless. Ask students how long the video was. Discuss whether or not it makes sense to say that a child is overly active, persistent, or curious after observing for such a short time.

3. **Analyzing records and summarizing information.** Copy or create a file for a child that includes a variety of different types of observation records covering several months. Include information collected with different observation methods and tools. Make copies of this file for pairs of students to analyze. Ask them to identify the observation tool they want to try first and explain why. Have them summarize what they know from the observations about the child’s development, knowledge, and skills.
4. **Gathering data about particular skills.** Ask students to think about skills in several different developmental domains or subject areas. Examples might be one-to-one correspondence, interacting with other children, participating in classroom activities, using materials flexibly, or eye–hand coordination. Assign one skill to each small group. Have the students decide when (during the schedule of daily activities) and where they are most likely to gather data about this particular skill. You could also ask them to plan experiences that would enable children to demonstrate and practice the assigned skill(s).

5. **Gathering data during particular activities.** For each small group of students, designate an activity in which children might be engaged (snack, outdoors, indoor obstacle course, reading a story at large-group time, getting ready to go outside, etc.). Have students use your state standards, a checklist, or a list of developmental expectations to find 3–5 skills they might observe during the activity. For example, during snack, teachers could observe sharing, use of questions, descriptive language, etc.

6. **Collecting data related to particular domains.** Have students record what they see and hear as they watch a short video of one or two children in a classroom. Ask them to share their notes with their small group. Then assign each small group a focus (social–emotional, approaches to learning, math, science, literacy, language, fine-motor, or gross-motor). Replay the video. Ask students to record what they see and hear as they concentrate on finding evidence of skills related to the assigned domains. Combine tables and share observation records. Did people with different foci record different things?

7. **Exploring observation tools.** Make or buy examples of various observation tools and give students an opportunity to examine them. The actual tools spark more discussion than illustrations in the book.

8. **Incorporating observation in lesson plans.** Give students a lesson plan and have them plan what to observe during that lesson. Then have them identify and perhaps make the materials they would need to observe efficiently.

9. **Matrices.** Be sure that students know how to use matrices appropriately. Although we often observe individual children, teachers sometimes have to know how all children are doing with particular skills. Together, fill out a matrix that might be used for a week during group time or gym time.

10. **Books about classroom observation.** There are many wonderful books on classroom observation. Students respond differently to these various resources. Share your own collection.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Discuss how and why we form first impressions. Ask students for examples of a time when their initial impression of someone changed when they acquired additional information about or experience with that person. Ask whether or not anyone has an older sibling whose reputation affected the way he or she was perceived in school. How does that apply to observation?

2. Discuss the pitfalls of labeling a child. Why do we do it?

3. After students have read the eight guidelines for observing, ask them to explain the reasoning behind each guideline.

4. Define bias for students. Discuss how observations might be biased.
Assignments

1. **Open-ended observation.** Ask students to observe a child at a child care center for 5 minutes and record everything the child says and does. Have them highlight any interpretations and write the facts that led to those interpretations. See Appendix 3.

2. **Language sample.** Have students take language samples, writing exactly what a child says, including errors and mispronunciations. See Appendix 4.

3. **Domain observation.** Have students write brief anecdotes and assign them to domains (social–emotional, communication, cognition, fine-motor, or gross-motor). See Appendix 5.

### Suggested Resources


Collecting Data: Using Checklists and Rating Scales

Overview  Chapter 6 describes a second approach to data collection: using checklists. After first distinguishing checklists from rating scales, it offers nine guidelines for using checklists successfully. It also discusses how to make accurate ratings, avoiding common errors that diminish the reliability and validity of checklists. The chapter ends with an analysis of the composition of high-quality checklists and points out their limitations.

Instructor to Instructor

One of the main points of this chapter, and of data collection in general, is that checklist ratings must be based on evidence. For checklists, that evidence could take the form of language samples, observation records, or work samples. We want to discourage teachers from making checklist ratings based solely on memory or impressions rather than tangible evidence.

Selecting the right checklist is critical to data collection. When choosing a checklist, teachers should first determine whether it answers his or her questions about children’s learning. Second, the items on the checklist and the points on the rating scale should be clearly defined. To students, emphasize the importance of using the existing points of a rating scale rather than creating new points midway between existing points. To complete a checklist, teachers gather data, recognizing that they are interpreting that data when they make ratings.

Checklists are helpful for aggregating information about a child or a group of children. However, they are less informative than portfolios for describing how children perform tasks. Help students understand that different questions are best answered by different types of data.
Chapter Outline

Features of Checklists and Rating Scales
- Breadth
- Content
- Rating scale

Using Checklists Effectively
- Record what you observed
- Review existing documentation
- Observe intentionally
- Study children's work
- Plan activities to gather evidence
- Plan for assessing with checklists
- Avoid testing situations
- Gather data for checklists in natural situations
- Complete checklists over time

Making Accurate Ratings
- How much data is enough?
- Understand the meanings of ratings and how to choose among them
- Know the difference between not applicable and not observed

Criteria for High-Quality Checklists
- The content should be purposeful
- Items should be clearly defined
- Items should evaluate meaningful learning
- There should be a reasonable number of items
- The points on the scale should be clearly defined
- The format should be well-organized
- Validity and reliability of checklists

Limitations of Checklists
Activities

1. **Review examples of rating scales.** Supplement your lecture or discussion with examples of checklists and rating scales. Use these to explain terms, to distinguish checklists from rating scales, and to distinguish high-quality checklists from those of lower quality.

2. **Evaluate rating scales.** Have students search for several checklists and rating scales, respecting rules related to copyrights. Give them time to share their findings.

   Have students compare and contrast the checklists. Analyze the lists in terms of rating scales, definitions of points on the rating scales, number of points on the scales, number of items, match with your state standards, the meaningfulness of items, clear definition of items, and whether the formats make them easy to use. You might make a task sheet to enhance this work. A sample is shown in Appendix 6.

   Have each small group evaluate a checklist according to the criteria for effective checklists and determine the most and least effective checklists.

3. **Analyze rating scale items.** Give students examples of checklist items of similar or different content. Ask students to rank them in terms of effectiveness and to explain their decisions.

4. **Gain familiarity with commercially available checklists.** Many widely used, valid checklists are available for assessing young children. The *Child Observation Record*, *The Work Sampling System*, and *Teaching Strategies GOLD* are some examples. Show students one or more of the observational checklist systems in the field.
5. **Link activities to checklists.** Give pairs of students a toy or material used by preschoolers or by infants and toddlers. Have students identify how they might use the toy or material for assessment. Given any checklist, they should decide which items might be informed by a child’s interaction with the material.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Discuss how checklists are sometimes misused.

2. Discuss the issue of how much evidence is enough. What factors influence how much evidence is necessary? Does the necessary quantity of information vary according to the questions teachers are trying to answer?

3. Ask your students to consider a scenario in which Mr. Westerman prepares to assess how well children use language and otherwise communicate. How can he best gather data during routines, outside activities, and while interacting with the children in his classroom? Which of these contexts would probably yield the best data? Why?

**Suggested Resources**

Center for Child and Family Studies at WestEd, & Berkeley Evaluation and Assessment Research Center at the University of California, Berkeley. (2006). *Desired results developmental profile-revised (DRDP-R)*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education Press. (This curriculum-embedded measure for children from birth through 12 years aligns with the California standards.)


Collecting Data: Creating Portfolios

Overview  In *The Power of Assessment*, portfolio creation is the third approach to data collection. Chapter 7 explores the various types of portfolios and their purposes. Nine guidelines for effective portfolios are presented. Portfolio creation is discussed as a two-part process: collecting work for possible inclusion in portfolios and then selecting actual portfolio items from the collected work. Because portfolios contain samples of a child’s work, teachers must be very clear about the questions they want to answer through portfolio creation. Along with providing evidence for assessment decisions, portfolios have two major roles. First, they provide an impetus for both teacher and child reflection on work because they include tangible items for review. Second, they provide common ground for discussions with families about children’s learning.

Instructor to Instructor

Like observation, the key to effective portfolio collection is having a clear focus and actively engaging children in work related to that focus. It is important for teachers to be selective about the work they save and that they take time to organize it. Otherwise, portfolio collection and selection can be overwhelming.

For young children, with whom we use a process-oriented rather than a product-oriented approach to teaching, portfolios are not themselves an assessment instrument, but they provide data for assessment. Items are not scored, nor is the entire portfolio assigned a rating, as may happen in upper-elementary and secondary classrooms. However, portfolios can be used to help teachers make checklist ratings or write progress reports. Given our focus on using assessment to improve teaching and learning, it does not make sense to reduce rich collections of young children’s work to a grade or summative evaluation.
One challenge of portfolio collection is how to obtain concrete, tangible evidence of children’s thinking and learning. Teachers include work samples and annotated photographs in portfolios to try to capture evidence of internal learning processes. When teachers annotate children’s work, they provide critical information for understanding the learning shown by the samples, especially those of very young children.

When teachers help children create portfolios, they integrate teaching, learning, and assessing. Children engage in typical classroom activities while interacting with teachers who are scaffolding their learning. Portfolio items emerge from these activities. The processes of collection and selection further involve the teacher and child in studying and analyzing portfolio items.

One of the greatest strengths of portfolios is that they offer each child the opportunity to display his or her particular approach to learning and preferred ways of demonstrating knowledge. Children should have the opportunity to show what they know in different ways. Certainly, if your focus is on writing, you will want all children to write about a story that you read aloud. However, if your focus is on children’s comprehension of that story, then perhaps some children will write, others may draw, and still others might reenact the story. All of the portfolios will include demonstrations of story comprehension, but the samples will be different.

Portfolios are also great tools for communicating with families. Seeing their children’s work is meaningful for families and keeps them connected with their children’s lives at school.

**Chapter Outline**

**Purposes of Portfolios**
- Show a child’s achievement of objectives or standards
- Show a child’s progress
- Present a child’s best or representative work
- Demonstrate a child’s individuality

**What Goes Into Portfolios**
- Items must match your purpose
- Consider ownership and use of portfolios
- Portfolios should not look alike
- Items should be informative
- Items should tell a story
- Include items that represent all types of learning
- Use child-generated work whenever possible
- Look for items that show multiple skills
- Show the evolution of work

**Collecting Portfolio Items**
- Where will you put children’s work?
  - Portfolio containers
  - Work folders or baskets
- Ways to collect items
  - Planned collection
  - Spontaneous collection
Selecting Portfolio Items
- When?
- Who?
- How?
- How much is enough?

Thinking About the Work in Portfolios
- Think about children’s work when it is created
- Think about children’s work during the collection and selection of portfolio items
- Review completed portfolios

Involving Children and Families in Portfolio Collection
- Supporting children’s ownership of their portfolios
  
  Teach children about portfolios
  Include children in filing work
  Invite children to help select items
  Consider including children in family–teacher conferences
- Using portfolios to involve families
  Communicate the purpose and power of portfolios
  Share portfolios with families at conferences

Three Approaches to Early Childhood Portfolios
- Focused Portfolios™
- The Work Sampling System®
- Teaching Strategies GOLD®

Important Vocabulary

- portfolio: a purposeful and organized collection of a child’s work
- authentic assessment: assessment that engages children in using skills during tasks that involve real-world challenges
- performance assessment: assessment that focuses on the integration and application of skills during performances, demonstrations, and the creation of products

Activities

To teach students about portfolios, it is essential to have several examples for them to see. Students need to have portfolio items in order to analyze the different types of learning that the items document. With permission from both teachers and families, you can make photocopies of actual portfolios and work samples.

1. Worksheet challenge. Provide students with worksheets. Challenge them to redesign them to be effective portfolio items that reflect children’s active engagement with learning.

2. Analyzing work samples. Give students an example of children’s work. Have them list the skills and knowledge a child must have had to do that work. Ask, “What learning does the work document?” Challenge students to explain and justify their interpretations.
3. **Annotating children’s work.** Present students with a piece of work without any annotation. Ask them to list what the work tells them about the child’s knowledge and skills. Then provide the annotation. Ask, “Can some interpretations be eliminated, given the annotation? Can others be added?”

4. **Selecting portfolio items.** Assign Smith, 2000 for students to read (see “Suggested Resources”). Review the selection process. Ask students to describe how they would ask preschoolers and/or kindergartners to talk about or select portfolio pieces. Students should write a dialogue.

5. **Matching data collection to focus.** Provide students with a list of learning objectives or standards that might be assessed. Ask them to distinguish those that would most effectively and efficiently be assessed by using observational data from those most effectively assessed by using work samples in a portfolio.

6. **Identifying early childhood portfolio items.** Assign a learning domain to each group of students (language, literacy, science, social studies, math, science, gross-motor, fine-motor). Have each group identify three pieces of evidence that they would consider for inclusion in a portfolio.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Portfolios can be very time-consuming for teachers. How do you think they enhance teachers’ knowledge of children’s learning? Do you think they are worth the time they take? Why or why not?

2. Ask students to plan the lesson in which they introduce portfolios to preschoolers or kindergartners. Encourage them to be very specific, writing what they would say, what props they would use, and the questions they would pose.

3. “Less is more in portfolio collection.” Ask, “What does this statement mean? Why? Do you agree or disagree with the statement?”

4. “Portfolio items are representations of children’s thinking and learning.” Ask, “What does this statement mean? What challenges does this pose for teachers who use portfolios?”

**Talking with children about portfolios.** Visit an early childhood classroom that uses portfolios. After receiving permission from both the children and the teachers, talk with one or two young children about their portfolios. Ask the child to select one or two items from his or her portfolio to discuss with you. Ask open-ended questions about the items. Then talk with the teacher about the strengths, challenges, and limitations of portfolio collection. Write your findings in two parts: your conversations and your interpretations of those conversations.
Suggested Resources


Helping Children Think About Their Learning

Overview  As teachers collect data, they interact with children, lead and facilitate activities, and make sure the classroom runs smoothly. During data collection, teachers have opportunities to help children think about themselves as learners and to think in more complex ways. Chapter 8 addresses ways to support young children as they begin to recognize themselves as competent thinkers. It begins with a definition of metacognition and then explains five strategies for engaging children in metacognitive activities, critical thinking, and problem solving.

Instructor to Instructor

In elementary- and secondary-school teacher education, educators emphasize students’ development of critical thinking and problem solving skills. Although these skills are equally important during early childhood, they are mentioned less frequently in discussions about very young children. However, establishing habits of inquiry, analysis, and critical thinking is an essential part of fostering children’s cognitive development, and that can be accomplished when teachers interact with children as they are collecting data.

Teachers often do not recognize how important and memorable their words and conversations with children are. Comments, questions, and one-to-one conversations can have a huge impact on children’s self-esteem, motivation to learn, and ability to think critically.
Chapter Outline

Metacognition

Creating an Emotionally Supportive Classroom Climate

Talking About Learning and Assessment
• Talking about learning
• Talking about assessment
• Talking with children individually

Giving Children High-Quality Feedback
• Focus on a clear message
• Be specific
• Communicate the learning goal
• Focus on attitudes, feelings, and the child’s learning process

Teaching Children to Reflect and Make Choices
• Modeling reflective thinking
  - Verbalize your thoughts
  - Model questioning as a problem-solving strategy
  - Investigate thinking programs
• Using questions to foster reflection
• Giving children opportunities to make choices and to plan

Using Portfolios to Promote Reflection
• Encouraging children to reflect
  - Ask questions
  - Give directions
  - Help children set goals for themselves

Important Vocabulary

metacognition
awareness of one's own cognitive functions; the ability to reflect on, monitor, and control one's own thinking

reflection
remembering something and analyzing it
Activities

1. Using prior knowledge about metacognition. In small groups, ask students to recall their own school experiences and respond to these questions:
   - Did you have a teacher who helped you think about your learning?
   - In what ways did he or she encourage you to reflect on what and how you were learning?
   - How did this teacher invite you to think about the progress you were making?
   - Did he or she encourage you to set goals and then assess your progress toward those goals?

2. Using prior knowledge about problem solving. Ask students to solve a problem. Then ask them to discuss and list the steps they took to solve it (their thinking process).

3. Giving clear, specific feedback. Provide students with written descriptions of young children exploring in classrooms. (You may use descriptions from other chapters in the book.) Ask them to provide clear, specific feedback to a child that focuses on learning goals and/or the child’s learning processes.

4. Asking open-ended questions. After a discussion of open-ended questions, give each small group one or two toys or materials commonly found in early childhood classrooms. Ask them to list open-ended questions they might pose to a child engaged with the materials.

5. Talking with children about their learning. Give students the following directions:
   Think about a learning experience you will offer children during the next few days or one in which you have seen children participating during your field placement. Decide how you will talk to them about the purpose of the experience and what they will be learning. Write your “script” and practice it with a few peers. Invite feedback. Then listen and respond to your peers. Next, identify three or four specific questions you might ask children after the learning experience to encourage them to analyze or think critically about it. See page 138 of *The Power of Assessment* for an example of questions about a trip to a fire station.

6. Role playing a conversation. Give students the following directions:
   With a partner, practice having one-to-one conversations that focus on learning. Take turns doing some type of learning activity, such as drawing and writing, building with some materials, or sorting items from your pocket or purse. When you play the “teacher,” watch the “learner” and then initiate a conversation by stating what you see the “learner” doing.
Discussion Questions

1. Direct students to think about a teacher who gave them high-quality feedback. What did he or she say and do? What impact did the teacher’s feedback have on their learning and motivation?

   Discuss the difference between praise and feedback. Ask, “What are some implications of giving each to young children?”

2. Have students discuss ways to create a classroom climate that encourages children to take ownership of their learning.
   Point out that giving young children choices has many benefits, including helping children become more self-directed learners. Ask, “Is it always appropriate to give choices? How do you make decisions about when to give a choice and when to give a direction?”

3. Encourage students to think about their own educational experiences. Ask, “Have you experienced a ‘culture of thinking’ in some classrooms? How did the teacher accomplish this? Have you been in classrooms where you did not feel emotionally safe to take cognitive risks? What do ‘emotionally safe’ classrooms look like at the early childhood level?”

4. Provide students with this quote from Intellectual Emergencies: Some Reflections on Mothering and Teaching (Katz & Katz, 2009) about teachers’ relationships with children:

   Relationships cannot be developed in a vacuum; we have to relate to each other about something—something that matters to the participants in the relationship. The content of our relationship with children should not be mainly about rules, regulations, and conduct, but about their increasing knowledge and developing understandings of those things within and around them worth knowing more about and understanding more deeply, more fully, and more accurately.¹

   Ask students about the implications of this quote as it pertains to interacting with children and fostering their understanding of themselves as learners.

   After some discussion, provide the paragraph that follows the initial quote:

   Cultivate the habit of speaking to children as people—people with minds—usually lively ones. Appeal to their good sense. It is not necessary to be sweet, silly, or sentimental at one extreme, or somber, grim, or harsh at the other end. Let us be genuine, direct, honest, serious, and warm with them, and about them—and sometimes humorous, too.²

Assignment

Supporting children’s metacognition. Have students observe in a classroom during choice time. Direct them to record the actions of two groups of children who are interacting with different materials. In their notes, have them insert questions and comments they might use to help children solve problems and/or think about their own learning.

2. Ibid.
Suggested Resources


**Talking With Children**


**Curricular Approaches That Emphasize Thinking and Self-Direction**


Partnering With Families

Overview  Assessment provides many opportunities for strengthening relationships with families. Chapter 9 discusses skills for developing collaborative partnerships with families, writing progress reports, and sharing assessment findings during family–teacher conferences.

Note.  Given the diversity of family configurations, the term parent is used to mean anyone who nurtures a child in a family context and functions as a primary caregiver, regardless of legal or biological relationship.

Instructor to Instructor

Communicating assessment results is more successful when teachers already have a positive relationship with a family. I do not think you can discuss reports and conferences without talking about some basic strategies for building partnerships with families. I emphasize being honest with and respectful of families.

Writing reports can be challenging for students for several reasons. First, students may lack confidence in their ability to write professionally. The format presented in this chapter can help this group of students. I suggest making a broad statement, backing it up with evidence, setting a goal, and describing plans to reach that goal.

Students may also have difficulty summarizing what they know. Practicing teachers may be required to address every developmental or content area in each report. This approach often overwhelms families with information. I am a firm believer that “less is more.” Three clearly stated main ideas are plenty.

Because conferences are generally brief, teachers have to be extremely well-prepared in order for parents to have a chance to talk. I encourage practicing teachers not to be constrained by the lack of time. Time constraints can be mitigated by scheduling a second, longer conference if necessary.

Evidence is essential when sharing information with families. Narrative reports should include specific examples linked to the broader conclusions the teacher draws. Similarly, conferences should include observation records and work samples to substantiate the teacher’s view.
Chapter Outline

Establishing Collaborative Relationships
• Appreciate the intense feelings parents experience about their child
• Recognize that each family is unique
• Get to know each family’s style of communication
• Have realistic expectations for family involvement
• Tell parents how children will be assessed
• Make regular contact
• Use a variety of ways to communicate
• Treat parents of children with special needs gently
• Assure families that confidentiality will be respected.

Preparing to Share Assessment Information
• Review the evidence
• Focus on two or three main points
• Do not diagnose
• Be accurate and positive, but never mislead
• Identify specific suggestions for each family

Conducting Family–Teacher Conferences
• Preparing for Conferences
  Schedule conferences to meet families’ needs
  Let families know what to expect
  Arrange for a translator and interpreter if necessary
  Plan the way you will conduct the conference
  Know how you will begin
  Arrange the environment
  Decide whether the child will be present at the conference
• During the Conference
  Welcome families
  Ask questions to learn from parents about their child
  Share information about the child’s strengths
  Share concerns about the child
  Answer questions
  Set goals with the family
  Plan ways to work together to meet goals
  Summarize the conference
• Common Conference Challenges

Writing Narrative Progress Reports
• Appearance
• Length
• Tone
• Audience
• Format

Important Vocabulary

anticipatory guidance
letting parents know what skills and behaviors their child is likely to develop next and for what they should be on the lookout
Activities

1. **Defining family.** I often begin this discussion by asking students to list the members of their family. When they ask for further clarification (“Do you mean immediate family? How extended do we go?”), I repeat the instructions. After a few minutes, students share their lists. I ask for the number of persons on each student’s list. We discuss how many persons are on different lists and what that means. Have students included any family members who are not related biologically? Did they include pets? We use this data to explore the meaning of family and how that translates into sharing assessment information with families.

2. **Role-playing a family conference.** Give students a case study about a child that includes some family background information. (In graduate courses, I often provide a form for students to complete. It asks the child’s name, the family configuration, who comes to conferences, the child’s strengths and challenges, issues for the family, etc. The completed forms are used as case studies.) Then have students work in pairs, using a “Conference Planning Form” as they role-play a family–teacher conference. At the end of the role play, the student who is playing the teacher will complete the “Family Conference Summary.” See Appendices 7 and 8.

3. **Evaluating progress reports.** Give students some sample narrative report forms or progress reports from local programs. Ask them to evaluate the form in terms of its appearance, amount of information requested, and format.

   For one of the reports, develop a plan to gather the evidence needed to complete the form.

4. **Analyzing narratives.** Give students samples of completed narrative reports. Ask them to evaluate the reports in terms of content, tone, format, clarity, and amount of information conveyed.

5. **Conference challenges.** When teaching practicing teachers, I often ask them to list challenges they face when facilitating parent–teacher conferences. There is usually a great deal of overlap, with many teachers talking about time constraints, parents’ emotional reactions to their children’s struggles, difficulties working with divorced parents, etc.

   I take 4–6 of the major concerns and write each one at the top of a piece of chart paper. Then we have a round robin, where small groups of students talk about and record ways to resolve a challenge until they are directed to move to the next chart. When a group arrives at a chart, they review the strategies listed by previous groups. Then they put a check mark by strategies they agree with and a question mark by those that are unclear or that they are not sure about. After each group has had a chance to respond to every chart, the entire class moves from chart to chart, discussing resolutions for each challenge.
Discussion Questions

1. Working with families is often a major concern of beginning teachers. Although they may discuss this topic during their coursework, they have little hands-on experience with creating family partnerships, even during student teaching. To help focus your teaching, it can be helpful to ask students about their concerns about collaborating and sharing assessment information with families.

2. How might it affect a conference if the family members you are working with are different from you in cultural background, race, socioeconomic status, or language?

3. Many early childhood teachers dislike writing progress reports and “grading.” Why do you think this is so?

Assignments

1. Provide students with data about a child’s learning during one reporting period. Have them write a narrative report, describing the child’s current performance, goals, what they will do to foster development and learning, and how families can help.

2. Have students design a developmentally appropriate progress report for an infant–toddler, preschool, or kindergarten program. Then have them justify their designs with information and concepts from the readings and class discussions.

Suggested Resources


Culture


Family-Teacher Conferences


Writing Reports


Family (Home) Activities


Interpreting Assessment Data

Overview  Chapter 10 addresses the ways teachers find the meaning of the assessment data they have collected. It describes three types of interpretation: responsive interpretation, interpretation for planning, and evaluative interpretation. Each occurs in a different time frame and has a specific purpose. Responsive interpretation happens quickly in the action of the classroom. Interpretation for planning occurs daily or weekly, enabling the teacher to plan curriculum and keep the classroom running smoothly. Evaluative interpretation takes place after several months, when teachers are preparing to write reports and conduct conferences. They compare children’s performance to standards or expectations, or to past performance.

The remaining sections of the chapter discuss threats to accurate interpretations, the risks of inaccurate interpretations, and how teachers can enhance the accuracy of their interpretations.

Instructor to Instructor

The most difficult thing about teaching this phase of the assessment cycle is that students want to jump from data collection directly to taking action. They often do not recognize that there is an intermediate step. Your goal is to help them develop awareness that, even when teachers are interpreting very quickly, they are drawing some tentative conclusions or making some decisions that lead to action.

Especially for responsive and evaluative interpretation, it is critical that teachers take time to review the evidence about children’s skills and knowledge. Teachers generally start by reviewing their data with a broad focus, gradually moving to a more focused review. Scheduling time for data review is an important habit to develop.
I emphasize the importance of making tentative interpretations that are continually appraised as more data is gathered. Whenever possible, provide students with opportunities to generate multiple interpretations, keeping their thinking about each child flexible. Guide students to think of interpretations as hypotheses that can be confirmed or disproved as actions are taken.

Chapter Outline

Responsive Interpretation

Interpretation for Planning
- Think ahead
- Reflect without a specific focus
- Look for patterns in the data
- Focus on curricular goals and objectives

Evaluative Interpretation
- Comparing data to expectations
- Comparing the child’s current performance to an earlier one

Interpreting Data Accurately
- First impressions
- Who you are influences your interpretations
  - Culture
  - Personality
  - Experience and expertise
- Why accuracy is extremely important
- Expectations guide actions
- Enhancing the accuracy of interpretations
  - Gather enough data
  - Use multiple sources of information
  - Review your data regularly
  - Keep expectations positive, current, and flexible
  - Develop several hypotheses

Interpretation Paves the Way for Action

Important Vocabulary

**interpret**
explain or tell the meaning of something; to make inferences or draw conclusions based on data

**responsive interpretation**
quick interpretation during interactions with children that allows teachers to make informed responses

**interpretation for planning**
interpreting daily or weekly in order to make plans and resolve classroom challenges

**evaluative interpretation**
interpreting after several weeks in order to write progress reports and conduct family–teacher conferences
Activities

1. **Interpreting data.** Give students some data about a child or a group of children. Have them list some tentative interpretations in one column and the corresponding data in a second column.

2. **Responsive interpretation.** Show a video of a child in an early childhood classroom. Ask students to record what they see. Focus on what the child is doing (the skills and processes being used, for example, “The child is using markers to draw lines and circles,” and “The child is writing letter strings and scribbling under the drawing of a house”) and the knowledge evident in the work (“Knows that houses in his neighborhood have windows, that trees have leaves, and that sentences begin with uppercase letters”).

   Then ask students to generate two or three different ways to use this responsive interpretation to provide the child with feedback. Encourage them to think about the reasons for their choices. Have them explain how their feedback or actions will help the child continue to learn.

3. **Interpretation for planning.** Provide students with a set of data related to language and literacy (for example, three observation notes and a work sample). Give them a checklist with literacy skills. Invite them to reflect on the evidence of literacy learning. Have them list the skills and knowledge evident in the collection. Ask, “Based on your observations of the work, what steps you would take next with this child?”

4. **Influence of first impressions.** Reread the example of Eryca on page 186.

   During Eryca's first day of kindergarten, she plays alone and whispers when talking with adults. Her teacher immediately forms the impression that Eryca is shy and will need help to develop social skills. This interpretation leads Eryca's teacher to begin planning ways to help Eryca participate in classroom activities. The teacher notes in her plan book that Eryca will need assistance over the next week with finding friends.

   Encourage students to consider the two questions that follow the example. Ask, “What are your reactions to this story? What else might explain why Eryca played alone on the first day of school?”

   Also ask, “How might this teacher's first impressions interfere with Eryca's success in this classroom?”

5. **Culture.** Encourage students to discuss the following questions in small groups:

   - How would you define the cultural groups to which you belong? Consider age, gender, sexual orientation and expression, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, religion, etc.
   - How might your cultural identity affect your interpretations of children's behavior?
   - Think about the children you teach or observe. Do you need to know more about any of their cultures?

6. **Labeling children.** Forbes and Shannon's *Classroom Assessment Case Book* (2006) provides a variety of brief cases related to assessment. Case 6, “Amateur Analyst,” presents a vignette about a student intern who jumps to the conclusion that a child is hyperactive. Have students read this case. Then discuss the impact that first impressions and labeling children have on the child, his or her peers, and the teacher.
Discussion Questions

1. Have students reflect on their school experiences. Ask. “Did a teacher misjudge you? In what way(s) did a teacher’s impression of you affect the way you learned in the classroom?”

2. Encourage students to respond to the following questions: Are there some types of children you like better than others? Can you think of a child you were drawn to instantly? Why do you think that was? Have you shied away from other children? How can your personal reactions to children affect your teaching and their learning? What can you do about it?

3. In the Art of Awareness, Curtis and Carter (2000) tell a story about and provide a photo of a toddler using a washable marker to decorate his tummy. Some teachers react to this by stating that the child broke the rules. Others immediately anticipate a major cleanup effort, while still others focus on what the child might have been learning when he did that. Depending on their interpretations, teachers would take action in very different ways.

Ask students to think of another behavior of a child that could be interpreted in multiple ways. Have them describe the situation and then generate at least two different interpretations of the same facts.

Suggested Resources


Culture


Taking Action

Overview  Chapter 11 describes the fourth phase of the assessment cycle: taking action based on evidence and interpretations. The chapter gives firsthand accounts of early childhood teachers who described their thinking as they moved through the phases of the assessment cycle. The stories focus on their assessment of individual children, how well groups of children were meeting curricular goals, and resolving common classroom challenges.

Instructor to Instructor

Taking action on behalf of children lies at the heart of early childhood education. You can help students see this phase as both the culmination of the cycle and as a new beginning. Sometimes the action a teacher takes confirms his or her interpretation. At other times, the action does not produce the desired result. This may occur because the steps taken did not work or because the interpretation they were based on was not accurate.

This is also the point at which to emphasize that the assessment cycle is iterative. After taking action, teachers have new questions, and the cycle begins again. They may make a different interpretation, or they may discover that they need to collect additional data.
Chapter Outline

Taking Action to Help Individual Children
• Meeting the needs of a nonverbal child
• Supporting a child who is acquiring English

Taking Action to Help Groups of Children
• Monitoring preschoolers’ gross-motor development
• Investigating mathematical thinking

Taking Action to Resolve Classroom Challenges
• Keeping the classroom safe for all children
• Involving everyone in cleanup

Taking Action: The Long and Short of It

Activities

1. Flexible interpretation. For each vignette in this chapter, generate alternative interpretations that could be based on the data. (Students often become committed to one explanation. If, after taking action, the first interpretation does not seem correct, students need to be willing to widen their lenses and develop other interpretations.)

2. Analyzing a vignette. Assign each small group one of the vignettes in the chapter. Have them reread, analyze, and respond to the following questions:
   • As you read the example, what were your reactions?
   • In what ways did the teacher learn about the child?
   • What did you find surprising about the story?
   • What new ideas did you come away with after reading the story?
   • Do you have additional suggestions for the teacher?

3. Using assessment to resolve classroom challenges. Encourage students to think about challenging classroom situations. They can either invent situations or recall something that they observed. Ask them to offer possible explanations for each situation. Have them explain how they would collect data to help them understand each situation.

4. Using assessment data to plan. Provide a table or other form of aggregated data showing three different levels of performance on a particular group of skills. For example, in a preschool classroom, a teacher might have a large group of children who independently select and read books and who are focused on print, a smaller group of children who only select books with a peer or with teacher assistance, and two children who do not seem to know how to handle books and do not seem to enjoy stories. Ask students for multilevel activities that will benefit all of the children. Have them explain several ways to work with the children.
Discussion Questions

1. Ask, “What are some important messages about effective formative assessment that you took away from reading this chapter?”

2. Prompt, “Did any of the stories in the chapter remind you of situations you have experienced? Explain.”

Assignments

1. **Child observation.** This assignment (Appendix 9) asks students to collect and interpret data about one child, to recommend action, and explain how the evidence supports their recommendations.

2. **Class observation.** This assignment (Appendix 10) requires students to collect and interpret data from the entire class and use their interpretations of the evidence to recommend action.

Suggested Resources


Overview From a review of assessment texts and the position statements of major early childhood organizations, I identified five overarching criteria for high-quality assessment for young children. The assessment tool must
• be developmentally appropriate,
• respect the role of families and children,
• meet technical and ethical standards,
• help teachers teach, and
• benefit children.

Organized around these major criteria, Chapter 12 promotes students’ understanding of basic concepts. Foundational knowledge is particularly important for students who may become responsible for developing assessment processes or evaluating and selecting assessment tools for their programs.

Instructor to Instructor Although validity and reliability are not given deep technical treatment in The Power of Assessment, it is important that students understand the basics associated with these concepts. I very briefly introduce them at the beginning of the course, talk about them in relation to various methods of data collection, and return to them near the end of the course.

The discussion of validity centers on content validity, the requirements that an assessment tool measure what its developers claim to measure and that it match the curriculum. This provides one more opportunity to stress the importance of teachers’ being clear about the focus, or target, of their assessment activities.

The chapter reemphasizes the idea that assessment is only worthwhile if it can be used to improve teaching and learning. Only when the cycle is completed and repeated do teachers realize the full value of assessment.
Chapter Outline

High-Quality Assessment Is Developmentally Appropriate
- Developmental level
  - Attention span
  - Environmental factors
  - Familiarity of the assessor
  - Language and communication
  - Pace and autonomy
- Cultural and linguistic background
  - Culture
  - Language
- Individuality
  - Developmentally appropriate assessment enables children to express what they know and can do in many ways
  - Focuses on all domains to provide a complete picture of the child's learning
  - Accommodates children with disabilities

High-Quality Assessment Respects Families and Children
- A meaningful role for families
- A meaningful role for children

High-Quality Assessment Meets Technical and Ethical Standards
- Validity
  - Content validity
  - Threats to validity
- Reliability
  - Enhancing reliability
- Fairness
  - Enhancing fairness
- Ethical use of assessment information
  - Maintain confidentiality
  - Inform families before making any major decisions
  - Explain assessment strategies clearly
  - Stay informed about laws related to assessment
  - Recognize the limits of your expertise and be careful not to diagnose children
  - Use appropriate assessment processes and tools, and only for their intended purposes

High-Quality Assessment Helps Teachers Teach
- Efficiency and practicality
- Formative information
- Alignment with curriculum
- Authenticity
  - How information is gathered
  - Content of the assessment

High-Quality Assessment Benefits Children
- Children can be given feedback about their learning
- Teachers can get to know and form positive relationships with children
- Teachers can communicate accurately with family members
Important Vocabulary

**validity**
the accuracy of test results

**content validity**
the degree to which an assessment instrument measures what its developers claim to measure

**threats to validity**
factors that diminish validity

**reliability**
consistency or dependability of the assessment results

**biased tool**
an instrument that offends or unfairly discriminates against a particular group of people

Activities

1. **Studying the position statement.** Assign students the assessment portion of the NAEYC and NAEC/SDE (2003) position statement, *Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children Birth through Age 8*. Ask students to respond to the following prompts and to be prepared to report back:
   - What type of document is this? Who developed it and why?
   - Select five of the assessment indicators. How would you use them in an early childhood classroom?

2. **Analyzing scenarios.** Discuss the assessment issues in the following scenarios.
   - Mr. and Mrs. Hernandez do not speak English very well, but they go to school to meet their child’s kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Miller, on the first day. They also attend a family–teacher conference in January, even though a translator is not available. At the end of the year, they are surprised to learn that Mrs. Miller wants their daughter, Rosa, to repeat kindergarten.
   - Mrs. Smith assesses her first graders’ reading skills by using worksheets as tests. Each worksheet assesses one concept, for example, a beginning sound or rhyming words. She loves to grade and puts the percentage of correct responses at the top of each page.
   - As the children in Mr. Marsden’s class are going out for recess, he tells another preschool teacher, in front of the children, “I just finished testing all my kids, and they don’t know anything. This is going to be a hard year.”
   - Ms. Seller, a kindergarten teacher, is very happy because she just finished assessing all of her students. She exclaims, “I know exactly where everyone is in reading and math. What a job! I’m glad I’m done!”
Ms. Mason, a preschool teacher, does all of her assessment at a center she has set up next to her desk. She has all her materials there and calls students up to be tested one at a time.

At the end of a family–teacher conference, Ms. Sharp, a second grade teacher, gives each family a list of skills the child is missing. She provides parents with a worksheet to go with each skill and asks that they be turned in when completed.

Ms. Jones is conducting a conference with the Miller family. They have very different ideas about what Samantha can do in reading and math. The parents think Samantha has many more skills than the teacher thinks Samantha has. After a few minutes of discussion, Ms. Jones says, “Well, it really doesn’t matter what Sam is doing at home. What’s important is what I see in school.”

Discussion Questions

1. Ask, “How do characteristics of young children affect the assessment process? What is different about assessing preschoolers and kindergartners? Infants and toddlers?”

2. Prompt, “Think about bias. Are you aware of any biases that you have in relation to young children or that might affect your assessment of young children?”

3. Ask, “What practices should early childhood teachers maintain to protect families’ privacy and right to confidentiality?”

Suggested Resources


Position Statements


Snapshots of High-Quality Assessment Systems

Overview  Chapter 13 presents brief descriptions of several widely used, commercially available early childhood assessment systems. It includes illustrations, a story from a teacher who uses each system, and an analysis of how each system meets the criteria for high-quality assessment discussed in chapter 12. The goal is for educators to have enough information to make decisions about which system or systems they would like to research further.

Instructor to Instructor
I want students to gain familiarity with some of the major assessment systems that are available. Each of these high-quality systems has particular strengths. Sometimes teachers and programs must choose systems on the basis of working styles, similarity to what they have used previously, alignment with curriculum goals or state standards, or cost.

Chapter Outline

Child Observation Record
• Using the Child Observation Record
• The COR as a high-quality assessment tool

Teaching Strategies GOLD®
• Using Teaching Strategies GOLD®
• Teaching Strategies GOLD® as a high-quality assessment tool

The Work Sampling System®
• Using The Work Sampling System®
• The Work Sampling System® as a high-quality assessment tool

The Ounce Scale™
• Using The Ounce Scale™
• The Ounce Scale™ as a high-quality assessment tool

Conclusion
Activities

1. Exploring assessment systems. It is always helpful for students to see actual assessment materials rather than just photographs. If you have the funds, buy several assessment systems. Give students time to see the materials and, by exploring them hands-on, to figure out how the systems work. This is very similar to what practicing teachers do when faced with a newly required assessment tool.

2. Evaluating assessment tools. Bring in other classroom assessment tools for students to examine. Help students evaluate them in terms of the criteria for high-quality assessment discussed in chapter 12.

3. Planning for assessment. Assign students several indicators or objectives from one of the assessment systems described in this chapter. Ask students to develop several experiences that could be offered during a period of a week to engage children in the identified learning. The plans should also include how the teacher will assess children’s learning, specifying the materials she will prepare to assist her assessment efforts.

Discussion Questions

1. Have students compare and contrast the four approaches described in this chapter.

2. If students have field placements, ask them to discuss with their supervising teacher how assessment tools are selected or approaches decided. Have students share this information to illustrate the varied levels of input teachers might have.

Assignment

To small groups of students, assign one of the assessment systems described in this chapter or an assessment system widely used in your area. Their responsibility is to do further research and present the system to the class. The materials can often be borrowed from school districts or resource libraries.
Suggested Resources


National Institute for Early Education Research (nieer)—nieer

See resources available from: http://nieer.org/


California Department of Education. (2010). *Desired results developmental profile (DRDP)*. Sacramento: Author. (*DRDP* is a curriculum-embedded measure for assessing children from birth through 12 years. It aligns with the California standards.)

Testing Young Children

Overview  Information about tests is presented late in The Power of Assessment because they play a minor role in classroom-based early childhood assessment. Chapter 14 introduces basic concepts related to testing, raises issues related to testing young children, and provides recommendations for the appropriate use of tests with young children.

Instructor to Instructor  Although tests do not play a huge role in early childhood assessment, some students begin an assessment class believing that test and assessment mean the same thing. By this time in the course, they have the tools to understand that tests are one method of data collection and that there are different types of tests (e.g., screening tests and tests used for diagnostic purposes).

Students often have clear and negative opinions about tests because of their personal experiences and information from other courses. I emphasize the appropriate uses of tests, that not all tests are the same, and that not all tests are evil.

In the discussion about standardized procedures, I emphasize how maintaining procedural consistency helps teachers define the content of an assessment. It keeps teachers focused on the questions they are trying to answer.

When I teach about tests, I usually spend some time discussing different types of test items, the type of knowledge each is best at eliciting, and the conventions for writing each type of item. My expectation is not that early childhood teachers will write many tests but that they will be able to evaluate the quality of the items if they are using tests at some point in their careers.
Chapter Outline

Basic Concepts Related to Standardized Testing
- Individual or group administration
- Standardization
  - Standardized procedures
  - Standardized tests
- Interpreting test data by making comparisons
  - Norm-referenced tests
  - Criterion-referenced tests
- Accountability
- Test Selection

Issues Related to Testing Young Children
- Young children are not good test-takers
- Developmentally appropriate assessment practices
- Negative effects of standardized tests
  - On children
  - On teachers and the curriculum
  - On programs

Recommendations for Using Tests Appropriately

Important Vocabulary

standardized tests
tests that are administered, scored, and interpreted by using the same procedures for each test taker

norm-referenced tests
tests that compare each child’s score to the scores of others who have previously taken the test (the norming group)

criterion-referenced tests
tests that compare each child’s performance on the test to a set of criteria

accountability testing
evaluating children’s achievement by testing, in order to be able to tell a program’s constituents whether the program is effective
Activities

1. KWL. Students generally begin this course with personal and academic knowledge about tests, so I often begin by asking them what they know about tests and charting their responses. We develop a list of what they would like to know, and I use this to adjust the information I present about tests. After this part of the course, we review what students wanted to know and list what they learned.

2. Watching test administrations. A live or taped administration of a test can be very informative for students. You can bring a child into the classroom and administer a brief screening or watch a DVD (often available with a test publisher’s training materials). Discuss how the examiner’s behavior is constrained by the standardized administration procedures. Ask students to observe the interaction between the examiner and the child, looking for miscommunication that may affect the results.

3. Exploring standardized tests. Give students the opportunity to explore test kits and review test manuals. Provide a structured format, asking students to
   • identify the age range for which the test is intended;
   • identify the norming group;
   • determine how test validity—especially content validity—was measured;
   • find out who is qualified to administer the test; and
   • teach themselves to administer two items for two different age levels.
Add other directions for exploring the materials as time allows.

4. Children’s books about testing. Several children’s books have been written about tests. Have students review the books and discuss how and when they might use them.

5. State testing programs. Ask students to research their state testing program online. This can be done in small groups or as an individual assignment. Structure their research by providing questions such as these:
   • Is the test norm- or criterion-referenced?
   • How does it relate to the state’s standards?
   • To whom is it administered?
   • How are special needs accommodated?
Discussion Questions

1. Before you begin a discussion of tests, spend some time eliciting from students their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences about and with testing. You might start with some basic questions, such as these:
   - What experiences have you had with tests, either as a student or while you observed in classrooms?
   - With what types of tests are you familiar?
   - How accurately do you think tests portrayed your learning? Children's learning?

2. Prompt students to imagine that they work in a district that uses a testing program to measure kindergartners' achievement of standards. Ask, “What is your role as an advocate for young children? What is your role as a teacher in making testing experiences as positive as possible for children?”

Suggested Resources


Test Reviews

Murphy, L., Geisinger, K. F., Carlson, J. F., & Spies, R. A. (Eds.) (2011). *Tests in Print VIII*. [Tests in Print (TIP)] is a bibliography of all known commercially available tests in English. Information includes test purpose, publisher, in-print status, price, test acronym, intended test population, administration times, publication date(s), and test author(s). Available from http://www.unl.edu/buros/bimm/html/catalog.html#tip


(The Mental Measurements Yearbooks, published by the Buros Institute of Mental Measurements every 2 years, present consumer-oriented descriptions and critical reviews of tests. Available from http://www.unl.edu/buros/bimm/html/catalog.html#mmy)
Test Reviews Online

Test Reviews Online is a service that provides access to the same test reviews that appear in the Mental Measurements Yearbook series. The most current reviews may be downloaded for a fee ($15 per test title at the time of this printing). Test reviews include descriptive information (i.e., test purpose, test publisher, price, test acronym, intended test population, administration times, publication date(s), test authors, and print status) and, when available, evaluative information summarizing technical properties of the test (i.e., reliability and validity). Available from http://buros.unl.edu/buros/jsp/results.jsp


Position Statements


Web Sites

Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation, http://ericac.net

National Center for Fair and Open Testing, http://www.fairtest.org

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), http://ncrel.org/sdrs

Children’s Books


The Power of Assessment and You

Overview  The concluding chapter returns to the central idea that assessment enhances educators’ ability to improve their teaching and children’s learning, but it focuses on the benefits for the teacher. It includes strategies to help teachers realize the power of assessment and ends with a discussion of next steps in a student’s learning about assessment.

Instructor to Instructor
Chapter 15 summarizes what has been presented and looks forward to the students’ personal use of classroom assessment. I emphasize that approaches to and beliefs about assessment change over time and that effective teachers work to keep their assessment knowledge current.

Chapter Outline
The Power of Assessment
• Assessment helps you teach better
• Assessment can help you see children in new ways and enhance your relationships with them
• Teachers can help children take charge of their own learning by sharing assessment information with them
• Becoming an effective assessor enhances teachers’ professionalism
• Assessment is intellectually satisfying

Realizing the Power of Assessment
• Commit to being an accurate and effective assessor
• Realize that it takes time to learn new assessment methods
• Monitor your development as an assessor
• Use what you learn

Where Do You Go from Here?
Activity

1. Demographics and assessment practices. Ask students to select and research the demographics of a district in which they would like to teach. Have them explain the effect of those demographics and diversity on their approach to assessment.

Assignment

Give students a self-reflective assignment. Ask them to evaluate their own assessment knowledge and skills. See Appendix 11 for a sample assignment.