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NAEYC STANDARDS

TEACHERS use assessments every day, and each teacher uses assessments differently. First grade teacher Katie Sandifer uses assessments in different ways to help improve student learning. She uses performance-based assessments that are fun for the students, such as playing *Jeopardy*, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, *Deal or No Deal*, and other games with them. The children really enjoy it and learn a lot while they 'play.'¹ These are wonderful ways to assess, especially when you have a SMART Board.¹ Kindergarten teacher Michaele Bachman acknowledges that some schools include preliminary formal assessments for incoming kindergarten students. ... However, her own preference is to refrain from putting barely five-year-olds through additional performance stress.² Instead, Michaele uses observational assessments to get to know her students. She writes down thoughts and observations about each of the children as they familiarize themselves with their environment. These observations include: *What is the child's size, and how does she/he use physical space? Does the child squint, or say 'huh' or ask for directions to be repeated again? Does the student only demonstrate parallel play? Does the child recognize and choose to acknowledge and cooperate with transitions? Is the student a watcher or a do-er? A little of both? How long does it take him/her to come out of a comfortable shell?*³

Teachers' minutes, hours, and days are filled with such assessment questions and decisions. Assessment is continuous. Questions abound: "What is Jeremy ready for now?" "What can I tell Maria's parents about her language development?" "The activity I used in the large-group time yesterday didn't seem to work well. What can I do differently?" Appropriate assessment can help you find the answers to these and many other questions about how to teach, how to assess, and what is best for each child.

WHAT IS ASSESSMENT?

Teaching without assessment is like driving without headlights. Teaching in the dark does not benefit you or your children. Assessment casts light on what children know and can do. It is an invaluable tool to guide your teaching and your students' learning.

Your children's lives, both in and out of school, are influenced by your assessment and the assessment of others. As an early childhood professional, assessment influences your professional life and is a vital part of your professional practice. Developmentally appropriate and effective assessment is one of your most important responsibilities.

Assessment is the ongoing, continuous process of collecting, gathering, and documenting information about children's development, learning, health, behavior, academic progress, need for special services, and achievement in order to make informed decisions about how to best educate them. Teachers and early childhood programs use assessment results for children's benefit by making sound decisions regarding teaching and program improvement.

assessment

The process of collecting information about children's development, learning, behavior, academic progress, need for special services, and attainment of grade level goals in order to make decisions.

Figure 3.1 outlines the purposes of assessment. Student assessment occurs primarily through observation, performance-based assessment with commercial and teacher-made tests, and evaluation of students' portfolios and work samples. You will use all three of these assessment procedures to inform your teaching so you can help all children be successful.

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FIGURE 3.1 | Purposes of Assessment

**For Children, Assessment:**

- Identifies what they know
- Identifies their special needs
- Determines their appropriate placement
- Refers them and their families for additional services to programs and agencies

**For Families, Assessment:**

- Provides information about their children's progress and learning
- Relates school activities to home activities and experiences to promote at-home learning
- Enables teachers and families to work collaboratively to benefit children and family members

**For Teachers, Assessment:**

- Informs lesson and activity plans and establishes goals
- Creates new classroom arrangements
- Selects materials
- Monitors and improves the teaching–learning process
- Groups for instruction

**For Early Childhood Programs, Assessment:**

- Informs policy decisions regarding what is and is not appropriate for children
- Determines how well and to what extent programs and services children receive are beneficial and appropriate
- Aligns curriculum and teaching with children's needs

**For the Public, Assessment:**

- Informs them of children's achievement
- Provides information relating to students' school-wide achievements
- Provides a basis for public policy (e.g., legislation, recommendations, and position statements)

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

Early childhood professionals use assessment in developmentally appropriate ways to make many important decisions about their teaching and children's learning. You can develop a broad background of information about developmentally appropriate assessment by reviewing the Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation Position Statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) on their websites. This important document provides you with many essential guidelines to follow as you assess young children.

Ensuring that your assessment practices are developmentally appropriate is challenging because children develop and learn in ways that are unique to them and their specific cultural and linguistic backgrounds. You not only need to consider such factors as children's age and development, but also how well they speak English. Developmentally appropriate assessment is ongoing, intentional, used to make appropriate instructional decisions—appropriate for children's developmental levels.

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DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT

Selecting appropriate assessment methods and instruments is an important part of the assessment process. You will know that the assessment practices and tools that you are using are appropriate when you use the following information:

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

In the classroom, you will be using assessment on a regular, daily basis. **Formative assessment** is the ongoing process of gathering data on students over the school year. Formative assessments are incorporated into your classroom practices and are a part of your instructional process. They provide information to inform you about what is needed to adjust your teaching and learning to your children's achievement. Through the use of formative assessment, you are consistently monitoring over the school year the progress of children as they learn outcomes of local, state, and common core state standards.

formative assessment

The ongoing process of gathering data on students over the school year.

This **video** depicts a teacher and student involved in formative assessment of reading comprehension and fluency. Pay particular attention to the teacher with a handheld device to assess how she interacts with the student, what kind of formative assessment she provides, and how she uses assessment to determine what she wants the student to do.

INFORMAL ASSESSMENT

Any assessment that obtains information that can be used to make judgments about children's learning behavior and characteristics or programs using means other than standardized tests is considered to be *informal* because it is not "standardized" or entails standard guidelines for administration and use. Formative assessments are considered to be the most *authentic*, or truest, means of evaluating children's actual learning and the instructional

activities in which they are involved. The terms *informal assessments*, *formative assessments*, and *authentic assessments* are often used interchangeably.

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

Figure 3.2 outlines characteristics of authentic formative assessment. As you examine these characteristics, think about how you will apply them to your professional practice. Following the authentic assessment strategies shown in Figure 3.2 will help ensure the information you gather will be useful and appropriate for all children. Authentic assessment relies heavily on informal procedures. Observations, checklists, and portfolios are just some of the informal methods of authentic assessment available to early childhood educators, as discussed in the following sections. *Informal screening* is what you and other professionals do when you gather information to make decisions about small-group placements, instructional levels, and so forth.

PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT.

Part of authentic assessment includes *performance-based assessment*. In performance-based assessment, children *demonstrate* by doing what they know and are able to do. Authentic assessments are particularly useful when teaching children who are from diverse backgrounds as well as for children with disabilities because you can gain a good picture of what they can do. For example, second grade teacher Robert Brooks uses authentic assessment in his inclusion classroom, particularly at the beginning of the school year, to determine