

Assessment, the big picture: What is it? Why do it?

Assessment: The process of observing, recording, and otherwise documenting the work children do and how they do it, and using this information as a basis for a variety of educational decisions that affect the child and the program. (Koralek, Dodge, and Pizzolongo 2008)

Most early care programs are required to do assessments, and funding is often linked to documented assessments.

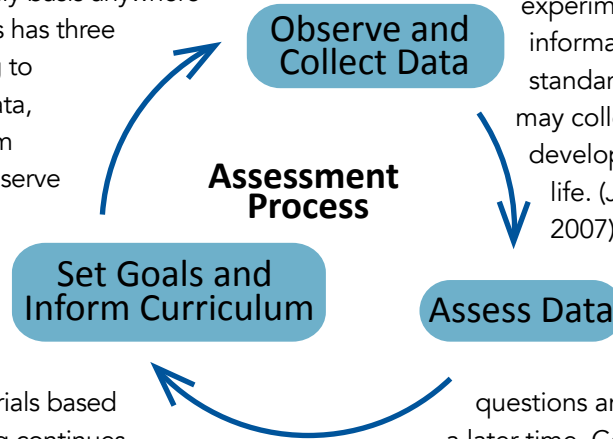
The assessment process is not a once-and-done task. It should be happening on a daily basis anywhere children are in care. The process has three primary steps, each one leading to the next: observe and collect data, assess data, set goals and inform curriculum, and then back to observe and collect data for the next cycle. Sometimes a cycle can be completed in a few moments. A teacher notices something, makes a quick assessment, adjusts some materials based on the observation, and learning continues. More often, this process takes months, collecting varied information, communicating and thinking about it, setting new goals based on the information, and planning with co-workers for a specific group of children.

Observe and collect data

“Before I began using an observation assessment, I tended to get the big picture of things in my classroom. I always said that I knew my kids really well. I could tell you who talked a lot at circle time, who was quiet, who did the work, who always forgot assignments. But once I started to observe more, I realized how much I didn’t know about them. I started paying attention more—noticing little details about what they said, how they interacted with each other, how they went about tasks. I can tell you really specific details about each child now.” (teacher reflection in Jablon, Dombro, and Dichtelmiller 2007)

Observations should be done in a variety of settings at different times of day. Anecdotal notes, dated development checklists, dictation, photographs of work or interactions, video recordings, and child portfolio work samples (journal entries, painted pictures, written experiment results) can all be sources of information. Trained evaluators may also use standardized tests/assessments. Teachers may collect information on a child’s health, development, approach to learning, and home life. (Jablon, Dombro, and Dichtelmiller 2007)

The observations need to be objective, free from opinion or emotional wording. Teachers’ questions and interpretations may be added at a later time. Consider this example. It has a time, a date, and a specific description of what the caregiver actually saw the child doing:



Notes	Interpretations
7/13: 11:00 a.m. Jason went straight to the reading area during choice time. Began reading Frog and Toad. After a few minutes he looked over to where Doug and Julie were building with blocks. I watched for a few minutes as he watched the children playing. I went over and asked him if he wanted to go play with them. He shook his head and went back to reading his book.	Reading or avoiding approaching other children?

(Source: Jablon, Dombro, and Dichtelmiller 2007)

Caregivers use different systems like mailing labels, calendars, sticky notes, digital cameras, notepads, and masking tape to record data. Some programs have prescribed tools they must use. The information then gets transferred to a more permanent record on a computer server or paper file where it can be tracked and analyzed.

Assess data

Caregivers review the information on a child and summarize the findings. Staff look for growth over time. At the grade-school level, children can be involved in evaluating their own work/progress. Teachers may also compare to a culturally appropriate standard. Comparisons among children, however, are inappropriate. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) stresses that the assessments need to take into consideration a child's culture, language, and development stage. In fact, they have specific recommendations relative to assessment of Young English Language Learners and guides for those who assess children with disabilities.

Screening is a quickly administered assessment used to identify children who may benefit from more in-depth assessment. (NAEYC 2003)

Avoid making assumptions about the data. "Many factors— anxiety, hunger, inability to understand the language of the instructions, culturally learned hesitation in initiating conversation with adults, and so on—may influence a child's performance, creating a gap between that performance and the child's actual ability, and causing staff to draw inaccurate conclusions." (NAEYC 2003)

Works Cited:

Koralek, Derry G., Diane Trister Dodge, and Peter Pizzolongo. 2008. *Caring for Preschool Children*, eCDA edition. Teaching Strategies. <http://www.teachingstrategies.com>

Jablon, Judy R., Amy Laura Dombro, and Margo L. Dichtelmiller. 2007. *Power of Observation for Birth Through Eight (2nd edition)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. 2003. "Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation: Position Statement with Expanded Resources." <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/CAPEexpand.pdf>

Set goals and inform curriculum

Once teachers have reviewed the data, a crucial step remains. "Curriculum and assessment are closely tied. Classroom- or home-based assessment tells teachers what children are like and allows them to modify curriculum and teaching practices to best meet the children's needs. Curriculum also influences what is assessed and how; for example, a curriculum that emphasizes the development of self-regulation should be accompanied by assessments of the children's ability to regulate their attention, manage strong emotions, and work productively without a great deal of external control." (NAEYC 2003) Sharing findings with families or stakeholders and asking their input on future goals is also valuable.

For more ideas and understanding, check out:

Jablon, Judy R., Amy Laura Dombro, and Margo L. Dichtelmiller. 2007. *Power of Observation for Birth Through Eight (2nd edition)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Newman, Roberta L. 2006. *Creating Portfolios with Kids in Out-of-School Programs: Ideas for Communicating with Parents and Enhancing Program Quality*. San Rafael, CA: Newroads Consulting.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. 2003. "Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation: Position Statement with Expanded Resources." <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/CAPEexpand.pdf>

National Association for the Education of Young Children. "Position statements on Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation." <http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/cape>