School Readiness and the Assessment of Children with Disabilities

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OSEP Reporting Requirements: the Outcomes

- Positive social emotional skills (including positive social relationships)

- Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (including early language/communication [and early literacy])

- Use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs
OSEP Reporting Categories

Percentage of children who:

a. Did not improve functioning
b. Improved functioning, but not sufficient to move nearer to functioning comparable to same-aged peers
c. Improved functioning to a level nearer to same-aged peers but did not reach it
d. Improved functioning to reach a level comparable to same-aged peers
e. Maintained functioning at a level comparable to same-aged peers

3 outcomes x 5 “measures” = 15 numbers
The wrong question

What is the best assessment to use with children with disabilities?
• Good EC assessment is good EC assessment

• Principles that apply to typically developing children apply to children with disabilities
  – See NAEYC position statement
  – http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/cape
Considerations Related to Assessment Selection

- Purpose
- Type of assessment
- Some key concepts
  - Construct irrelevant variance
  - Universal design/accommodations
  - Floor effects
  - Sensitivity
Children with special needs: Pages 260-280
Purposes from NAS report

• Determining the level of an individual child’s functioning
  – Screening, diagnostic testing, readiness determination

• Guiding intervention and instruction

• Evaluation
  – Program effectiveness, program impact, social benchmarking

• Research
Common Purposes for CWD

- Eligibility determination (diagnosis)
- Intervention/instructional planning
- Program evaluation and accountability
- Social benchmarking
Types of assessments

• Standardized, norm-referenced, direct assessment
• Observation-based assessment
  – Criterion referenced or curriculum based
  – Authentic or naturalistic assessment
  – Teacher checklists
Features of standardized assessments

- Child is asked to perform or respond to a series of assessor administered tasks
- Tasks must be administered the same way to all children
- Child may or may not be familiar with the assessor
- Examples: Bayley Scales of Infant Development, PPVT
Features of observation-based assessment

- Multiple ways for child to show mastery of the item or objective
- Assessor is familiar with the child; not a stranger.
- “Authentic” refers to activities that are meaningful to the child and that occur naturally in the child’s life (not contrived).
- Examples: Developmental Continuum (Creative Curriculum), High Scope COR, Work Sampling
Observation-based assessment widely regarded as the better way to assess young children.

Many large scale assessment efforts (especially program evaluations) use standardized measures.
  – Few notable exceptions: statewide efforts in KY, CO, NE, PA.

**Standardized assessments pose far more problems for assessing children with disabilities**
### Purpose and Assessment Type for CWD

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• Child has the concept but does not get credit for the item because
  – Can’t point
  – Can’t speak
  – Can’t attend for even short periods of time
  – Can’t understand the instructions
  – Etc.

• Major problem with standardized assessments because of the standard administration.

  **Standardizing the conditions does not standardize the experience for the child.**
Universal Design and Accommodations

• Develop assessments to allow the widest range of participation; minimize the need for accommodations
  – E.g., refer to “communication,” not “spoken language”
• Accommodations – modifications in presentation, response format, timing, setting (Some of which assessors do in EC anyway)
  – Validity of accommodations
• Example:
  Desired Results Developmental Profile – Access
  – http://www.draccess.org/index.html
Floor effects and sensitivity

- Floor effects – not enough or any items for children who are lower functioning
  - E.g., assessment is for 3-5s – developmentally the child is 2
- Lack of sensitivity – increments between items too large to capture growth of children who progress slowly
Large scale assessment

- Exclusion of children with disabilities is not an acceptable option.
- All children and their families are entitled to know if the program works for them, if they are making progress, etc.
The right questions

• Why is the assessment being administered?
• Is the interest in individual child data or aggregated child data?
• Is there a way to use an observation-based assessment?
Resources

- [www.the-eco-center.org](http://www.the-eco-center.org)
- Promoting Positive Outcomes for Children with Disabilities: Recommendations for Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation
  - Available free from the Division for Early Childhood (DEC)
    [http://www.dec-sped.org/About_DEC/PositionConcept_Papers/Promoting_Positive_Outcomes](http://www.dec-sped.org/About_DEC/PositionConcept_Papers/Promoting_Positive_Outcomes)
- Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, How
  - Available from the National Academies Press