

NASP Position Statement on Early Childhood Assessment

The National Association of School Psychologists believes that early identification of developmental and learning problems in preschool and primary grade children is essential because of children's broad and rapid development. Intervention services for these children's psychological and developmental difficulties are essential, beneficial, and cost-effective. Because the accurate and fair identification of the developmental needs of young children is critical to the design, implementation, and success of appropriate interventions school psychologists must play a key role.

Evidence from research and practice in early childhood assessment indicates that issues of technical adequacy are more difficult to address with young children who have short attention spans and go through periods of variable, rapid development. Therefore, standardized assessment procedures should be used with great caution in educational decision-making because such tools are inherently less accurate and less predictive when used with young children.

Multidisciplinary team assessments must include multiple sources of information, multiple approaches to assessment, and multiple settings in order to yield a comprehensive understanding of children's skills and needs. Therefore, assessments should center on the child in the family system and home environment, both substantial influences on the development of young children. Similarly, families' self-identified needs should drive the decision-making process concerning the identification of child and family services.

Because categorical identification of infants, toddlers, and young children is ineffective in meeting the special needs of young children, assessment of infants and young children requires specialized training and skills beyond those required for the assessment of older children. Longitudinal and functional assessment of behavior and development of infants, young children, and families in a variety of settings is needed to evaluate and document progress and response to intervention over time, and must guide early intervention strategies in meaningful ways.

Therefore, the National Association of School Psychologists will promote early childhood assessment practices that are:

- developmentally appropriate, ecological, comprehensive, skills-based, and family-focused;
- conducted by a multi-disciplinary team;
- linked to intervention strategies designed for young children, rather than to categorical classification;
- based upon comprehensive, educational and/or behavioral concerns, rather than isolated deficits identified by individual assessments;

- nondiscriminatory in terms of gender, ethnicity, native language, family composition, and/or socio-economic status; and
- technically adequate and validated for the purpose(s) for which they are used, including the provision of norms for minority children and children with physical disabilities.

Role of the School Psychologist

NASP encourages the adoption of the philosophy of "parents as partners" and families as the focus to promote assessments and interventions for young children that include full integration of parents and families into the assessment and intervention components of early childhood services. This mandates methods of naturalistic and systematic observation and information gathering, including work sampling procedures and the involvement of the family, home environment, daycare/preschool, and the community ecology as part of the comprehensive assessment to gather information and input from parents and caregivers. School psychologists should provide leadership to the multidisciplinary team in ensuring that all information gathered through the assessment is clearly understood by parents so that they can make fully-informed decisions about interventions for their children.

NASP also advocates for pre-service and in-service education for school psychologists and other professionals to address the following issues: 1) normal as well as atypical developmental patterns of infants and young children; 2) practices, procedures, and instrumentation appropriate for screening and assessment of young children, their families, and their environments; 3) the selection of assessment techniques and utilization of findings from such assessments for the design, implementation, and efficacy evaluation of interventions; 4) and standards for early childhood psychological and educational assessment, including legal, ethical, and professional issues - all in the context of noncategorical service delivery for young children and their families.

Summary

NASP supports early childhood assessment practices that allow for accurate and fair identification of the developmental needs of infants, preschoolers, and young children and facilitate interventions that involve parents and other caregivers. Sound early childhood assessment should involve a multi-disciplinary team, including school psychologists with specialized training in the assessment of the young child, and who view behavior and development from a longitudinal perspective.

- Original version adopted by NASP Delegate Assembly, March 24, 1991

- Revision adopted by NASP Delegate Assembly, July 24, 1999

- Revision adopted by the CASP Board of Directors, February 15, 2006

Annotated Bibliography

Gridley, Betty. (1995). Preschool Screening. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology III*, (pp 213-226). Washington, DC: National Association of School Psychologists.

This chapter discusses the purposes of screening, the importance of parental input to appropriate screening practices, commonly used screening instruments, and practical activities for parents to do to facilitate development and learning in their child.

Gullo, Dominic, F. (1994). *Understanding assessment and evaluation in early childhood education*. Teachers College Press: New York, NY.

This book will help early childhood practitioners develop the essential understanding required for appropriate use of informal and formal assessment and evaluation information. Appendices contain a glossary of assessment instruments in early childhood education and a case study of an alternative assessment program.

Harrington, Robert, H., & Tongier, Jane. (1993). The compatibility between state eligibility criteria for developmental delays and available early childhood assessment instrumentation. *Diagnostic 18*(33), 199-217.

This paper discusses the results of a survey of 50 state consultants in early childhood special education in the United States to evaluate whether they perceive available developmental assessment instrumentation to be satisfactory for the identification of children with developmental delays in the 3 through 5 year old range. Results showed a need for instruments that facilitate parent involvement and a need for special norms for minority children and children with physical disabilities.

Katz, L. (1997). *A developmental approach to assessment of young children*. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

This paper describes the concept of developmental appropriateness as it applies to the assessment of young children. The various purposes of assessing individual children are discussed. A match between plans, strategies, and assessment instruments and specific assessment purpose is mandated.

McClellan, M.E. (1993). Practices for Young Children with and without disabilities: A comparison of DEC and NAEYC Identified Practices. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 13*(3), 274-292.

This article summarizes practices that represent consensus of professionals and consumers in the field of early childhood education and early intervention relative to useful practice. Practices identified through the work of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Task Force on Recommended Practice are compared with practices identified through the work of the National Association of the Education of Young Children

(NAEYC). Similarities and differing emphases in the areas of inclusion, family involvement, assessment, program planning, curriculum and intervention strategies, service delivery models, and transition are discussed.

Neisworth, John. (1993). Assessment: DEC recommended practices. In *DEC recommended practices: Indicators of quality in programs for infants and young children*. (EC 301 933).

This paper lists practices recommended by the Division for Early Childhood for assessment in early intervention and early childhood special education programs for infant and young children with special needs and their early families. Introductory text examines the role of assessment, materials, and procedures used, and assessment principles, including: assessment must clearly identify developmental or behavioral objectives for change; assessment should help to select and guide treatment activities; assessment should contribute to evaluating intervention or program efficacy, assessment should identify goals and objectives that are judged as worthwhile and important; assessment methods and materials themselves should be judged as acceptable; assessment decisions must be based on a wide base of information; assessment batteries should contain several types of scales and include observation and interviews; assessment should include data and reports from parents and other significant individuals; and assessment must be done on multiple occasions.

Preator, Karleen, K., & McAllister, J.R. (1995). Assessing infants and toddlers. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology III*, (pp775-788). Washington, DC: National Association of School Psychologists.

This chapter discusses basic considerations when assessing infants and toddlers, particularly under the requirements of federal legislation. The role of the school psychologist in working with the medical community and working with families as team members, as well as how to formulate assessment strategies with this population are also included.

SERVE: Southeastern Regional Vision for Education. (1991). *Assessment in Early Childhood Education: Status of the Issue*. Office of Educational Research and Improvement: Washington DC (ED 368 507).

This research brief argues that standardized testing has been over-used and misinterpreted, particularly when tests do not have established reliability and validity, when readiness tests are substituted for screening tests, and when tests are used for purposes they were not designed for. The National Association for the Education of the Young Child recommends that the most important consideration in evaluating and using standardized tests with young children is utility. Staff must be trained to recognize what specific tests can and cannot measure. Assessment systems that can be used cooperatively by parents and teachers is recommended. On-going evaluation should consist of criterion-referenced checklists, portfolio collection of the child's work, and summative teacher report forms.

Schweinhart, Lawrence. (July, 1993). Observing young children in action: The key to early childhood assessment. *Young Children* 48(5), 29- 33.

This article discusses practices such as performance-based assessment that are consistent with early childhood profession's process goals. Appropriate assessment practices are described including the use of observational methods that use anecdotal notes to complement assessments with developmental scales of established reliability and validity.

Shephard, L., Kagan, S., & Wurtz, E. (1998) *Principles and recommendations for early childhood assessments*. Washington DC: National Education Goals Panel.
<http://www.negp.gov>

This booklet discusses best practices for assessment of young children considering their unique development, recent abuses of testing, and legitimate demands for clear and useful information. General principles of assessment included address benefits, reliability and validity, age level appropriateness and language, and parent role in assessment.

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