
Resources and Connections:

Enhancing the Quality of Early Learning and
Early Intervention for Infants, Toddlers, & Their Families



September, 2002 • Volume 1, Number 6

A monthly compilation of useful resources to help keep you up-to-date on the latest information and opportunities supporting quality practices in early learning and early intervention. Read the details at the end of this issue to request a **FREE** monthly subscription. An online version of can be viewed at: www.cde.state.co.us/earlychildhoodconnections/Technical.htm

Special Focus: Recommended Practices in Early Childhood Assessment

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Recommended Practices in Early Childhood Assessment

This issue of *Resources and Connections* focuses on early childhood assessment. The importance of focusing on assessment is underscored by Bagnato and Neisworth in their introduction to their chapter on *Recommended Practices in Assessment in DEC Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education*.

“Professionals and families have promoted some notable changes in assessment for early intervention/ early childhood special education since the early 1980s. Yet, these changes are meager in comparison to fundamental transformations witnessed in EI/ECSE: use of natural settings, developmentally appropriate practices, and family-centered methods. In this respect, assessment for early intervention has been *delayed* in its own development. Materials that are family friendly and that link assessment and teaching seem critical to early intervention; however, few changes have occurred in the process, style, and methods of assessment to complement inclusion or

developmentally appropriate and family-centered practices.

Assessment is a pivotal event for families and their children; assessment results are used to include or exclude children from specialized interventions that can change their developmental destinies. Beyond the eligibility determination or *gate keeping* purpose, assessment also is critical for program planning, for monitoring (formative) progress, and for program (summative) evaluation. Given the importance of assessment, it is understandable that the materials and procedures for early childhood assessment are contentious. The professional literature, newsletters of parent organizations -- and, indeed, the pages read by hearing officers -- illustrate the assessment struggle.” (Chapter 2, p. 17)

Where do we turn for information on improving our assessment practices? Fortunately, the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children has provided leadership. The *DEC Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education* is an essential source of guidance on a variety of early intervention practices. Based on both scientific literature and the knowledge and experience of researchers and other stakeholders, this publication synthesizes scientific and experiential knowledge. Steve Bagnato and John Neisworth provide 46 recommended assessment practices, supported by literature and professional experience, in their chapter on *Recommended Practices in Assessment*. This book is available for loan from your Early Childhood Connections offices or purchase from Sopris West (see page 5).

One valuable way to use the recommended practices is as a set of benchmarks for assessing the practices of assessment teams and programs. We have been granted permission to use these materials as a self-assessment and quality improvement planning tool for Colorado. See the following page for more information.

Self-Assessment of DEC's Recommended Practices in Assessment

DEC Recommended Practices for Assessment	Where we are now:			Where we'd like to be:
	Typically or always	Occasionally	Rarely or Never	Describe next steps or strategies to increase the use of this practice (see sample strategies on the cover page)
We collaborate with and in planning and implementing assessment.				
1. We provide families with easy access by phone or other means for arranging initial screening and other activities.				
2. We ensure a single point of contact for families throughout the assessment process.				
3. Families receive a written statement of program philosophy regarding family participation in assessment planning and activities.				
4. We collaborate with families to discuss family preferences and reach consensus about the process, methods, materials, and situations of assessment that will meet the child's needs best.				
5. We solicit information from families regarding the child's interests, abilities, and special needs.				

The *DEC Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education* is an essential source of guidance on a variety of early intervention practices. Based on both scientific literature and the knowledge and experience of researchers and other stakeholders, this publication synthesizes scientific and experiential knowledge. In their chapter on Recommended Practices in Assessment, Steve Bagnato and John Neisworth provide 46 recommended assessment practices, supported by literature and professional experience. Sopris West, publishers of The DEC Recommended Practices, has been kind enough to grant permission for us to use the recommended practices for assessment as a self-assessment and quality improvement planning tool for Colorado. *The Self-Assessment of DEC's Recommended Practices in Assessment* is being sent along with this issue of *Resources and Connections* (Vol. 1., No. 6). We hope that assessment teams and service providers will find this tool useful in reflecting on their current practices and identifying opportunities for growth and improvement. Although the tool might be used in a variety of ways, one valuable way to use the recommended practices is as a set of benchmarks for assessing the practices of assessment teams and programs. Described below is one process for using the tool to reflect on practices and plan quality improvement activities.

Step 1: Have each team member complete the assessment. To get more well rounded feedback, you could also ask families who you have worked with to join you in completing the assessment from their experience with your services.

Step 2: Meet as a group and discuss each item. Come to consensus for a program-wide rating. Then consider each item that was rated as either "Occasionally" or "Rarely or Never" and prioritize which practices the team would like to focus on first.

Step 3: Identify next steps and strategies that could be put in place to increase the quality and frequency of the practices in question.

Step 4: Set goals and make plans for instituting quality improvement activities. Be sure to identify a system for tracking your progress over time.

Step 5: Repeat this process until you are consistently using all of the recommended practices. Use the tool to periodically reflect on your progress.

Research Brief

Bagnato, S. and Neisworth, J. *Collaboration and teamwork in assessment for early intervention*. In *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, Vol. 8, No. 2, April, 1999 pp. 347-363.



Teamwork is the centerpiece of assessment, instruction, and therapy for young children with special needs. Parents and professionals need to share common philosophies, use common practices, and work toward mutual goals. They need to establish joint priorities and make consensus decisions about the plan and logistics for delivering services to young children and their families. Although there are roadblocks and funding challenges to collaboration for the delivery of team-based services, service providers can learn to collaborate if they infuse a common set of developmentally appropriate standards and practices into their services. This article narrows the focus of collaboration to the standards, the process, and specific methods of assessment that facilitate teamwork among parents and medical and educational professionals. Collaboration exists when parents and professionals share observations and judgements, set mutual priorities, and reach consensus about diagnosis, intervention, and measures of progress. Teamwork is characterized by parents and professionals working together in diagnosis, assessment, intervention, progress evaluation, use of instruments, goals, and intervention tactics. Developmentally appropriate practices refer “to approaches and activities that harmonize with natural, ongoing child and family activities and that involve the proper choices of action for assessment, instruction, and therapy” (p. 349). Collaboration, teamwork, and developmentally appropriate practices are essential for achieving eight standards for collaborative assessment proposed by Bagnato and Neisworth (summarized on the following page).

This article goes on to describe curriculum-based assessment (CBA) as an example of collaborative information gathering, decision-making, and intervention. A CBA contains worthwhile, real life, teachable objectives, and can detect even small changes in a child. Materials for a CBA can be used by a variety of professional team members, and are particularly useful for parents and other family members.

Another useful tool is the SPECS (System to Plan Early Childhood Services). The system links team assessment, intervention, and progress evaluation. The tool facilitates a process for collaborative decision-making by team and family members.

The authors also discuss classification systems for behavioral problems, including the DC:0-3, and the Temperament and Atypical Behavior Scale (TABS). The article concludes with the “DEC Recommended Practices for Assessment,” which summarize the points made in the article.

This article is “must read” for parents and providers involved in the assessment of young children. There is a wealth of practical and philosophical information to stimulate many ideas for change.

Assessment Standards

Following are eight standards proposed by Steve Bagnato and John Neisworth for materials that facilitate collaborative assessment.

Standard 1: Utility. The materials used for assessment need to support the collaborative team model and be useful for planning intervention and measuring change. Assessment should be evaluated using these three questions:

1. Is the assessment useful for identifying instructional and therapeutic objectives?
2. Is the assessment useful for selecting methods or approaches for teaching or therapy?
3. Is the assessment useful for detecting change after intervention?

Standard 2: Acceptability. Acceptability of assessment, or social validity, refers to the perceived value or appropriateness of assessment. Like utility, acceptability can be gauged at three levels: (1) acceptability of identified intervention goals; (2) acceptability of assessment methods; and (3) acceptability of changes detected by assessment.

Standard 3: Authenticity. Authentic assessment materials examine real functioning in real situations. Naturalistic observation, behavior rating scales, interview inventories, and curriculum-based measures are examples of materials that usually focus on authentic content. Testing children at tables with flip-cards, miniature toys, and a prolonged series of tasks is not a realistic sample of how children really function in their own situations. Not only may some of these nonauthentic tasks be nonrepresentative of real situations, but many children with special needs cannot manage the tasks or are not interested in them.

Standard 4: Equity. Within the law, equity refers to equality of opportunity, not necessarily equal circumstances. Equity in teaching means supplying children with learning materials and arrangements that accommodate for sensory, motor, affective, or cultural differences. The same standard of equity must be applied to assessment materials.

Standard 5: Sensitivity. Many assessment materials include only a few items for appraising competence. Too few items mean that only relatively crude estimates can be made, so finer targeting for intervention planning is not possible, nor is it feasible to monitor progress from this type of assessment.

Standard 6: Convergence. Some scales or inventories depend only on one occasion, source, and setting. Many new materials include alternate forms to be completed by parents, teachers, or others who can offer their perspectives. Converging two or more perspectives provides a wider information base, typically including multiple settings (home, school), times (current, prior), and sources (parent, teacher)}.

Standard 7: Congruence. Almost all conventional psychometric materials have been developed and standardized with a "standard" sample of children. The items and administration are designed to assess deviation from the norm, and thus to make diagnosis possible. It should be apparent that such materials would fail the standards of equity and sensitivity. *Congruence* requires that materials are developed and field-tested with children similar to those being assessed.

Standard 8: Collaboration. This standard is discussed last because it depends on the preceding standards. Cooperative assessment involves sharing the effort, providing materials in a "friendly" manner to parents and other professionals, and actually depending on the contributions of others to produce the information needed for collaborative decision-making. It should be clear that the various standards, especially convergence and authenticity, provide the basis for collaboration. The special requirement for collaboration is cooperative decision-making based on the assessment information.

Adapted from: Bagnato, S. and Neisworth, J. Collaboration and teamwork in assessment for early intervention. In *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, Vol. 8, No. 2, April, 1999 pp. 347-363.

Resources on Assessment **On the Web**

ERIC

<http://ericeece.org/>

ERIC is the Educational Resources Information Center, a federally-funded national information system that provides, through its 16 subject-specific clearinghouses, associated adjunct clearinghouses, and support components, a variety of services and products on a broad range of education-related issues. ERIC is the world's largest source of education information, with more than 1 million abstracts of documents and journal articles on education research and practice. AskERIC is a personalized Internet-based service providing education information to teachers, librarians, counselors, administrators, parents, and anyone interested in education throughout the United States and the world. Searching the AskERIC site for "Early Childhood Assessment" yielded 65 hits. For an example of one ERIC article on assessment, visit:

<http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/eece/pubs/digests/1995/meisel95.html>

The Early Childhood Research Institute on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS)

<http://clas.uiuc.edu/special/evaltools/>

The CLAS Institute identifies, evaluates, and promotes effective and appropriate early intervention practices and preschool practices that are sensitive and respectful to children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The Evaluation Tools Special Collection provides a listing of a variety of screening and diagnostic tools, and books about recommended practices in assessing the development of young children with and without disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse groups. According to the site: "This collection is designed to provide information that raises awareness regarding alternative assessment for young children. In addition, our goal is to provide you with information about tools especially designed for culturally and linguistically diverse children and families. The CLAS Institute's emphasis is on the evaluation process, not the specific instruments and publications. This listing is meant to encourage a dialogue about culturally and linguistically appropriate evaluation in the field of early childhood." CLAS is a federally funded collaborative effort of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, The Council for Exceptional

Children, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, funded by the [Office of Special Education Programs](#) of the [U.S. Department of Education](#).

Trends in Early Childhood Assessment Policies and Practices

By Lorrie A. Shepard and Grace A. Taylor, University of Colorado, Boulder and Sharon L. Kagan, Yale Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy; October, 1996. This research was supported in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U. S. Department of Education, through the Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST). The findings and opinions expressed do not reflect the position or policies of OERI or the U. S. DOE. <http://www.negp.gov/Reports/ecms2.pdf>

In Print

DEC Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education Sandall, McLean, Smith (Eds.) (2000)

The DEC Recommended Practices Project synthesized the knowledge found in the scientific/professional literature and the knowledge from experience of parents, practitioners and administrators about those practices that produce the best outcomes for children. The *Recommended Practices* bridges the gap between research and practice, offering much-needed guidance to parents and professionals who work with young children with disabilities. The book outlines how families and educators can improve the development and learning outcomes for these children and the different meanings associated with those outcomes, including improved social competence, independence, problem solving, and enhanced family functioning. The following seven topic areas are covered:

- Assessment
- Child-Focused Interventions
- Family-Based Practices
- Interdisciplinary Models
- Personnel Preparation
- Policies, Procedures, and Systems Change
- Technology Applications

To obtain a copy for loan, contact your local ECC office. To order, please visit www.sopriswest.com or call (800) 547-6747. Cost: \$20.00

11th Annual Early Childhood Institute

Quality Practices in Assessment, Service Delivery, and Assistive Technology

October 16 - 18, 2002
Vail, Colorado

For current information and to register visit our website at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/earlychildhoodconnections>

The Institute is an opportunity to learn from nationally recognized professionals in the field of early intervention. Workshop and keynote sessions will deliver state-of-the-art information and concrete strategies to implement promising practices in assessment, effective service delivery, and assistive technology to facilitate full participation. Professionals working with children from birth to five years are encouraged to attend. Family members are also encouraged to attend.

Topics include:

- Authentic assessment in early childhood.
- Functional assessment of families' routines.
- Assessing social/emotional development and behavioral difficulties.
- Assessment of newborns and babies.
- Primary service provider models for providing services in everyday routines, activities, and places.
- Community perspectives from local service delivery teams.
- Embedding assistive technology into early intervention.
- The role of assistive technology in play.
- Creating play environments.
- Child growth and development.
- Leadership.
- What parents need to know about their role in planning, decision making, accountability, and working with medical personnel.
- Working with families in Neonatal Intensive Care Units.



Robin McWilliam is back by popular demand:

Special Pre-Institute Workshop on Functional Assessment of a Family's Routines

Among the six pre-institute workshops on Wednesday, October 16th at the Early Childhood Institute will be a full-day session by Dr. McWilliam focusing on the routines-based interview.

Good Things Start With A Functional Assessment of the Family's Routines

presented by Robin McWilliam, Ph.D., Director, Division of Child Development, Research Professor of Education, Department of Pediatrics, Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

This session will focus on the routines-based interview, which Robin McWilliam has developed as a functional way to gather the family's priorities. The session will feature a demonstration, followed by an analysis of the process. Included will be a discussion of service delivery options to address the resulting outcomes. Participants will leave with enough information to begin using the strategy in their own communities.

If you miss this session, Dr. McWilliam will also be presenting a session on the primary service provider model for providing services in natural environments during the Institute on Thursday, October 17. For more information and to register visit:

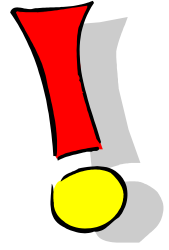
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/earlychildhoodconnections>

Upcoming Events

Colorado's 11th Annual Early Childhood Institute: Quality Practices in Assessment, Service Delivery, and Assistive Technology

October 17 & 18, 2002 in Vail, Colorado

New this year: Pre-Institute Workshops on October 16, 2002. For additional information, please visit: www.cde.state.co.us/earlychildhoodconnections



Early Childhood Activities Calendar. Remember to periodically check out this useful source of information on training opportunities and other events:

www.cde.state.co.us/earlychildhoodconnections/calendar/Cal.htm

Subscription Information

You can request a **FREE** monthly subscription to *Resources and Connections* to be sent by e-mail or U.S. mail.

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To Receive Connections by U.S. Mail: Contact Melissa Garner at garner_m@cde.state.co.us with SUBSCRIBE in the subject line and your U.S. Mail address in the body of the message or mail your address to: Melissa Garner, CDE, 201 E. Colfax Ave., Denver, CO 80203

For more information about evaluation and assessment in Colorado...

For more information about state policy and guidelines about evaluation and assessment of young children birth to five years old, contact Nan Vendegna, Colorado Department of Education at Vendegna_N@cde.state.co.us

Contact Us... *Resources and Connections* is published by Early Childhood Connections at the Colorado Department of Education and JFK Partners, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center. We invite you to contact the editors with your questions and suggestions.

Larry Edelman, Co-Editor edelman.larry@tchden.org JFK Partners 1825 Marion Street Denver, CO 80218	Susan Smith, Co-Editor smith_s@cde.state.co.us Colorado Department of Education 201 East Colfax Avenue Denver, CO 80203-1799	Ann Grady, Abstract Editor grady.ann@tchden.org JFK Partners 1825 Marion Street Denver, CO 80218
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Please pass along copies of Resources and Connections to your colleagues and friends!