Resources and Connections

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

A bi-monthly newsletter supporting quality practices in early learning and early intervention. See the back page to request a *FREE* monthly email subscription. Online versions can be viewed at:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/earlychildhoodconnections/Technical.htm

Coming Attractions to Colorado's 12th Annual Early Childhood Institute!

In This Issue
- The Asset-Based Context Matrix
- Research Brief
- Resources on the Web
- Upcoming Events

The Asset-Based Context Matrix

Adapted from: "The Asset-Based Context Matrix: An Assessment Tool for Assessing Children's Learning Opportunities and Participation in Natural Environments" by Linda L. Wilson, M.A., Donald W. Mott, M.A. and Deb Batman, M.S. (In press - Topics in Early Childhood Special Education).

Editors' Note: In anticipation of the Early Childhood Institute in Vail, we asked our Featured Presenters, Dathan Rush and M'Lisa Shelden, to recommend some information that could set the stage for their upcoming visit. They suggested an article written by some of their colleagues that describes information that Dathan and M'Lisa will be sharing at the Institute. The article describes The Asset-Based Context (ABC) Matrix, an assessment tool based on ongoing research and practice at the Family, Infant and Preschool Program, Western Carolina Center, Morganton, NC. The ABC Matrix provides a systematic and efficient way for practitioners and parents to gather an abundance of information that is asset-based, functional, and consistent with the family's values, interests, and priorities. Although the information generated is specific to each child and family, the organization and categorization of the information is based on conceptually sound principles and practices of early childhood development. Because of the specificity, functionality, and conceptual relevance of the information, the ABC Matrix is particularly helpful in generating intervention outcomes and strategies that can be implemented in children's natural learning environments. To learn more about the assessment, we'll need to wait for the full article to be published and for Dathan and M'Lisa's to present at the Institute.

The following section describes the components of the ABC Matrix to show how this assessment tool emphasizes the importance of children's learning in natural environments.

Context*:* The ABC Matrix examines everyday learning in three contexts of a child's life: (1) family life, (2) community life, and (3) early childhood program participation (when appropriate). Family life includes the day-to-day events in which a child and family participate, including routines and household jobs, holidays and special events, indoor and outdoor play, and family traditions and rituals. Community life includes activities and interactions the child and family have in the community, such as play at the park, recreation center activities, and organized religious events. Early childhood programs include activities in childcare settings; mother's day out

programs, Early Head Start/Head Start, playgroups, or family resource centers.

Activity Settings: Activity settings are places where the child and family spend time engaging in behavior. They are the natural occurring routines and daily events, such as getting ready for bed, eating meals, riding in the car, reading a story, taking a walk, playing outside on swings, playing dress up, and so forth, which occur in the contexts of a child's everyday life. Each activity setting provides a set of conditions for learning and expression of interests and assets (Dunst & Bruder, 1999; Dunst & Hamby, et al., 1999; Gallimore & Goldenberg, 1993). Activity settings provide children opportunities to participate and build upon their competencies in various locations, with different materials, and with a variety of people in a variety of ways. Knowing about a child and family's various activity settings provides practitioners with information about child and family interests and assets.

Interests and Assets: Interests refer to a child's likes, preferences, favorites, and so on that encourage engagement and participation in different settings, and both expression of existing competence and enhancement of new abilities (Dunst, Herter, & Shields, 2000; Kellegrew, 1998). Interests include how the child and family spend their time and what activities or events maintain their attention. A fundamental principle of contextually based learning is that a child's interests play an important role in influencing competence expression and development (e.g., Gelman, Masseys, & McManus, 1991; Guberman, 1999; Nelson, 1999). Assets are the particular abilities that are a child's or a family's strengths, talents, and capabilities. Assets are those things that a child or family is most likely to use as the means for participation in everyday activity settings (Hanft & Pilkington, 2000). Examples of assets include smiling, vocalizing, reaching, crawling, jumping, and so forth. As children use their abilities to participate in activities using their strengths, they are able to strengthen these abilities and gain the confidence to learn new skills.

Functional/Meaningful Interactions: Functional and meaningful interactions refer to critical and useful behavior that enables a child to produce a range of social-adaptive competencies, which promote and increase participation in everyday activity in an independent, competent, and satisfying manner (Bricker, Pretti-Frontczak, & McComas, 1998; Wolery, 1989). The term functional is used in a very specific sense to mean the relationship between child behavior and its socio-environmental consequences (e.g., increased participation and mutually beneficial interactions).

Opportunity and Participation: Opportunity refers to the quantity and quality of experiences occurring in activity settings promoting increased social and nonsocial child participation in cultural activity (Kellegrew, 1998). *Quantity* refers to the frequency, intensity, and variety of everyday experiences that provide contexts for strengthening and promoting child competence (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). *Quality* refers to the social and nonsocial characteristics of people and objects, respectively that engage a child in activity promoting participation and competence production (Dunst, Bruder, et al., 2001; Hanft & Pilkington, 2000). Participation is what a child actually does when an opportunity presents itself. Participation in an activity assists a child to strengthen existing abilities and helps him/her to learn new skills. For example, if a child has an interest in feeding himself, can hold a spoon, and has the opportunity to eat with a spoon multiple times each day, the ways in which he actually participates in feeding himself at meals is recorded on the Matrix. He may be able to bring the spoon to his mouth once a spoonful of food is scooped for him. His actual participation is bringing the spoon to his mouth. Having the opportunity to participate in this way helps him to perfect this skill, gives him chances to elaborate on his abilities, and provides opportunities to learn new ways to participate in mealtime.

Possibilities*: Possibilities are the ways in which a child and family can expand the child's opportunities to learn and participate in everyday experiences. In the earlier example, imagine that the child was interested in feeding himself and currently participated in meals by reaching for the spoon. A possibility for this child might be to give the child a chance to participate in meals by giving him a spoon to hold. By giving him the opportunity to hold a spoon, he may start to participate in meals by dipping the spoon into his food as well as

bring it to his mouth. Giving him the opportunity to hold and dip the spoon in food builds on his ability to use a spoon as a way to participate in a more conventional way in mealtime than before.

Administration of the ABC Matrix: Practitioners collect information for each component of the Matrix through observations, interviews and conversations with parents or primary caregivers, and through interactions with and observations of the child. After practitioners and parents identify activity settings, interests, assets, and functional/meaningful interactions, they gather information and record the current opportunities that a child has to engage in interesting experiences, as well as the ways in which a child participates during those opportunities. The ABC Matrix captures both the quality and quantity of opportunities provided to a child to display his or her interests and assets within identified activity settings. Practitioners and parents then plan, create, and record possibilities for the child and family based on the activity settings, interests, assets, opportunities and current participation experiences identified on the Matrix. Using the ABC Matrix and focusing on strengths and participation in everyday experiences assists practitioners to develop contextually based possibilities or contextually-based outcomes. Identifying contextually-based possibilities or outcomes helps practitioners and parents ensure IFSP or IEP interventions and activities are implemented in natural learning environments

---

Colorado's 12th Annual Early Childhood Institute

Celebrating Progress:
Applying What We Know About Effective Early Intervention

October 23 – 24, 2003
Vail Cascade Resort and Spa, Vail, Colorado

An Institute for family members and professionals with an interest in children birth – five years old with developmental delays and disabilities.

Thursday evening, October 23, 2003 beginning at 4:30 p.m.
Registration and Exhibits, Opening keynote, and Networking Reception and Cash Bar
All-Day Friday, October 24, 2003
Opening and Closing Plenary Sessions and Two Breakout Sessions

Featured Speakers:
M'Lisa Shelden, PT, Ph.D., is the Director of the Family, Infant and Preschool Program (FIPP) at Western Carolina Center and an associate research scientist at the Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute in Morganton, North Carolina.
Dathan Rush, M.A., CCC-SLP, is the Associate Director of FIPP at Western Carolina Center and a research associate at the Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute.

Registration and Lodging Information

Space is Limited! Register early! Visit:
http://eccevents.spindustry.com/asp/EventsPlus/events.asp?e=20

Questions?
Call (303) 837-8466 x200 or toll-free (888) 776-2332 x200 or email
earlychildhoodinstitute@what-works.org

Research Brief

In this article, a three-dimensional framework for defining different aspects of natural learning environments is used to organize and describe natural communication intervention practices. The first dimension of the framework describes the settings in which the learning takes place. Settings are distinguished as either contextual or non-contextual. Contextual learning enables a child to participate in activities that are familiar and meaningful, as well as socially and culturally relevant. Non-contextual learning refers to the creation of artificial environments designed to simulate environmental situations, which are not usually comfortable and familiar to the child. The second dimension of the framework is the activity dimension. The model differentiates between activities that are adult-directed and those that are child-directed. "Direction" is a key concept because it refers to the person who has the locus of control during the interaction. For example, when a child engages in an activity designed and initiated by an adult, the control remains with the adult. When a child initiates an activity and a parent or interventionist follows the child's lead, the child remains at the center of completing the activity. All children participate with activities that are adult-centered and child-centered. However, young children with disabilities, especially those children receiving intervention, tend to spend more time in adult–directed activities than their peers without disabilities. The third dimension of the framework relates to the role of an interventionist, and the extent to which the interventionist is present or absent when a natural communication learning opportunity takes place. This dimension differentiates between interventions implemented primarily by a speech therapist and the everyday naturally occurring learning opportunities that enhance communication competence,

The three-dimensional framework provides a foundation for describing seven communication strategies and practices: (1) increased opportunities for a child to practice existing and new communication skills; (2) adult responsiveness to child behavior as a method for increased communicative initiations; (3) imitation of child behavior for sustained communication engagement; (4) increased engagement in child-directed activities with child-centered outcomes; (5) modeling as a strategy for increasing opportunities to exhibit certain communication skills; (6) minimal prompting as a way of promoting child initiations and sustaining child engagement around topics and activities of interest; and (7) increasing child participation in communication rich activities as a way of supporting communication competence. These strategies can be implemented in practice when the therapist knows how and where children and their families spend their time, and has the ability to transfer his or her own knowledge to parents concerning the activity settings and learning opportunities afforded by them. This role will help parents discover optimal child engagement strategies available to them and the learning opportunities contained therein.

In summary, this article describes strategies and practices that are general by intention in order to provide guidance for the design of a broad range of interventions. The authors make the point that learning in natural environments sounds simple, but in fact reflects a complex process that varies from child to child, parent to parent, and context to context. It is a combination of the setting, type of activity, and person that constitutes best practice in natural environments. This article emphasizes ways in which interventionists can develop their communication practice in natural environments through knowledge and reflection on the interests and capability of the child and family, using the seven strategies proposed by the authors.

Editorial Comment: The strategies and practices outlined in this article will provide both interventionists and families with guidelines and practices to use collaboratively to enhance children's communication competence in their own preferred environment.

A potpourri of web sites of interest to families, practitioners, higher education faculty, administrators, and policy makers.

Learning Basket

The Learning Basket has been developed to be a practical tool to enable parents and caregivers to nurture learning with infants and toddlers through play. This approach has been used in Migrant Head Start, Healthy Families and Head Start Programs.
http://www.learningbasket.homestead.com/

The Future of Children

The Future of Children's most recent journal issue, *Caring for Infants and Toddlers*, is available online. *The Future of Children: Caring for Infants and Toddlers* summarizes the latest research and policy developments surrounding how young children are cared for in the United States.
http://www.futureofchildren.org/homepage2824/index.htm

Culturally Competent Practice

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recently launched a dynamic section on their Web site: View NASP's Web site for a comprehensive menu of resources, research, links, frequently asked questions, reports, and more addressing educational practices for students, families, and others from diverse cultural backgrounds. For more information go to:
http://www.nasponline.org/culturalcompetence/index.html

Special Education News

Special Education News answers a need in education for in-depth, timely news related to educating students with disabilities. The Web site and newsletter are journalistic publications centered on the news of the special education field. The Web site is also designed to offer unique resources to special education professionals in one convenient place. To view, go to:
http://www.specialednews.com

Resources on the Web

The Promising Practices Network (PPN)

The PPN web site highlights programs and practices that credible research indicates are effective in improving outcomes for children, youth, and families. The information pertains to children from the prenatal period to age 18, as well as the families and communities in which they live. This site provides useful information to decision-makers, practitioners, and program funders who must choose among many possibilities for improving results for children, youth, and families.

http://www.promisingpractices.net/about.asp

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education

The Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education is integral to NECTAC's role in linking people and knowledge. Through our working relationships with knowledge producers and users at all levels: researchers, policy makers, practitioners, families and advocates for young children with special needs, we identify new information resources and enter them into the ERIC database, for retrieval by anyone through library or web access.

http://www.nectac.org/eric/adjhome.asp

Connect for Kids

Connect for Kids, an award-winning multimedia project, helps adults make their communities better places for families and children. The Web site offers a place on the Internet for adults— parents, grandparents, educators, policymakers and others—who want to become more active citizens, from volunteering to voting with kids in mind.

http://www.connectforkids.org/

Upcoming Events

Colorado's 12th Annual Early Childhood Institute
October 23 – 24, 2003 at the Vail Cascade Resort and Spa – See page 3 for details.

Regional IFSP Training
October 3 – Grand Junction; October 7 – Denver; October 30 – Pueblo; November 4 – Greeley; Steamboat Springs – TBA
This one day interactive training event consists of 3 modules that focus on IFSP development. Each training session will be limited to 30 participants. The targeted audience is IFSP teams consisting of Service Coordinators, parents, Child Find personnel, and service providers. Register at: http://eccevents.spindustry.com/asp/EventsPlus/events.asp?e=16

Service Coordination Core Training
November 11 & 12, December 9 & 10, 2003 from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. in Denver.
A free intensive four-day course for anyone wanting to build their skills as a service coordinator and for those wanting to help others become highly effective service coordinators. Intended for service coordinators, family members, community centered board personnel, public health personnel, home visitors, and child find personnel. For information & registration: http://eccevents.spindustry.com/asp/EventsPlus/events.asp?e=8

Autism National Committee Conference
Mile High Visions: People with Autism Living a Good Life
October 24 - 25, 2003 at the Radisson Hotel Stapleton Plaza
Contact Marne Ares at 720-941-1538 or http://www.autcom.org

State Autism Conference
Putting the Pieces Together: Strategies and Methodologies for Teaching Children and Youth with Autism. November 14 - 15, 2003 at Holiday Inn DIA
Contact Gina Quintana at 303-866-6605 or Quintana_g@cde.state.co.us

---

Early Childhood Forums

Early Childhood Forums will be held in several communities to discuss how to build and support an integrated early childhood system that promotes school readiness in Colorado. These forums are open for anyone who is invested in establishing and supporting a coordinated and integrated early childhood system. Sponsored by the Early Childhood State Systems Team in conjunction with the National Smart Start Technical Assistance Center and the Colorado Consolidated Child Care Pilot,

Durango
Town meeting: October 20, 6-9 p.m.
Technical Assistance Day: October 21, 8:30-4:00 p.m. "Expanding Organizational Capacity on the Local Level." RSVP: Tamara Volz at 970-247-5960 or tamarav@tchs4c.org

Pueblo
Town meeting: October 22, 6-9 p.m.
Technical Assistance Day: October 23, 8:30-4:00 p.m. "Expanding Organizational Capacity on the Local Level." RSVP: Cindy Bernal at 1-800-894-7707 or cindy.bernal@pueblocc.edu

Metro Denver
Town meeting: December 1, 6-9 p.m.
Technical Assistance Day: December 2, 8:30-4:00 p.m. "Harnessing Public Support."
RSVP: Gretchen Davidson at 720-289-5532 or g-davidson@att.net

Fort Collins
Town meeting: December 3, 6-9 p.m.
Technical Assistance day: December 4, 8:30-4:00 p.m. "Harnessing Public Support."
RSVP: Wendy Watson at 970-490-3197 or ecc@frii.com

Early Childhood Activities Calendar
Remember to periodically check out this useful source of information on training opportunities and other events:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/earlychildhoodconnections/calendar/Cal.htm

National Survey of Early Intervention Service Providers
The Tots n' Tech Research Institute (TnT) is a federally funded project that conducts research about the use of assistive technology (AT) in order to enhance the development of infants and toddlers with disabilities. The Institute is currently conducting a national survey of Early Intervention Service Providers who work with children under the age of three. The results of this survey will be used, in conjunction with other institute activities, to identify needs in early intervention regarding AT. For more information, please visit:
http://tnt.asu.edu/CoorSurvey/EI_letter.htm

Subscription Information
To receive a FREE monthly *electronic* subscription to Resources and Connections, send a blank e-mail message to garner_m@cde.state.co.us with SUBSCRIBE in the subject line.
To unsubscribe, send a blank email message to garner_m@cde.state.co.us with UNSUBSCRIBE in the subject line.
To view or subscribe, go to
http://www.cde.state.co.us/earlychildhoodconnections/Technical.htm or contact your local Early Childhood Connections at 1-888-777-4041.

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.

Please pass along copies of Resources and Connections to your colleagues and friends.

Larry Edelman, Co-Editor edelman.larry@tchden.org	Susan Smith, Co-Editor smith_s@cde.state.co.us	Ann Grady, Abstract Editor grady.ann@tchden.org