

Introduction to Assessment in Child Development

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Methods of Assessment in Child Development: Introduction

- Definitions
- Purpose of Assessment
- Principles of Assessment
- Criteria for Good Assessment
- What to Assess
- Types of Assessment
- Ethics of Assessment

Definitions

- **Assessment:** Process of collecting information about children's development, learning, behavior, academic progress, and need for special services in order to plan and implement curriculum and instruction (Morrison, 2006)
- **Testing:** Formal, systematic, and standardized procedures for gathering samples of students' behavior.
 - *"Test" and "Examination" will be used as synonyms*

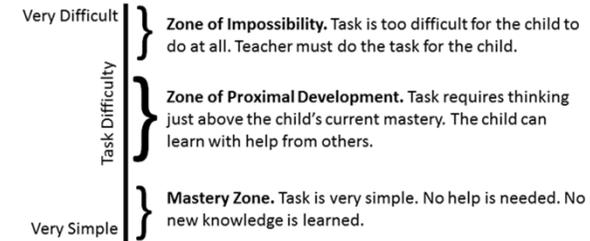
Purposes of Assessment

1. Assessment to inform instruction
2. Assessment for diagnostic and selection purposes
3. Assessment for accountability and program evaluation

Purposes of Assessment

- **Assessment to inform instruction**
 - Teachers know what should and should not be taught
 - Share information about student growth, development, and performance with students, parents, teachers, and others

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) Vygotsky



Instruction and Assessment

- Learning is a process of building new understandings on the foundation of existing knowledge and skills
 - Therefore, learning will be most effective when built on what children already know and can do
 - Teachers should understand a child's zone of proximal development – the area where learning is within reach but takes the child just beyond his or her current skills
 - *Example: Walking across a balance beam*
 - Role of assessment is to provide insight into educational experiences that will be most effective in helping children learn and grow beyond where they currently are

Instruction and Assessment

- When properly done, assessment not only *evaluates* but also *enhances* students' learning and teachers' instruction
- Teacher instruction, student learning, and assessment are continuously inter-related activities
- Assessment of children's growth and development is essential for effective teaching and learning
 - What is taught and how it is taught requires teachers to make choices
 - The foundation for these choices should be based on assessment of children's current skills and aptitude for future learning

Purposes of Assessment

- **Assessment for diagnostic and selection purposes**
 - Make decisions about placement, promotion/retention, and graduation
 - **Selection:** Identify students prepared for a particular curriculum/educational intervention
 - **Diagnosis:** Identify special learning needs

Purposes of Assessment

- **Assessment for accountability and program evaluation**
 - Information about the quality of a school
 - Information about specific educational programs
- This information can be beneficial for:
 - Parents choosing a school
 - Educationalists choosing a program/curriculum to implement
 - Funders choosing what to fund
 - Society to hold educational proprietors accountable

Purposes of Assessment

(Morrison, 2006, p. 157)

Children	Families	Early Childhood Programs	Early Childhood Teachers	Society
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Identify what children know •Identify children's special needs •Determine appropriate placement •Refer children and/or families for additional services to agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Communicate with parents to provide information about their child's progress and learning •Relate school activities to home activities and experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Make policy decisions regarding what is and is not appropriate for children •Determine how well programs and services are beneficial and appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Identify children's skills, abilities, and needs •Make lesson plans •Select materials •Report to parents and families about children's developmental status and achievement •Monitor and improve the teaching-learning process •Group for instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Provide a basis for public policy (e.g., legislation, recommend -ations, and statements •Provide info relating to school-wide achievements

Criteria for Good Assessments (NAEYC, 2003)

- Developmentally appropriate
- Culturally and linguistically relevant
- Related to children's daily activities
- Based on best practices of assessment procedures
- Includes families both in the assessment process and sharing results
- Connected to specific beneficial purposes:
 - Foundation for decisions about teaching and learning
 - Identify concerns that require intervention for individual children
 - Help schools/programs improve their quality of education

Criteria of Good Assessment

- Assessments must be intentional (purposeful) and systematic
- Assessments should be based on objectives for instruction
- Assessments should have reasonable reliability and validity evidence

Principles of Assessment

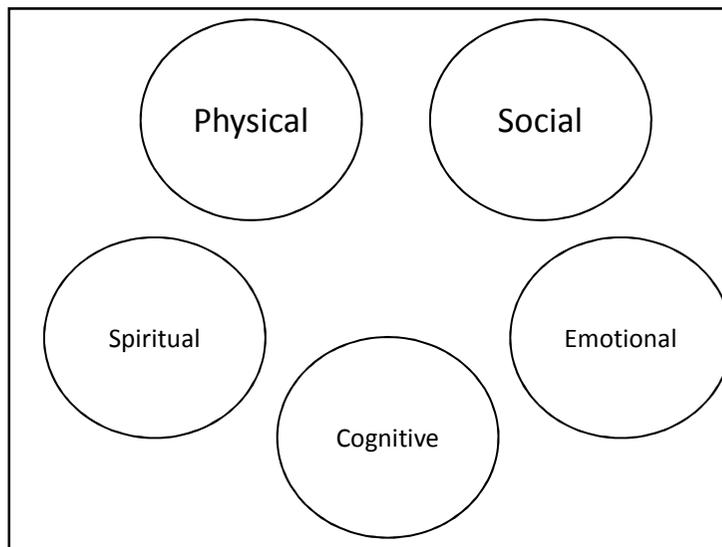
- Assessment is an ongoing process
- Assessment uses information from multiple sources collected over time
- Exams/Tests, while an important tool in assessment, are only one of many options for acquiring information about a child's knowledge and skills

Principles of Assessment

- Children demonstrate their knowledge or skills through active engagement in classroom activities, which can then be assessed by informal assessments
- Teachers can conduct assessment by observing and documenting children's skills and knowledge as they participate in classroom activities
- Assessment is of practically no value without influencing instruction or intervention
 - The meaning of an assessment is closely tied to its utility - its contributions to decision making about intervention or its confirmation of a child's progress in an intervention

What Should Be Assessed

- For some purposes of assessment, children's previously developed skills and abilities should be assessed
- For other purposes of assessment, children's readiness to benefit from educational programs should be assessed



Domains of Development to be Assessed in Early Childhood Education

- **Cognitive skills:** Thinking skills and knowledge
- **Social skills:** Interactions with others
- **Character:** Moral/personality dispositions when nobody is watching
- **Self-regulation skills:** Ability to plan, guide, and monitor own behavior
- **Physical skills:** Gross motor (large movement) and fine motor (small movement)

Domains to be Assessed: Head Start's Developed Skills

(US Department of Health and Human Services, 2015)

- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language and Literacy
- Cognition (Mathematical Thinking and Scientific Reasoning)
- Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development

Readiness to Learn

- Receptivity to learning
 - Physically healthy, rested, nourished
 - Enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities
 - Able to communicate needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in their primary language
- Teachers' beliefs about a child's readiness to enter school:
 - Takes turns and shares
 - Not disruptive of class
 - Sensitive to other children's feelings
 - Can follow directions

Types of Assessments

- Formal vs. Informal Assessment
 - **Formal:** Pre-developed tests related to specific developmental skills or curriculum content
 - **Informal:** Assessment of child development and learning that are ongoing, in many contexts, usually designed and carried out by the classroom teacher

Formal vs. Informal Assessment

- WAEC
- Asking children questions during a lesson to test understanding
- Observing children's faces to see if they demonstrate understanding
- Common Entrance Exam

Types of Assessments

- Objective vs. Subjective Assessment
 - **Objective Assessment:** Scoring does not require interpretation
 - **Subjective Assessment:** Examiner must make a personal judgment about the quality of work

Objective vs. Subjective Assessments

- Essay questions
- Multiple choice items
- True/False Items
- Observation of behavior
- Fill-in-the-blank
- Student answers to questions
- Matching items

Ethics of Assessment

- **Confidentiality:** Identities and results are revealed only to the intended audience and all information is discussed only in professional settings
- **Consent:** Individuals (or parents, in the case of children) have given their permission to be evaluated and/or assessed

Ethics of Assessment

- Only one assessment should NOT be used as the basis for significant decisions
 - Use multiple assessment tools for major educational decisions: interviews, anecdotal records, daily performance samples, standardized testing
 - “One measure...cannot be the sole source for evaluating a student’s progress” (Enz & Morrow, 2009, p. 8)
- No test score should be considered infallible or immutable (perfect or unchangeable).
- Educators should consider the consequences of an assessment and ensure that the assessment will be educationally beneficial

Ethics of Formal Assessment of Young Children

- Assessment should benefit the child
- Assessment should have a specific purpose
- Formal assessments should have reliability and validity evidence
- Assessments should be age-appropriate in the content and method of assessment
- Assessment should be linguistically appropriate

Challenges in Assessing Young Children

- Children’s attention and self-regulation abilities to be purposeful are only beginning to develop
 - Young children can have difficulty attending to verbal instructions
 - Children may not understand the importance of the assessment
 - Children’s language abilities may not allow them to communicate what they know
 - Children may not be able to report how they are feeling or thinking

Challenges in Assessing Young Children

- The younger the child, the more difficult it is to obtain valid test results
 - Performance on a test can be affected by the child's physical condition, emotional state, and conditions of assessment