Assessment: Gathering and Using Information

Co-written at CEED by Vicki Hawley, Tanya Goretzki, and Karen Trewartha-Weiner

1

Assessment training, Handout 1.1: Course and module objectives

Assessment: Gathering and Using Information

Description: Assessment is a familiar buzzword in the child care and education field but not always easily understood and practiced. Participants in this training will practice the assessment cycle of gathering information and making decisions based on that information. The purpose of gathering and using information is to support children and families.

Overall Course Objectives:

> 1. Identify/define common terms used in assessment.
> 2. Explore criteria for quality assessment tools.
> 3. Practice the assessment cycle of observation/documentation, analysis, planning, implementation and reflection.
> 4. Identify strategies to engage families in assessment processes, results, and implications.

This training course consists of four modules. Each module has objectives that align with the course objectives above.

Module One Objectives Authentic Assessment: laying a foundation
1. Define common terms related to authentic child assessment
2. Practice observation across developmental domains
3. Devise a plan for observing a focus child in your program.

Module 2 Objectives Authentic Assessment: strategies and tools for gathering observation
1. Brainstorm and plan strategies for making assessment part of the daily routine.
2. Identify a process for choosing and using assessment
3. Explore multiple assessment tools
4. Use multiple tools/strategies to observe and document with the focus child.

Module Three objectives: Authentic Assessment: using assessment to make decisions
1. Apply assessment to lesson planning.
2. Participate in a "data debrief" reflection experience.
3. Plan and practice conversation with family to gather/share information.

Module Four objectives Authentic Assessment: conversations with families
1. Discuss the role of families in authentic assessment
2. Gain resources for related issues in child assessment (dual language learners).
3. Practice cycle of observation, planning, reflection, and conversation with families
4. Plan next steps for program needs.

Field work and focus child

Field work: *Each module will include a field work assignment to do back home between sessions.* *Then the next time we meet, we will USE our field work in activities that help us talk about how it went, what we learned, what was frustrating, etc. We want to do more than learn "about" assessment—we want to practice it and have an opportunity to work out any challenges that may arise. Field work will include:*

- *Specific things to notice, write down, and bring to the next session.*
- *Each training (after this one)* *will begin with discussion about how your field work went,* so please use the tools during the week in order to make this discussion rich and meaningful.

Choosing a focus child: *Decide to focus on one child in order to practice using the tools that we talk about in the training. At the end of the session, everyone will decide which child, so think about **how** you want to decide. (Do you want to choose a child who is challenging right now? One who is new? One you are curious about and need to get to know better?) You will use the field work activities with this particular child in between sessions. (Confidentiality note: while we will talk about how your field work went during future sessions, please do not use names or identifying descriptions.)*

FIELD WORK—back in your program between modules

Between Module 1 and Module 2: *gathering information about your focus child.*

Select one child that you will observe this week. This child will be your focus child and we will refer to this child throughout the remaining sessions. Before leaving Module 1 class think about these 3 questions, jot down thoughts, and be ready to share one with the group.

1. *Why did you choose this child?*

2. *What are you hoping to learn?*

3. *What do you think you might see?*

Select a time and place in which to observe your target child.

Observe your focus child and collect *at least 5* anecdotal observations. Look in the ECIPS (online or print them out) to identify what you see in the child and where s/he fits in a particular domain. Is s/he doing what the ECIPS says or not? How can this information help you decide what to do or how to plan? **Bring your observations and the answers to these questions, to class next week.**

Handout 1.3: Definitions of assessment

Authentic Assessment[1]:

- **Ongoing:** Is a natural part of what teachers do every day
- **Whole child:** Helps us observe all areas of a child's growth and development
- **Naturalistic:** Occurs as a child interacts with familiar materials, people and activities
- **Multiple perspectives:** Uses information from a variety of sources (including families)
- **Useful**: Helps teachers plan, measure progress, work with families and individualize curriculum

Parent Aware: "Instructional child assessment"
http://www.parentawareratings.org/files/Child%20Assessment%20Review%20Process%20Guide_1.pdf

A systematic, ongoing procedure to evaluate children's progress and plan appropriate learning experiences and instruction

What I notice about the definitions:

What I already do and how:

Links to Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: (will be used throughout training)
Birth to Three: *https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Legacy/DHS-4438-ENG*
Preschool: *http://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Legacy/DHS-4576-ENG*

---

[1]Results Matter, Colorado Department of Education, http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/observation.htm

Guide to the Child Assessment Review Process

This is a guide for submitting child assessment tool(s) for Parent Aware Rating Tool review and approval.

The guide provides:
- Background on the Parent Aware child assessment approval process
- Definition of child assessment
- Criteria used for reviewing and approving child assessments for the Parent Aware program.

This guide gives child care/early learning programs an opportunity to understand the review process before submitting assessments.

Submitting Assessments for Review
Child care/early learning programs participating in Parent Aware are invited to nominate instructional child assessments for review.

Three types of assessment tools are eligible for review:
- Comprehensive, published child assessment tools
- Comprehensive, site-designed child assessment tools
- A bundle of child assessment tools. These include multiple tools that, when reviewed together, are comprehensive of the domains in the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress. A bundle is typically a combination of published and/or site-designed tools.

Programs must use the Parent Aware Child Assessment Nomination Form to nominate assessment tools. If the tool is published, individuals nominating assessments must provide the information needed to purchase a copy of the tool so that it can be reviewed. If the tool is site-designed, a copy of the tool and all supporting materials is requested for review. **Only materials and information explicitly written for the purpose of informing child care providers'/early educators' use of and understanding of the development of the nominated assessment tool(s) should be submitted for review.** Examples of the type of materials and information that can be used by the reviewers include: assessment guides, instructions for conducting the assessment, observation guides, manuals, assessment forms, assessment reports, training manual, training materials, and research on technical adequacy.

Approval Process
Nominated tools will first be reviewed to determine if they meet the Parent Aware definition of an instructional child assessment. The **definition of "instructional child assessment"** is:

> A systematic, ongoing procedure to assess every participating child's developmental progress and to plan appropriate learning experiences and instruction.

If the nominated assessment(s) are found to meet the definition of "instructional child assessment," they will be reviewed to determine if they meet the required criteria. The review will score the assessment on a standard scale, with each required criterion scored separately using the guidelines described below. Optional criteria are desired but not required. The review process will document the extent to which the assessment tool meets the optional criteria, but the tool will not be scored on them.

Parent
Aware

Parent Aware Standards

Standards

Physical health and well-being

- Promotes child safety, injury prevention, and a learning-rich environment that is free of hazards
- Provides nutritious meals, opportunities for physical activity, and linkages to supports for families related to physical, oral and social-emotional health

Teaching and relationships

- Communicates regularly with families and links them to parent education services
- Supports children's transitions to kindergarten
- Promotes and supports the learning and development of all children, including children who are linguistically and culturally diverse, and children with disabilities
- Demonstrates effectiveness through intentional interactions with children
- Provides individualized instruction that promotes development and helps close the learning gap so that children perform at age level or higher

Assessment of child progress

- Assesses children by observing and tracking their developmental progress using a research-based assessment tool, and uses those results to individualize instruction
- Includes families in the assessment process

Teacher training and education

- Caregivers/lead teachers, program directors/administrators, education coordinators:
  - Have formal education degrees or credentials in early childhood education or a related field
  - Are engaged in ongoing professional development to ensure current knowledge and skills
- Program directors/administrators have specialized preparation in program administration or business management

Parent Aware

A Rating Tool for Selecting High Quality
Child Care and Early Education

Parent Aware Indicators and Standards
Assessment of child progress: Centers

AC1a. All lead teachers have completed at least 2 hours of training on authentic observation practices.

AC1b. Observes children regularly and records information at least monthly.

AC2a. Shares observation summaries with families prepared using authentic observation practices.

AC3a. Conducts assessment using an approved tool with all children at least twice per year in at least the following domains: social-emotional, language and literacy, mathematical thinking and physical development; and all lead teachers have completed 8 hours of training on authentic child assessment, OR   2 points

AC3b. Conducts assessment using an approved tool with all children at least once per year in two or more domains, and all lead teachers have completed at least 8 hours of training on authentic child assessment.   1 point
(If program is using an approved assessment tool with some but not all age groups, partial credit is given.)

AC3c. Provides families with child assessment results, and if a child has an Individualized   1 point
Education Plan (IEP) or Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP), shares assessment results with team with family's permission. For a child with a special need who is receiving specialty services (for example, physical or occupational therapy), shares assessment results with service providers with family's permission. (If program is using an approved assessment tool with some but not all age groups, partial credit is given.)

AC3d. Uses child assessment information to develop lesson plans and individual goals for all   1 point
children in the program. (If program is using an approved assessment tool with some but not all age groups, partial credit is given.)

Assessment of Child Progress: Family Child Care

AC1a. All lead child care providers have completed at least 2 hours of training on authentic observation practices.

AC1b. Observes children regularly and records information at least monthly.

 AC2a. Shares observation summaries with families prepared using authentic observation practices.

AC3a. Conducts assessment using an approved tool with all children at least twice per year in at least the following domains: social emotional, language and literacy, mathematical thinking and physical   2 points
development; and all lead child care providers have completed at least 8 hours of training on authentic child assessment, OR

AC3b. Conducts assessment using an approved tool with all children at least once per year in two or more domains, and all lead child care providers have completed at least 8 hours of training on authentic child assessment. (If program is using an approved assessment tool with some but not all age groups,   1 point
partial credit is given.)

 AC3c. Provides families with child assessment results, and if a child has an Individualized
Education Plan (IEP) or Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP), shares assessment results with   1 point
team. For a child with a special need who is receiving specialty services (for example, physical or occupational therapy), shares assessment results with service providers with families permission.
(If program is using an approved assessment tool with some but not all age groups, partial credit is given.)

AC3d. Uses child assessment information to develop lesson plans and individual goals for all   1 point
children in the program. (If program is using an approved assessment tool with some but not all age groups, partial credit is given.)
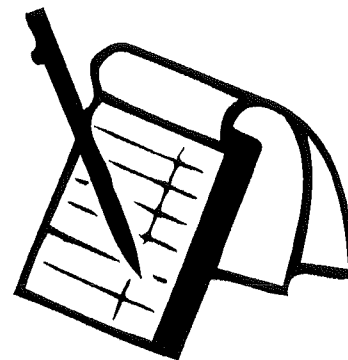
PLANNED OBSERVATION CAN
BE HELPFUL FOR SEVERAL REASONS:

1. **It is an opportunity to learn about each child's skills, interests and needs.**

   Does James get upset and need more space when others crowd him? Is Tara bored with the puzzles you have out and in need of something more challenging? What are Cody's interests, what activities does he enjoy and stay with for long periods of time? What is the child's individual temperament—how is this affecting his behavior and that of the group?

2. **It is an opportunity to evaluate your program and make changes to your environment.**

   You may decide to change part of the daily routine based on this observation, or rearrange the storage for art supplies so that children can reach them more easily. Do you have enough space for active children to move? Do you have alone/quiet space? Are the toddlers falling asleep before lunch arrives?

3. **It allows you to notice a child's progress as they learn new skills.**

   Is Andrew ready for longer books to read? Has Josie mastered the use of scissors? Does she need more practice? Josh is using more words to solve problems and less hitting.

4. **It allows you to determine how best to handle problem situations and behaviors.**

   Is Page more likely to have a tantrum when reacting to separation from her parents or when squabbling over toys? What is happening with Cassie before she bites? Is there something that you notice that leads Mindy into an aggressive act? With this knowledge you can learn to anticipate problems and figure out how best to prevent them.

Observation will help you step back, make informed decisions, and give you knowledge that can be communicated to the child's family as well.

HANDOUT to associate with Those Challenging Children – Observation
1999 • ND Early Childhood Training Center • NDSU, Extension
16

PLANNED OBSERVATION
CAN BE HELPFUL...

GUIDELINES FOR ACCURATE AND OBJECTIVE RECORDING

- Record only facts-write what you see not what you think is happening.

- Record every detail.

- Use action words-verbs-whenever possible: climbed, jumped, frowned, giggled, etc.

- Observe without interpreting.

- Record only what you see and hear.

- Use words that describe but do not judge.

- Record the facts in the order they occur.

- Jot down notes frequently. Carry a pad with you.

- Use short phrases rather than complete sentences.

- Abbreviate what the child said-don't need all the words-get the gist.

- Describe how a child is doing or saying something.

- Develop a system of abbreviations or initials: qu-quiet area, dr-dramatic play, SB-Sam Brown, etc.

HANDOUT to associate with *Those Challenging Children – Observation*
1999 • ND Early Childhood Training Center • NDSU, Extension
15

GUIDELINES FOR
ACCURATE/OBJECTIVE RECORDING

Tips for Overcoming Preconceived Notions During Observation

✓ Acknowledge that most people have some preconceived notions; denying their existence does not make the problem go away.

✓ Avoid attaching labels to children. Positive labels can be equally as damaging to objectivity as negative ones.

✓ Before doing an observation, write down any preconceived notions you might have about the child and his or her family.

✓ Anticipate examples of the child's behavior in which these notions might come into play. For example, if you view Emily as needy, you might anticipate that she would cling to adults while on the playground. This might make you be on the lookout for behavior that confirms your expectations.

✓ Be watchful for examples of this type, so that you are observing what you actually see – not what you think you will see.

✓ Do not overcompensate. Your goal in this situation is to be objective, not to learn to see things in a different light.

✓ Be sure to check yourself for preconceived notions.

✓ Consider asking someone else to observe with you to ensure objectivity and reliability.

from: Overcoming Observation Challenges page 45

Field work: between Module 2 and Module 3

Practice specific observation strategies as you observe your target child.

1. *Choose two different observation strategies.*
2. *Use each strategy to collect information about your target child. After using a strategy, note the following:*
   - *What is great about it? (What was it like to use?)*
   - *What is not so great about it? (What was challenging about using it? If it didn't meet your expectations, why not?)*
   - *What did you learn about the child?*
   - *How did you use what you learned? How could you use it in the future?*

Take notes and answer the questions before next time. *We'll be using our findings to move to the next step (in Module 3).*

Also, please bring a copy of your lesson plan for the following week to the next session.

Field work between Module 3 and Module 4: Two tasks

1. **Make changes to your lesson plan based on the needs of your focus child.** *Based on our earlier conversations and what you have learned about your focus child, what is* **ONE** *domain that you would like to support more intentionally? Where could you adapt or add an activity in your lesson plan that supports this?* **Write it on the lesson plan and implement the change.** *In Module 4, we will talk about how the activity went and what you learned*

2. **Parent conversation.** *Between this session and the next, plan and have a conversation with the family of your focus child that relates to assessment. Some possibilities are:*
   a. *Tell them you are taking a class on assessment with an assignment to ask parents a few questions. (Most people like helping someone complete their "homework" ☺)*
   b. *You have learned some things about their child using observation strategies and you would like to share what you have learned. (show data; ask questions, etc.)*

   Before the conversation, *jot down: What do you want to* **ask them** *about? (What would give you more insight about their child? It could be something about what they do at home, how the parents handle a behavior, etc. What are you curious about?).*
   Next, reflect about:
   What do you know about the family?   How do they usually respond to questions?
   When will you have the conversation? Where would you have the conversation?

Write out your goal for when you will have this conversation and one thing you want to ask them. Share it with the person on your left.

OBSERVATION METHODS–ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES

The following chart lists some advantages and disadvantages of the observation tools and the best uses for each.

Tool	Advantages	Disadvantages
Running Record **Best Uses:** *To observe skills, use of materials, and interactions. For any situation if done objectively accurately.*	■ Format is easy to learn requires only paper and pencil to implement ■ Can be used in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes ■ Collects information accurately and objectively ■ Can focus attention on one child ■ Can find out aspects of a child's behavior that could be unnoticed	■ Requires practice to refine skills; training helps observers be more reliable ■ Difficult to record everything seen and heard; may need to develop system of abbreviations ■ Requires good writing skills ■ May need backup support if done for extended period
Anecdotal Records **Best Uses:** *To record milestones, incidents, and noteworthy behaviors.*	■ Can be done after the fact in minimum time with minimum effort ■ Does not require training or extensive writing skills ■ Parents could readily do	■ Quality of information depends on abilities of observer ■ Reported behaviors may not be typical ■ Provide only minimal information unless done with regularity
Sampling Observations **(A–Event, B–Time)** **Best Uses:** *To assess the frequency of expressed behavior.*	■ Training not needed ■ Reading skills not required ■ Easy to do and can involve children in the data collection process ■ Provide data on frequency of behaviors	■ Can get tedious ■ Require diligence on part of observer ■ May need to purchase standardized instruments
Diary Observations **Best Uses:** *To document changes in behavior, events, and development.*	■ Illustrate children's development over time and pinpoint patterns in behavior ■ Provide a history of a child's experiences ■ Training not required ■ Can be done after the fact ■ Parents might enjoy doing	■ Unreliable – quality and length of entries depend on observer ■ Unsystematic–regularity of entries depends on observer ■ Writing skills required ■ Biases difficult to remove from the approach
Checklists **Best Uses:** *To track progress; document skill development.*	■ Does not rely on judgments; force observer to decide ■ Easy to use and no writing skills required ■ Some require training, many do not ■ Can be used in various settings to meet many purposes	■ Quality of data depends on quality of instrument ■ Usefulness depends on comprehensiveness of instrument ■ Provide no information on frequency of observed behaviors ■ May need to purchase standardized instruments
Rating Scales **Best Uses:** *To determine the degree to which behaviors or skills are exhibited.*	■ Good for assessing skills ■ Can be used in a variety of settings ■ Many can be done after the fact ■ Some require training, many do not ■ No writing skills required	■ Judgment-based: observer bias difficult to overcome ■ Quality of data depends on quality of instrument ■ Usefulness depends on comprehensiveness of instrument ■ Tendency for observers to rate at the midpoint and avoid extremes ■ May need to purchase standardized instruments

From: Observation and Recording: Tools for Decision Making, Head State Training Guide

Child Assessment Nomination Form

Child care/early learning programs participating in Parent Aware are invited to use this form to nominate instructional child assessments for review.

Three types of assessment tool(s) are eligible to be reviewed:
- Comprehensive, published child assessment tools
- Comprehensive, site-designed child assessment tools
- A bundle of child assessment tools

A "bundle of child assessment tools" is a: a set of tools that, when reviewed together, are comprehensive of the domains in the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress. A bundle is typically a combination of published and/or site-designed tools.

Comprehensive, published child assessment tools
For each comprehensive, published child assessment tool you are nominating, provide the full title, edition (if the tool includes an edition number), author, publisher, copyright year and website address. This information will be used to purchase a copy of the tool so that it can be reviewed.

Comprehensive, site-designed child assessment tools
If the tool is site-designed, list the title of the child assessment and attach a copy of the tool and all supporting materials (e.g., manuals, training materials, procedures, protocols). Only information written for the purpose of informing child care providers'/early educators' use and understanding of the development of the nominated assessment tool(s) should be submitted for use in the approval process.

Bundle of child assessment tools
If a bundle of assessment tools is used, submit the full title, edition (if the tool includes an edition number), author, publisher, copyright year, and the website address for each published tool included in your bundle. List the title of the site-designed child assessment(s) and attach a copy or copies to this nomination form. Only information written for the purpose of informing child care providers'/early educators' use and understanding of the development of the nominated assessment tool(s) should be submitted.

The review will not begin until all required information is received.

Contact information of individual nominating the instructional child assessment:

Name:	
Program:	
Address:	
County:	
Email:	
Phone:	
Fax:	

6

Handout 4.2 Perspective-taking observation sheet

Through the lens of a parent

Scenario 1

Learn	Feel

Scenario 2

Learn	Feel

Scenario 3

Learn	Feel

4.3 Parent conversation planning tool

(because what gets written down can help us think/act 😄)

1. What I observed (observation—how/when/what):

2. What I think it could means (analyze, options):

3. Things I wonder, questions I have (seek parent ideas, perspective, their experiences)

4. Action agreement (planning/implementing)

Two things I'll do?

Two things you do?

Handout 4.3: Walking through the assessment process

This experience will include several steps:

1. Choose an observation strategy. This page has space for anecdotal notes, running record, or notes such as vocabulary. You may use a developmental checklist (provided) if you like.
2. Watch a video ((Austin and the broken bridge), taking notes using the observation strategy you selected. What do you see and hear? (use objective statements). (3 minutes)

3. Individual reflection (10 min):
   a. What are the observations telling you about this child? (look at ECIPS if available/helpful)

   b. How might this short observation fit into a comprehensive assessment system? (TO THINK ABOUT)
   c. Write down two questions to ask this child's parent.
      i. _____
      ii. _____
   d. Write down one thing you would share with the parent from this observation

   _____

   e. Using your observation and any information from the parent, identify two ways you can adapt your environment, lesson plan, routine, or interactions for this child (for example, what might you add/adapt in your routines or a lesson plan activity?)

   _____

   f. Identify two ideas/activities for parents to do at home (use the parent conversation planning tool). _____
4. In pairs, practice the conversation with the parent. Describe the observation process and what you learned about their child. Ask them questions, and offer them things to do at home.

Handout 4.4 Reflective questions—planning for my program

- How has my understanding of assessment changed?

- How has my attitude about assessment changed?

- What strengths do I bring to the process of using assessment to make teaching decisions? (the assessment cycle)

- What is still a barrier for me? Confusing? What are the areas where I will need more regular support?

- Where will I get help if I get "stuck?"

- How can I gain that support?

- What are my next steps in regards to assessment?