

Getting Started

The Quest for Quality in Early Childhood Programs via the Self-Study Process

The new NAEYC Accreditation Program Support Department offers information and guidance to support quality improvement in programs serving children from birth through kindergarten and to encourage programs to seek NAEYC Accreditation. Through **TORCH** (The Online Resource Center Headquarters), the information call center, training sessions, and partnerships with NAEYC Affiliates and accreditation facilitation projects throughout the country, the Accreditation Program Support Department is working with programs to help them align their services and activities with the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria.

In this effort, the Accreditation Program Support Department is encouraging all programs to look closely at the tools available to help with quality improvement. Teachers and program administrators in child care centers, preschools, and kindergartens already demonstrate their commitment to helping young children reach their full potential. They want to be confident that their programs and classrooms are the best possible environments to enable the children in their care to thrive. Teachers and administrators want to ensure that the children are nurtured; they encourage independence and growth supported by knowledge and learning to help children develop into autonomous, creative individuals. They work together to build a community of learners comprising children, families, and staff.



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The need for support

The quest for quality can be elusive. With so many educational philosophies and curricula to choose from, with staff of varied backgrounds and education levels, and with differing state and local requirements, some early childhood educators may wonder whether their program is truly a quality program. The good news is that tools to assist programs on their journey toward quality are right at hand in the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria.

Reports from the field are encouraging: centers and schools are using the

standards and criteria as a blueprint for building new programs; university professors use them in developing course outlines to instruct teachers in training. Institutions of higher education are offering new director credentials to support administrators, who often find themselves in new roles. Staff meetings using the criteria and topic areas are more focused and engaging. And most important, programs use the standards and criteria as a strategy to guide quality improvement in classrooms and programwide when they enroll in Self-Study—the first of the four steps to achieving NAEYC Accreditation.

The value of Self-Study

The NAEYC Self-Study process helps programs become better places for children's development and learning. In Self-Study, programs discover that they can become a stronger and more committed team of teachers, administrators, and families, working together to continuously improve program quality. Teachers and administrators find their work more rewarding. And families looking for early care and education for their children appreciate and seek out these quality programs.

Enrollment in Self-Study (Step 1) is available to all programs, even if they do not plan to pursue, or are ineligible for, NAEYC Accreditation. Upon enrollment, programs receive the complete Self-Study Kit, with separate books for each of the standards along with the book *Getting Started*, which gives an overview of the process and introduces staff to the accreditation mate-

rials. Together these books provide a wealth of information about the standards and their criteria. The kit is designed to help programs engage in reflective practice—for teachers, families, and administrators to consider the program's strengths and ways to further improve its services in support of children's learning and development.

Engaging in the activities suggested in the Self-Study Kit creates a synergy among staff that opens dialogues between teaching teams and classrooms, encourages collaboration within programs, and prompts a renewed sense of mission and purpose. By design, Self-Study requires teamwork; it establishes a collaborative process in which everyone in the program becomes a stakeholder.

Self-Study provides a systematic approach for all program participants to use in considering their strengths and identifying areas needing improve-

ment. It is about helping stakeholders take specific steps to improve the quality of services, care, and education offered to young children and their families. The Self-Study process writes a new chapter in a program's story that describes how the program can become a better place for teachers to work, for families to thrive, and ultimately for children to grow, learn, and achieve their full potential.

Tools for quality improvement

Self-Study is a journey, and like any journey, it helps to have support along the way. That's what the Accreditation Program Support Department provides through its online resources, information call center, training sessions, and partnerships with NAEYC Affiliates and accreditation facilitation projects throughout the country.

NAEYC resources in English and Spanish for preschool teachers

Teaching Young Children (TYC) is NAEYC's colorful, easy-to-read magazine for busy preschool teachers. Available in English and Spanish (as **Tesoros y Colores**), each issue offers practical ideas you can put to use immediately in your classroom. Visit the TYC Web site to read articles, become a subscriber, and to network with other teachers through discussion boards.

Center directors can use **NEXT: The Teaching Young Children Staff Development Guide** to plan staff meetings or training sessions, staff development specialists can use it to design workshops, and teacher educators might incorporate some of the ideas in their classes. NEXT suggests ways to build on content while encouraging teachers to adapt and apply appropriate ideas in their own classrooms. NEXT is available in Spanish as **NEXT: La Guía de Tesoros y Colores para el desarrollo profesional**.

For more information or to become a subscriber:

- visit the TYC Web site at <http://tyc.naeyc.org>
- call 800-424-2460
- send an e-mail request to resource_sales@naeyc.org



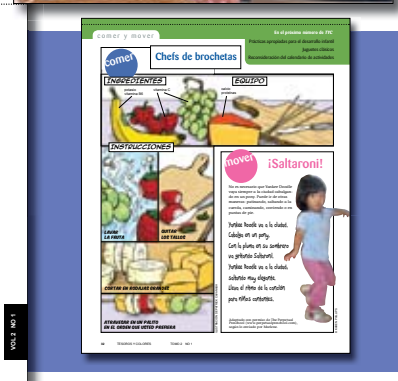
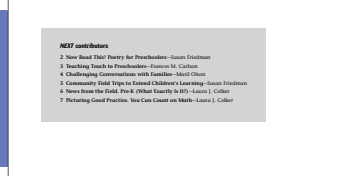
NAEYC magazine *Teaching Young Children* (TYC) is designed especially for preschool educators. Articles in *Teaching Young Children* contain the accreditation criteria for NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards. (Go to www.naeyc.org/standards/standards, click on the red links for more information on each standard.)

Using the guide:

- NEXT: The Teaching Young Children Staff Development Guide suggests ways to build on the content of selected TYC articles. For these articles you will find:
 - a brief summary of the main ideas;
 - an indication of which NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards are most closely related to the content (check the box at the top of each page);
 - key points to reiterate;
 - discussion questions to ask staff;
 - workshop activities to further thinking and ways to apply content to the classroom.
- Center directors can use NEXT to plan staff meetings or training sessions. Staff development specialists can use it to design workshops, and teacher educators might incorporate some of the ideas in their classes.

A few notes:

- Articles for the activities in NEXT appear in the magazine NEXT.
- All page numbers refer to *Teaching Young Children*, Volume 2, Number 1.
- No permission is needed to make copies of NAEYC copyrighted articles in *Teaching Young Children* as long as they have a credit line and are distributed at no cost.
- Depending on the writing in which you want, you can ask participants to do activities in print or read copies of an classroom book.
- Ask questions to give and disseminate the ideas generated in the session.
- Teachers and NEXT users can share their ideas, read articles, and find other useful resources at tyc.naeyc.org.



TORCH. The Online Resource Center Headquarters at www.naeyc.org/torch allows you to

- Search for criteria, FAQs, and additional resources by keyword
- View a calendar of important NAEYC due dates and chart your own due dates on a personalized calendar
- Access valuable NAEYC resources and link to other helpful Web sites
- Submit questions directly to the Information Center

TORCH includes resources for programs at all steps in the NAEYC Accreditation process. Registration in TORCH is also available to others interested in the quality improvement process supported by NAEYC Accreditation. Registration instructions are available at www.naeyc.org/torchinfo.

Information Center. The Information Center for NAEYC Accreditation of programs serving young children is available by phone or e-mail to answer your questions about the NAEYC Accreditation process. Call 1-800-424-2460, and choose option 3; or e-mail your questions to accreditation@naeyc.org.

Training Sessions. Training sessions are offered as pre-conference events at NAEYC's National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development and the NAEYC Annual Conference. The Accreditation Program Support Department will also coordinate regional training events. Watch for new Web-based seminars later this year.

Partnerships with NAEYC Affiliates and Accreditation Facilitation Projects.

Through monthly conference calls and meetings at the NAEYC Annual Conference and the National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development, we are strengthening our connection with Affiliate Groups and accreditation facilitation projects. We want to ensure that groups working to support programs as they make quality improvements and seek NAEYC Accreditation are

How Will TORCH Help Me Understand the NAEYC Accreditation Criteria?

On the TORCH Web site, each criterion is accessible in one convenient place, including

- The full language of the criterion
- The age group(s) to which the criterion applies
- Guidance associated with the criterion
- The assessment category of the criterion
- All sources of evidence in which evidence for the criterion should be included
- FAQs that apply specifically to the criterion

Register for TORCH at www.naeyc.org/torchinfo.

providing accurate, current, and consistent information about the process. A project is under way to define best practices in accreditation facilitation so that others can learn from successful initiatives.

NAEYC embraces three fundamental beliefs with respect to early childhood program quality:

1. Quality is a **complex** attribute of program life that is both shaped and experienced by many people, especially children, families, teaching staff, and administrators.
2. Quality is a **dynamic** attribute that requires ongoing attention and willingness to change—including change through development and learning—as program participants (children, families, staff) change.
3. Programs need the **capacity to sustain and improve quality** over time.

These beliefs guide the NAEYC Accreditation process and our efforts in the Accreditation Program Support Department. By working together with programs, the support department hopes to help them on their journey of continuous quality improvement.

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