Standard 4: ASSESSMENT OF CHILD PROGRESS

A Guide to the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standard and Related Accreditation Criteria

**National Association
for the Education
of Young Children**

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Accreditation

Standard 4: Assessment of Child Progress: A Guide to the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standard and Related Accreditation Criteria

Standard 4: ASSESSMENT OF CHILD PROGRESS

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Introduction to the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards

Since its founding in 1926, NAEYC has strived to improve the quality of group programs for young children by defining a vision for high quality and then providing tools and resources to achieve that vision. For more than 20 years, NAEYC Accreditation has been one of the Association's most powerful mechanisms in this regard. The system sets the standard for excellence—for families and the public as well as the early childhood profession—and, through the Self-Study process, offers support to programs to meet the standard.

Beginning in 2000, NAEYC launched a comprehensive review of its accreditation system, resulting in the design and implementation of a reinvented system. A new set of 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and more than 400 Accreditation Criteria were adopted by the Association in 2005. Each of the 10 standards is a broad statement that describes a critical component of early childhood program functioning. How programs meet that standard is defined by specific accreditation criteria. The criteria are organized by topic areas that highlight the key issues within that standard. Some of the criteria are "universal," meaning that they apply to all children, while others apply to a particular age category: infant, toddler/two, preschool, and kindergarten. Many criteria apply to more than one age category. Programs use only the criteria that apply to the age categories they serve.

Together, the standards and their criteria define what NAEYC believes every early childhood education program should be. The standards are set high to match the vision for NAEYC Accreditation: that NAEYC Accreditation and NAEYC-Accredited programs are leading the way to higher quality in all programs. Setting standards for high quality and having NAEYC-Accredited programs meet those standards will help many more people recognize the value of early childhood education.

As one of the results of reinvention, NAEYC is increasing its support to programs in Self-Study and is encouraging programs to enroll in Self-Study even if they have no intention of pursuing NAEYC Accreditation. Ideally, all programs will think about how they can create a better place for children to grow and learn. As part of this effort, the Self-Study resources have been greatly expanded. Separate books have been created for each standard and are available independent of the Self-Study Kit. Thus, you may be reading this volume from one of several perspectives:

- as a teacher or administrator in an NAEYC-Accredited program seeking re-accreditation under the new standards;

- as a teacher or administrator enrolled in Self-Study for the first time;

- as a teacher or administrator interested in learning more about this standard and possibly thinking about the accreditation process; or

- as a student of early childhood education, learning about the importance of the standard on assessment of child progress.

Whatever your perspective, we hope that you find this resource to be a helpful tool in improving the quality of the early childhood programs that you touch and, thus, in enhancing the quality of life for young children.

Each of the program standard books follows a similar format. They are organized around a basic framework of four questions for programs:

- What do you need **to know** to study your practices in this standard? (i.e., What is the standard and why is it important to quality?)

- What do you need **to think about** as you study how your program performs the criteria in this standard? (i.e., What does it mean for your program?)

- What do you need to do **to improve** your ability to meet the criteria for this standard and to gather evidence of your progress? (i.e., What do you need to do for Self-Study?)

- What do you need to do **to demonstrate** that your program meets the 10 standards, if you want to formally pursue NAEYC Accreditation after completing Self-Study? (i.e., What do you need to do for Self-Assessment?)

The book provides information and resources to help you consider each of these questions in relation to the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria. Each book provides resources that are related to a standard and

that are based on tools used in the assessment process for NAEYC Accreditation. Note: The tools themselves are provided at TORCH— The Online Resource Center Headquarters for program improvement through NAEYC Accreditation; see www.naeyc.org/selfstudy. As you use the framework to consider changes to your program, you will be encouraged to follow six tasks for Self-Study:

- Create shared understandings of key concepts about accreditation, the standards, the criteria, and implications for the program.

- Gather evidence, using the Self-Study tools.

- Determine strengths and weaknesses, using the standards and criteria as your measure of quality.

- Develop improvement plans as needed.

- Make improvements and document your progress.

- Evaluate results and determine next steps.

Before becoming Applicants for NAEYC Accreditation, programs will find it helpful to complete these tasks, considering each standard. As a program evaluates its results and determines next steps, it may find that further study and improvements are needed for some standards. Programs are ready to apply for NAEYC Accreditation when they are confident that they can demonstrate that each standard is met. Programs not intending to seek accreditation at this time are encouraged to use the tasks to address specific areas, perhaps subgroups of criteria within a particular standard, to make improvements.

Overview of Steps to Achieve NAEYC Accreditation

Steps	Tasks for Programs

Step 1: Enrollment/ Self-Study	■ Complete enrollment form and submit enrollment fee
	■ Review the Self-Study Kit and online resources at TORCH (see www.naeyc.org/selfstudy)
	■ Engage in Self-Study, considering these suggestions:
	  • Create shared understandings of key concepts about accreditation, the standards, the criteria, and implications for the program
	  • Gather information
	  • Determine strengths and weaknesses
	  • Develop improvement plans as needed
	  • Make improvements and document progress
	  • Evaluate results and determine next steps
	■ Prepare to meet eligibility requirements
	■ Currently NAEYC Accredited? To maintain accreditation status, verify deadlines for Step 2: Application/Self-Assessment and Step 3: Candidacy

Step 2: Application/ Self-Assessment	■ Complete application, selecting a due date for submission of Candidacy Materials, and pay application fee
	■ Meet eligibility requirements
	■ Engage in formal Self-Assessment—Must complete all requirements in the Guide to Self-Assessment available online to enrolled programs:
	  • Plan formal Self-Assessment, involving families, teaching staff members, and program administrators
	  • Document evidence that all standards are met, building on results of Self-Study
	  • "Fine-tune" program performance, making improvements as needed to make sure that all required criteria and at least 80 percent of criteria within each standard are met by the program overall and that every classroom consistently performs at least 70 percent of all applicable criteria
	■ Prepare to meet all Candidacy requirements
	■ Complete Candidacy Materials, including documentation of performance on selected criteria as requested by the NAEYC Academy

Overview of Steps to Achieve NAEYC Accreditation

(continued from page 7)

Steps	Tasks for Programs
Step 3: Candidacy	■ Submit Candidacy Materials and fee by chosen due date ■ Meet Candidacy requirements ■ Prepare for site visit by NAEYC Assessors ■ Continue to gather evidence of performance and make improvements
Step 4: Meeting the Standards/ Accreditation Decision	■ Participate in site visit ■ Complete site visit evaluation and submit it to the NAEYC Academy ■ Deferred programs—May choose to return to Step 2: Application/Self-Assessment or Step 3: Candidacy ■ Denied programs—May choose to return to Step 2: Application/Self-Assessment
Maintaining the Standards	■ Accredited programs—Sustain quality over the five-year term—as documented through annual reports, reports of program changes, and results of unannounced visits if randomly selected—and pay applicable fees

Program Requirements for Each Step of NAEYC Accreditation

Steps	Program Requirements
Step 1: Enrollment/ Self-Study	■ No requirements ■ Open to any program interested in using the Self-Study Kit and tools for program improvement
Step 2: Application/ Self-Assessment	■ Open to any center- or school-based program serving children birth through kindergarten that also • Serves a minimum of 10 children • Is in operation for at least one year before submitting materials for Step 3: Candidacy • Is regulated by the appropriate licensing or regulatory body (or alternative if ineligible for licensing/regulation) • Is located in the United States or its territories, unless affiliated with U.S. government ■ Program is willing to meet each of the 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards ■ Leaders demonstrate knowledge of the NAEYC Accreditation process ■ Program completes the formal, comprehensive Self-Assessment, following requirements in the Guide to Self-Assessment available online to enrolled programs
Step 3: Candidacy	The program must do the following: ■ Maintain good standing in its licensing or regulatory status within the last year or since its last inspection ■ Demonstrate necessary early childhood and management and leadership expertise among members of its teaching and leadership staff ■ Provide documentation of a collaborative process used to complete its Candidacy Materials, which has actively engaged the program administrator, the teaching staff, families, and the program's governing body (when applicable) ■ Believe that it can meet each of the 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and that it can document satisfactory performance on at least 80 percent of the NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for each standard

Program Requirements for Each Step of NAEYC Accreditation

Steps	Program Requirements
Step 4: Meeting the Standards/ Accreditation Decision	■ Meet all applicable required criteria and continue to meet all Candidacy and eligibility requirements ■ Meet each of the 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards by demonstrating proficiency in at least 80 percent of each standard's associated accreditation criteria assessed during the site visit, with no individual classroom scoring below 70 percent on its assessed criteria
Maintaining the Standards	■ Maintain level of quality expected of NAEYC-Accredited programs ■ Self report any major changes to the program within 90 days ■ Submit to unannounced visits if randomly selected or verification visits in response to program changes, complaints, or questions about the program's continued ability to meet the requirements of NAEYC Accreditation ■ Submit annual reports on each anniversary, with applicable fees

NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards

1. Relationships: The program promotes positive relationships among all children and adults to encourage each child's sense of individual worth and belonging as part of a community and to foster each child's ability to contribute as a responsible community member.

2. Curriculum: The program implements a curriculum that is consistent with its goals for children and promotes learning and development in each of the following areas: social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive.

3. Teaching: The program uses developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches that enhance each child's learning and development in the context of the program's curriculum goals.

4. Assessment of Child Progress: The program is informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children's learning and development. These assessments occur within the context of reciprocal communications with families and with sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children develop. Assessment results are used to benefit children by informing sound decisions about children, teaching, and program improvement.

5. Health: The program promotes the nutrition and health of children and protects children and staff from illness and injury.

6. Teachers: The program employs and supports a teaching staff that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and to support families' diverse needs and interests.

7. Families: The program establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with each child's family to foster children's development in all settings. These relationships are sensitive to family composition, language, and culture.

8. Community Relationships: The program establishes relationships with and uses the resources of the children's communities to support the achievement of program goals.

9. Physical Environment: The program has a safe and healthful environment that provides appropriate and well-maintained indoor and outdoor physical environments. The environment includes facilities, equipment, and materials to facilitate child and staff learning and development.

10. Leadership and Management: The program effectively implements policies, procedures, and systems that support stable staff and strong personnel, fiscal, and program management so all children, families, and staff have high-quality experiences.

What Do You Need to Know about the Assessment of Child Progress Standard?

Why Is Assessment of Child Progress Important to Quality?

Administrators and staff need to know not only how children are progressing but also what challenges they are encountering so they can make good decisions about what next steps would most benefit those children. Child assessment is not something new. Good teachers have always observed children, talked with them about their activities, noted interesting things

This section provides answers to the following four key questions about the Assessment of Child Progress Standard:

- Why is assessment of child progress important to quality?
- What is the standard for assessment of child progress?
- What are the NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for the Assessment of Child Progress Standard?
- What are the connections between the Assessment of Child Progress Standard and the other standards?

they did and said, recorded their accomplishments in development and learning, and shared information with families. The work that may be new or unfamiliar is in organizing and systematizing your assessments, making sure that the information you gather is actually used to improve services for individual children and to improve the program overall.

A teacher's day is very full. The task of productively engaging children throughout the day in meaningful learning experiences; interacting with them to provide both comfort and assistance; keeping them clean, safe, fed and well rested; and helping them be contributing members of their classroom community is enormous. Teachers working on this standard will benefit from integrating assessment into their day—developing routines and practices that are part of each day rather than trying to make assessment a large task to be attempted all at once. To meet the NAEYC criteria with respect to assessment of child progress, programs may have to make their assessments of children more visible, more intentional, and better documented than they may have in the past.

Assessment provides important information that helps programs do the following:

- *Monitor children's development and learning*—"Snapshots" of growth and learning over time help identify children's strengths and needs. Teachers cannot effectively plan and tailor a program to build on strengths and meet needs without this vital information.

- *Guide planning and decision making*—Information about children's interests, needs, and abilities helps determine what books to read; what activities, experiences, and materials to provide; and what instructional strategies to use.

- *Identify children who might benefit from special services*—Initial identification of a possible problem might come from the teacher, from a family member, or through screening. If a potential problem

is detected, the next step is a referral for an in-depth assessment by a specialist or team of specialists who determine whether special services are needed and, if so, develop a plan to assist the child.

- *Report to and communicate with others*—Assessment information is always shared with families. Some assessment information is collected to be shared among program staff, specialists, or both for the benefit of individual children.

- *Know what areas of the program need improvement*—Although assessment results are often used to provide information about individual children, results for groups of children (in a classroom or an age category) can be combined to provide the program with information about how their science curriculum is working, how teachers have integrated staff training on conflict resolution into the classroom, etc.

The ideas behind the assessment of children are not different from those that programs consider as they engage in the Self-Study of their program. The pursuit of quality programs and the pursuit of quality outcomes for individual children are similar.

Program assessment is the process of observing, recording, surveying, and documenting what programs do and how they do it as a basis for a variety of educational decisions that affect children, families, and program staff. Program assessment involves the multiple steps and methods of collecting information on program practices in light of the program goals and objectives and then compiling that information so results can be incorporated into planning, implementation, and evaluation. Program assessment is a fundamental aspect of the Self-Study and the Self-Assessment that is addressed within the Leadership and Management Standard.

Child assessment is the process of observing, recording, and documenting what children do and how they do it as a basis for a variety of educational decisions that affect teaching approaches as well as curriculum development and implementation. Child assessment involves the multiple steps and methods of collecting information on children's abilities and skills and then compiling that information so results can be incorporated into planning that meets the needs of not only individual children but also the whole group. Assessment results are compiled to learn about each child and the context of his or her learning; to learn what is necessary to further each child's growth and learning and then make plans; and to implement plans and then evaluate to see whether the plans resulted in positive gains for each child.

What Is the Standard for the Assessment of Child Progress?

Program Standard: The program is informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children's learning and development. These assessments occur within the context of reciprocal communications with families and with sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children develop. Assessment results are used to benefit children by informing sound decisions about children, teaching, and program improvement.

Rationale: Teachers' knowledge of each child helps them to plan an appropriately challenging curriculum and to tailor instruction that responds to each child's strengths and needs. Further, systematic assessment is essential for identifying children who may benefit from more intensive instruction or intervention or who may need additional developmental evaluation. This information ensures that the program meets its goals for children's learning and developmental progress as well as informs program improvement efforts.

Definition of *Assessment of Child Progress:* Assessment is the process of observing, recording, and otherwise documenting what children do and how they do it as a basis for a variety of educational decisions that affect the child. Assessment procedures should be consistent with the NAEYC/NAECS-SDE 2003 Joint Position Statement "Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children Birth through Age 8," which appears in the Appendix. Assessment involves the multiple steps of collecting data on a child's development and learning, determining its significance in light of the program goals and objectives, incorporating the information into planning for individuals and programs, and communicating the findings to families and other involved people. Assessment is integral to curriculum and instruction. In early childhood programs, the various assessment procedures that are used serve several purposes: (a) to plan instruction for individuals and groups, (b) to communicate with families, (c) to identify children who may be in need of specialized services or intervention, and (d) to inform program development.

A Guide to the Standards and Criteria Chart

Standard: There are 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards. Each standard describes an essential element that together with the other nine standards provide a definition of quality for child care, preschools, and kindergarten programs. Standards are numbered 1 to 10.

Topic areas: Within each standard are topic areas that highlight the big ideas to more fully express the meaning and value of the standard. Each topic area includes criteria that further define the meaning of quality in that area. The topic areas are identified by capital letters (A, B, C, etc.). The number of topic areas within a standard vary.

Criteria: Each criterion provides specific details to guide program plans, policies, and practices. The criteria are numbered (01, 02, 03, etc.) within their topic area.

Indicators: Many of the criteria are straightforward statements such as "Teachers use their understanding of children's ideas to plan new learning experiences." Other criteria have multiple indicators that define very specific aspects of more complex criteria. Each indicator is identified by a lowercase letter (a, b, c, etc.).

Age category: Each criterion within each program standard is identified by its relevant age category (or categories). Many criteria are identified as "universal" (U), meaning that all classrooms and programs pursuing NAEYC Accreditation must address these criteria. These aspects of quality should be seen in any programs or classrooms serving children birth through kindergarten, though they may look somewhat different in practice depending on the children's age.

A Guide to the Standards and Criteria Chart

(continued from page 14)

Other criteria apply to specific age categories:

I = infant = birth to 15 months
T = toddler/two = 12 to 36 months
P = preschool = 30 months to 5 years
K = kindergarten = children enrolled in a public or private kindergarten program

The age categories for each criterion are indicated by an X.

Note that there is some overlap among the age ranges for each category, especially for infant and toddler/two. This overlap is purposeful to allow programs some flexibility in grouping children. When a group consists only of children whose ages are listed in two different age categories, for example, 12 to 15 months, the group may be designated as serving either category (e.g., infant or toddler/two). The designation chosen by the program will determine which age category is used for assessment purposes. If a group includes children whose ages range beyond the overlapping portion of two age categories, then the group is a mixed-age group. For mixed-age groups, universal criteria and criteria relevant to the age categories for that group apply. For example, a group of children 24 to 48 months must meet universal, toddler/two, and preschool criteria.

Assessment category: The assessment category column in the criteria informs programs of how the criterion is considered in scoring after the site visit to determine NAEYC Accreditation. Although programs will consider all the criteria during Self-Study and will need to be prepared to be assessed on any criteria, the site visit will include only a sample of the more than 400 criteria.[1] Criteria are grouped by the following categories for the purposes of the site visit:

- *Required*—Required criteria are so fundamental to program quality that they must be fulfilled to achieve NAEYC Accreditation. There are no required criteria related to the Assessment of Child Progress Standard.

- *Always Assessed (Always)*—These criteria will be assessed during each site visit and are considered as part of the overall score to determine accreditation status.

- *Randomly Assessed (Random)*—These criteria could be assessed during a site visit, and programs should be prepared to be assessed on any of the random criteria.

- *Emerging Practice (Emerging)*—These criteria are ones that are important to program quality but are not yet widely practiced, and time is needed for the early childhood field and individual programs to develop the capacity (through additional training, major facility renovations, or other significant steps) to meet them. Programs may be assessed on emerging practice criteria. When programs are assessed on these criteria and they meet them, then the programs will receive credit for doing so. However, a program will not be penalized for failing to meet an emerging practice criterion. NAEYC

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[1]   The determination of which criteria are used in specific site visits is based on the results of an extensive series of field tests conducted to establish valid and reliable measures of the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards.

A Guide to the Standards and Criteria Chart

will assess overall performance of all programs on the emerging practice criteria to determine how those criteria will be considered in the future. The following are emerging practices criteria related to the Assessment of Child Progress Standard:

- **Criterion 4.C.01**—All children receive developmental screening that includes
    - a. the timely screening of all children within three months of program entry;
    - b. screening instruments that meet professional standards for standardization, reliability, and validity;
    - c. screening instruments that have normative scores available on a population relevant for the child being screened;
    - d. screening of children's health status and their sensory, language, cognitive, gross-motor, fine-motor, and social-emotional development;
    - e. a plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the screening program; and
    - f. using the results to make referrals to appropriate professionals, when needed, and ensuring that the referrals are followed up.
- **Criterion 4.D.02**—Teaching teams meet at least weekly to interpret and use assessment results to align curriculum and teaching practices to the interests and needs of the children.

- **Criterion 4.E.07**—The program staff provide families with a full explanation of confidentiality by
    - a. listing the categories of individuals who will have access to individual child screening and assessment results as well as the reasons for their access.
    - b. sharing regulations governing access to files and familial rights.
    - c. describing the procedures used to keep individual child records confidential.
    - d. explaining how and why children's individual screening results and assessment information will be represented, used, and interpreted.

Sources of evidence: Evidence is a critical concept for NAEYC Accreditation. The process is designed to focus on evidence of the program's ability to meet the standards and criteria consistently over time, not simply on the day of the site visit. Specific tools are provided online at TORCH (see www.naeyc.org/selfstudy) to help you gather documentation of your program's past, present, and future performance related to each standard.

The sources of evidence are:
O = Observable Criteria
FS = Family Survey
TS = Teaching Staff Survey
PP = Program Portfolio
CP = Classroom Portfolio

A Guide to the Standards and Criteria Chart

Additional tips for understanding the standards and criteria chart:

■ Text in bold is provided to highlight particular concepts within the criterion when helpful to aid understanding.

■ The term *teaching staff* is used to refer to all members of the teaching team, including teachers and assistant teachers-teacher aides; for more information about definitions of teaching staff and their qualifications, see *Getting Started* included in the Self-Study Kit.

■ The following example will illustrate the various features of the criteria chart.

EXAMPLE: the number 4.B.02 found in the far left column of the criteria chart indicates the following:

• 4—the number of the standard; Standard 4 is the Assessment of Child Progress Standard

• B—Topic area, in this case, "Using Appropriate Assessment Methods"

• 02—Criterion, in this case, "Assessments obtain information on all areas of children's development and learning, including cognitive skills, language, social-emotional development, approaches to learning, health, and physical development (including self-help skills)." Indicators for age categories with respect to the criterion are marked by an X in each appropriate box (U, I, T, P, K).

Topic Areas within the Assessment of Child Progress Standard

The Assessment of Child Progress Standard comprises five topic areas (4.A through 4.E). These topics are summarized below.

4.A—Creating an assessment plan. This topic area addresses the need for assessment plans that describe assessment purposes, methods, and uses of the results.

4.B—Using appropriate assessment methods. This topic areas addresses the importance of choosing assessments that look at all aspects of children's development and that are sensitive to family backgrounds and children's special needs.

4.C—Identifying children's interests and needs and describing children's progress. This topic area addresses the need for developmental screening and assessment of each child, which is conducted by teachers who have the expertise and skill to integrate the information into curriculum goals.

4.D—Adapting curriculum, individualizing teaching, and informing program development. This topic area emphasizes regular observation of children to gather information to help teachers make decisions about teaching practices and curriculum development.

4.E—Communicating with families and involving families in the assessment process. This topic area discusses the importance of communicating with families about all the areas of their child's development, using both formal and informal opportunities to exchange information as well as make them aware of confidentiality and disclosure policies.

What Are the NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for the Assessment of Child Progress Standard?

The following chart presents the topic areas and criteria for the Assessment of Child Progress Standard. It also shows the age categories for which each criterion is relevant, the assessment category for each criterion, and the sources of evidence that are used to assess each criterion.

NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for Assessment of Child Progress Standard

Number	Age Category U I T P K	NAEYC Accreditation Criterion	Assessment Category	Sources of Evidence
4.A.		*Creating an Assessment Plan*		
4.A.01	X X X X X	Programs conduct assessments as an integral part of the program. Programs use assessments to support children's learning, using a variety of methods such as observations, checklists, rating scales, and individually administered tests.	Random	PP
4.A.02	X X X X X	The program has a written plan for assessment that describes assessment purposes, procedures, and uses of the results. The plan also includes a. conditions under which children will be assessed, b. timelines associated with assessments that occur throughout the year, c. procedures to keep individual child records confidential, d. ways to involve families in planning and implementing assessments, and e. methods to effectively communicate assessment information to families.	Random	PP
4.A.03	X X X X X	The program's written assessment plan includes the multiple purposes and uses of assessment, including a. arranging for developmental screening and referral for diagnostic assessment when indicated, b. identifying children's interests and needs, c. describing the developmental progress and learning of children, d. improving curriculum and adapting teaching practices and the environment, e. planning program improvement, and f. communicating with families.	Random	PP
4.B.		*Using Appropriate Assessment Methods*		
4.B.01	X X X X X	Programs use a variety of assessment methods that are sensitive to and informed by family culture, experiences, children's abilities and disabilities, and home language; are meaningful and accurate; and are used in settings familiar to the children.	Random	PP

AGE CATEGORIES

U = universal

I = infant

T = toddler/two

P = preschool

K = kindergarten

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

O = Observable Criteria

FS = Family Survey

TS = Teaching Staff Survey

PP = Program Portfolio

CP = Classroom Portfolio

When a program is subject to a government rule or regulation that prohibits or exceeds the expectation outlined in a criterion, that rule or regulation takes precedence. When a government rule or regulation differs in other ways, or sets a lower threshold of performance, NAEYC Accreditation Criteria take precedence.

NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for Assessment of Child Progress Standard

Number	Age Category U I T P K	NAEYC Accreditation Criterion	Assessment Category	Sources of Evidence
4.B.02	X X X X X	Assessments obtain information on all areas of children's development and learning, including cognitive skills, language, social–emotional development, approaches to learning, health, and physical development (including self-help skills).	Random	PP
4.B.03	X X X X X	Norm-referenced and standardized tests are used primarily when seeking information on eligibility for special services or when collecting information for overall program effectiveness. When formal assessments are used, they are combined with informal methods such as observation, checklists, rating scales, and work sampling.	Random	PP
4.B.04	X X X X X	If the program uses published instruments, it evaluates information from the publisher about the standardization sample, standardization procedures, scoring, reliability, and validity to ensure that the results obtained with the instruments are valid for the program's purposes.	Random	PP
4.B.05	X X X X X	Staff-developed assessment methods a. are aligned with curriculum goals. b. provide an accurate picture of all children's abilities and progress. c. are appropriate and valid for their stated purposes. d. provide meaningful and stable results for all learners, including English-language learners and children with special needs. e. provide teachers with clear ideas for curriculum development and daily planning. f. are regularly reviewed to be certain that they are providing the needed information.	Always	CP
4.B.06	X X X X X	Staff share an understanding of the purposes, values, and uses of assessment in their program and can explain these to others.	Always	FS; TS; PP

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U = universal

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NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for Assessment of Child Progress Standard

Number	Age Category U I T P K	NAEYC Accreditation Criterion	Assessment Category	Sources of Evidence
4.C.		*Identifying Children's Interests and Needs and Describing Children's Progress*		
4.C.01	X X X X X	All children receive developmental screening that includes a. the timely screening of all children within three months of program entry; b. screening instruments that meet professional standards for standardization, reliability, and validity; c. screening instruments that have normative scores available on a population relevant for the child being screened; d. screening of children's health status and their sensory, language, cognitive, gross-motor, fine-motor, and social-emotional development; e. a plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the screening program; and f. using the results to make referrals to appropriate professionals, when needed, and ensuring that the referrals are followed up. **(This criterion is an Emerging Practice.)**	Emerging	PP; TS
4.C.02	X X X X X	Teachers assess the developmental progress of each child across all developmental areas, using a variety of instruments and multiple data sources that address the program's curriculum areas. Staff with diverse expertise and skills collect information across the full range of children's experiences.	Random	TS; CP
4.C.03	X X X X X	Teachers refer to curriculum goals and developmental expectations when interpreting assessment data.	Random	TS; CP
4.D.		*Adapting Curriculum, Individualizing Teaching, and Informing Program Development*		
4.D.01	X X X X X	Teachers or others who know the children and are able to observe their strengths, interests, and needs on an ongoing basis conduct assessments to inform classroom instruction and to make sound decisions about individual and group curriculum content, teaching approaches, and personal interactions.	Random	TS; CP
4.D.02	X X X X X	Teaching teams meet at least weekly to **interpret and use** assessment results to align curriculum and teaching practices to the interests and needs of the children. **(This criterion is an Emerging Practice.)**	Emerging	PP; TS
4.D.03	X X X X X	Teachers interact with children to assess their strengths and needs to inform curriculum development and individualize teaching.	Always	O; TS; CP

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NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for Assessment of Child Progress Standard

Number	Age Category U I T P K	NAEYC Accreditation Criterion	Assessment Category	Sources of Evidence
4.D.04	X X X X X	Teachers and other professionals associated with the program use assessment methods and information to design goals for individual children as well as to guide curriculum planning and monitor progress.	Random	PP
4.D.05	X	Teachers talk and interact with infants to assess and encourage use of language (e.g., smiles, sounds, eye contact, and cooing).	Random	O
4.D.06	X	Teachers observe infants to assess development and use these observations to modify the curriculum, interactions, and care.	Random	O; CP
4.D.07	X X X	Teachers talk and interact with individual children and encourage their use of language to inform assessment of children's strengths, interests, and needs.	Random	O; CP
4.D.08	X X X	Teachers observe and document children's work, play, behaviors, and interactions to assess progress. They use the information gathered to plan and modify the curriculum and their teaching.	Random	TS; CP
4.E.		***Communicating with Families and Involving Families in the Assessment Process***		
4.E.01	X X X X X	Families have ongoing opportunities to share the results of observations from home to contribute to the assessment process.	Always	FS; TS; CP
4.E.02	X X X X X	Family members are provided information, either verbally or in writing, about their child's development and learning on at least a quarterly basis, with written reports at least two times a year.	Random	FS; PP; TS
4.E.03	X X X X X	Teachers, families, and relevant specialists have regular opportunities to participate in two-way communication conferences to discuss each child's progress, accomplishments, difficulties in the classroom and at home as well as to plan learning activities.	Random	FS; TS; CP
4.E.04	X X X X X	Staff work to achieve consensus with families about assessment methods that will best meet the child's needs.	Random	FS; TS; PP
4.E.05	X X X X X	Communication with families about their child's assessments is sensitive to family values, culture, identity, and home language.	Random	FS; TS; PP

AGE CATEGORIES

U = universal

I = infant

T = toddler/two

P = preschool

K = kindergarten

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

O = Observable Criteria

FS = Family Survey

TS = Teaching Staff Survey

PP = Program Portfolio

CP = Classroom Portfolio

NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for Assessment of Child Progress Standard

Number	Age Category U	I	T	P	K	NAEYC Accreditation Criterion	Assessment Category	Sources of Evidence
4.E.06	X	X	X	X	X	The program staff provide families with information about the choice, use, scoring, and interpretation of screening and assessment methods that includes a. the purpose and use for which an assessment is designed and its programmatic purpose and use, b. the interpretations of the results and their meaning in terms of future learning opportunities for their child, c. the way teaching staff or others have been trained to use assessment procedures and interpret results as well as the conditions under which the child will be assessed (e.g., group size, time constraints, familiarity with adults involved), and d. access to or information about the specific instruments used.	Random	FS; TS; PP
4.E.07	X	X	X	X	X	The program staff provide families with a full explanation of confidentiality by a. listing the categories of individuals who will have access to individual child screening and assessment results as well as the reasons for their access. b. sharing regulations governing access to files and familial rights. c. describing the procedures used to keep individual child records confidential. d. explaining how and why children's individual screening results and assessment information will be represented, used, and interpreted. **(This criterion is an Emerging Practice.)**	Emerging	FS; TS; PP

AGE CATEGORIES

U = universal

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SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

O = Observable Criteria

FS = Family Survey

TS = Teaching Staff Survey

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CP = Classroom Portfolio

Table 1. Teacher[a]–Child Ratios within Group Size (Assessed in Criterion 10.B.12)

Age Category	Group Size									
	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24
Infant										
Birth to 15 months[b]	1:3	1:4								
Toddler/Two (12–36 months)[b]										
12 to 28 months	1:3	1:4	1:4[c]	1:4						
21 to 36 months		1:4	1:5	1:6						
Preschool[b]										
2½-year-olds to 3-year-olds (30–48 months)				1:6	1:7	1:8	1:9			
4-year-olds						1:8	1:9	1:10		
5-year-olds						1:8	1:9	1:10		
Kindergarten[d]								1:10	1:11	1:12

Notes: In a mixed-age preschool group of 2½-year-olds to 5-year-olds, no more than four children between the ages of 30 months and 36 months may be enrolled. The ratios within group size for the predominant age category apply. If infants or toddlers are in a mixed-age group, then the ratio for the youngest child applies.

Ratios are to be lowered when one or more children in the group need additional adult assistance to fully participate in the program (1) because of ability, language fluency, developmental age or stage, or other factors or (2) to meet other requirements of NAEYC Accreditation.

A group refers to the number of children who are assigned for most of the day to a teacher or a team of teaching staff and who occupy an individual classroom or well-defined space that prevents intermingling of children from different groups within a larger room or area.

Group sizes as stated are ceilings, regardless of the number of staff.

Ratios and group sizes are always assessed during site visits for NAEYC Accreditation in criterion 10.B.12, which is not a required criterion. However, experience suggests that programs that exceed the recommended number of children for each teaching staff member and total group sizes will find it more difficult to meet each standard and achieve NAEYC Accreditation. The more these numbers are exceeded, the more difficult it will be to meet each standard.

[a] Includes teachers, assistant teachers–teacher aides; some exceptions may apply; see TORCH (www.naeyc.org/selfstudy).
[b] These age ranges purposefully overlap. If a group includes children whose ages range beyond the overlapping portion of two age categories, then the group is a mixed-age group. For mixed-age groups, universal criteria and criteria relevant to the age categories for that group apply.
[c] Group sizes of 10 for this age category would require an additional adult.
[d] Kindergarten refers to children enrolled in a public or private kindergarten program.

Clarification on Groups

What is a group?

A group of children is those children who are assigned for most of the day to a specific teacher or team of teaching staff members and who occupy an individual classroom or well-defined space that prevents intermingling of children from different groups within a larger room or area. If children from different groups do intermingle within a larger room or area for more than two hours, if the composition of the original group of children changes by more than 50 percent, or if both occur, then this intermingled group is considered a separate group.

For example, if kindergartners join an all-day preschool group from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m., then the program would report one preschool group from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and one mixed-age group of kindergartners and preschool age children from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.

When do I have a mixed-age group?

If a group includes children whose ages range beyond the overlapping portion of two age categories, then the group is a mixed-age group. For mixed-age groups, universal criteria and criteria relevant to the age categories for that group apply. For example, a group of children 24 to 48 months must meet universal, toddler/two, and preschool criteria.

What if we serve school age children?

For NAEYC Accreditation, please count only groups that include eligible children (within the ages of birth through kindergarten).

A mixed-age group that serves ages that are eligible and ages that are not eligible for NAEYC Accreditation must be included in the accreditation process if at least 50 percent of the children served in the group are eligible—from birth through kindergarten. (For example, if an after-school group includes kindergartners and those of school age, it must be included in the accreditation process if the kindergartners make up at least 50 percent of the children in the group.) Groups in which fewer than 50 percent of the children represent eligible ages may not be included in the NAEYC Accreditation process.

What does NAEYC consider a part-day group?

Full-day refers to more than five hours. *Part-day* refers to five hours or less.

What Are the Connections between the Assessment of Child Progress and the Other Standards?

Each standard represents an essential, interlocking element of high-quality programs for all children from birth through kindergarten. The criteria within each standard are organized by topic areas to make the meaning and the value of the standard more clear. For example, the Assessment of Child Progress topic area "Adapting Curriculum, Individualizing Teaching, and Informing Program Development" emphasizes regular observation of children to gather information to help teachers make decisions about teaching practices and curriculum development. This topic area conceptualizes the importance of the partnership among assessment, curriculum, and teaching.

Standards are not independent of one another. Criteria not only are grouped within particular standards to make sense and to add context but also are connected across standards. Often, similar ideas appear in different standards, but each idea is expressed within the perspective of a particular standard. Looking at the criteria across standards therefore allows the examination of ideas from many perspectives. The assessment criteria are part of all of the criteria in the standards that focus on children. Teachers should regularly gather and use information about the following:

- Children's relationships with teachers and with peers (Relationships)

- Challenging behaviors and self-regulation (Relationships)

- All developmental areas: (social-emotional, physical, language, and cognitive) (Curriculum)

- Abilities in all content areas (literacy, math, science, technology, creative expression, health and safety, and social studies) (Curriculum)

- Children's ability to explore and benefit from the learning environment (Teaching)

- Children's ability to benefit from a range of instructional strategies (Teaching)

In addition to the connections that exist among various standards and criteria, several key themes emerge across the 10 standards. These themes relate to the most fundamental aspect of NAEYC Accreditation—respect for each unique individual (child, parent or family member, and staff member)—and they address cultural and linguistic diversity, attention to special needs, and the importance of genuine partnerships between families and program staff. Specific information about each of the key themes is provided in the next section to help you consider how they are addressed in your program.

Each Self-Study book provides guidance throughout, emphasizing the key themes and highlighting certain connections to help programs interpret and link criteria. Ultimately, however, programs will also need to create their own linkages because the linkages are really about putting the pieces together to create a story of program quality. Each program must use the standards and criteria to tell its own story, and program staff must make their own links between criteria and across standards to make sense of the criteria for themselves.

What Does This Standard Mean for Your Program?

The Self-Study process is self-paced and self-directed; there are no requirements, and the findings will not be reported to NAEYC. More information about Step 1: Enrollment/Self-Study is in Section 4. Section 3 offers guidance and information about the things you may want to consider as you study how your program develops and implements assessment of child progress. The following questions organize the information and focus your thinking about your assessment practices and how they contribute to quality in your program:

- What will help you create shared understandings about quality assessment practices?

- How do assessment practices differ depending on children's age and developmental level?

- How is sensitivity to diversity in language and culture demonstrated in your program's assessment practices?

- How are your program's assessment practices responsive to children who have special needs?

- What topic areas or criteria in the Assessment of Child Progress Standard are important to discuss?

- Are you open to changing how you develop and implement your assessment practices?

What Will Help You Create Shared Understandings about Quality Assessment Practices?

During the Self-Study process, programs should develop or strengthen structures that ensure genuine communication between family members and staff and then work to build shared understanding of basic information about choices, development, and implementation of assessment practices as well as understanding of basic information about the nature and importance of positive relationships. The following topics can guide your thinking as you form your Self-Study team and can help to build understanding.

Forming a Self-Study Team

Partnering with families and including staff members in efforts toward program improvement are cornerstones of the NAEYC Self-Study and accreditation processes. It is important to develop a way for staff members and families to share both ideas and responsibility in Step 1: Enrollment/Self-Study, and it is required in Step 2: Application/Self-Assessment. More information about the requirements for Step 2 is in Section 5.

Every family and staff member should have the opportunity to participate in Self-Study and provide feedback about their perceptions of the program's strengths and weaknesses. In addition, it is important to identify a smaller group to help lead the

Finding and Using Resources

As a process, Self-Study encourages you to expand your vision and knowledge of early childhood practice beyond the scope of your own program. It is essential for programs to look to the early childhood field for knowledge, resources, and professional expertise. Linking with other professionals helps make the planning and implementation of program improvement strategies easier and helps to ensure that program practices are up to date. Fundamentally, Self-Study involves both program improvement and professional development. Keep track of your resources as part of efforts to document improvement and development.

Look to the early childhood field for knowledge, resources, and professional expertise about the importance and use of early childhood assessment. Early childhood experts have been thinking about the importance of assessment in the lives of young children for a long time. Information, resources, and strategies are available to help programs that need guidance in this area.

The following list suggests resources and strategies for programs to consider for help and support:

- Find a state or local NAEYC Affiliate or facilitation project working on similar issues.

- Join with local programs and share efforts.

- Meet or speak with consultants on health, nutrition, sanitation, and hazards to gather suggestions for improvement. Document your conversations, and include copies of their reports.

- Ask other people such as volunteers, board members, and community specialists who work with the program for input and ideas.

- Consult child development and early childhood education specialists to assist in developing strategies to improve the program and to conduct relevant training and staff development opportunities.

In addition to these suggestions, the Resources section in this book provides additional sources of potential support, including a form that guides the observations you will be making and a list of relevant Web sites that contain articles and publications about this standard. The literature review, also in the Resources section, provides a summary of evidence that supports the criteria included in the standard. The references it mentions (see the Bibliography in Section 6) represent a range of sources: academic research; national reports; summaries of research, descriptive, survey, and interview data; and multi-authored position statements. These references provide support and rationale for the criteria, and they represent both national and international research. You can use this information to help program stakeholders (staff, families, and funders) understand why you are considering certain improvements and why those improvements are investments worth making.

effort. When selecting this team, programs benefit by choosing individuals from both families and teaching staff who are

- willing to participate in the additional tasks that are necessary to successfully completing the Self-Study and accreditation process,

- committed to maintaining a positive attitude toward learning, and

- open to constructive criticism and dialogue.

Over the course of the Self-Study, the Self-Study team can take responsibility for the following tasks:

- Meet with family members, staff, and others to discuss the process, what is involved, and the status of the program improvement efforts.

- Determine priorities and time lines for program improvement.

- Determine roles and responsibilities for specific Self-Study tasks.

- Find and use resources that can support the Self-Study effort.

Frequently Asked Questions about Assessment of Child Progress

The frequently asked questions and the answers that are outlined here can be provided not only to program staff but also to family members and may be the basis for both formal and informal conversation, discussion, and elaboration.

What should we consider as we begin to think about how we assess child progress in our program? There are a number of issues to consider. Here is a starting list of questions to ask:

- How do we select assessment tools and measures that are consistent with our program's goals and the needs of children in our program?

- Do we value and use our assessments? If not, do we have other choices? What resources can we turn to?

- Do teachers assess children on a regular basis?

- Is the assessment information used on a regular basis to inform our work?

- Do our assessments reflect children's real world activities and challenges?

- What areas of child development are or are not addressed by the assessments?

- Are our assessments suited to all the age groups with which we work?

- Are our assessments responsive to children in our program who have special needs?

- Are our assessments culturally sensitive and modified to accurately show the knowledge and skills of young English-language learners?

- Do our assessments and the procedures we use provide information that families find helpful and informative?

How do we make assessment a regular, normal part of classroom life?

Consider the following tips:

- *Begin the process slowly.* Become familiar with what you are assessing. Review the developmental checklist, continuum, or profile that your program has selected. That framework will help you identify what you will assess. Start by assessing one developmental or content area and focusing on it until you feel comfortable, or start with assessing only a few children, adding more as you learn.

- *Start with easy techniques.* The following strategies can simplify the process:
  - Use a checklist to structure a brief observation of children working in one particular area.
  - Gather anecdotal notes on one child or during one activity.

  - Date and store samples of children's work in individual child folders.
  - Document activities and achievements with photographs.
  - Engage in regular conversation with family members and other adults who work with the children to gain additional insights.

- *Stay organized and current.* Find a time in the day or in the week when information can be filed, notes can be written, portfolios can be added to, etc. Doing these tasks on a regular basis will ensure that the information is current.

- *Get others to help.* Specialists, classroom aides and assistants, volunteers, parents, and interns can help with assessment. Coach all nonprofessionals on confidentiality as well as on what they are to do, and choose assessment tasks that are appropriate for them.

- *Meet often to discuss practices and results.* Assessment is not a solitary activity. Talking regularly with a team of people who are all concerned with the progress of the children allows for an exchange of ideas on tools, methods, and interpretation of results.

- *Use the results to scaffold children's learning.* Assessment is a valuable tool, but it can become just another chore to do if it is not used to inform what happens in the classroom and with each child.

When should we conduct assessments of child progress?
Ideally, assessment is ongoing as part of your daily routine. In addition, it is important to build in periodic assessments—assessments that are made before and after a new project theme or curriculum emphasis is introduced and as needed to address a specific problem or concern.

Initial and periodic assessments provide valuable information for teaching and curriculum by documenting children's initial knowledge and skills and then their

growth, development, and learning. For example, when an infant enters the program, note her characteristics. You might want to find out, for instance, does she make and hold eye contact, grasp fingers or objects, sleep best in dark or light, interact best when the environment is quiet or noisy? Check for the same things every month and discuss results with families, comparing the child's characteristics at home with those at school.

Before making final plans for a large unit or project, assess the children's current knowledge and understanding of the content of the unit (what they know) as well as their attitudes and interests (what they want to learn). Teachers may find that some of the children have already mastered the skills and content that had been planned or, perhaps, that some more basic skills need to be addressed, at least with some children, before starting the project. After the project is over, assess to see what the children have mastered or what areas they may need to get continued support (in general, what they learned). Document these findings in a KWL (Know, Want, Learn) chart. A KWL chart has 3 columns: (1) What does the child **K**NOW?, (2) What does the child **W**ANT to know?, and (3) What did the child **L**EARN? The first two columns are completed before a learning experience, and the third column is completed after the experience.

Sometimes it is necessary to take a closer look at a child or a group when there is a specific problem. For example, a teacher may notice that a twenty-month-old in her group is making no efforts to use language. She notices that all of the other children in that age category are regularly using at least one word to express a need or a desire. It is important to collect information before seeking solutions. In this example, it is important to listen carefully and note (a) whether there are any times when the child does attempt to use words and (b) the ways that the child does try and communicate through gestures or noises. After a problem has been identified and information gathered, it may be possible to address it through classroom instruction or by having a conference with families or specialists. It is important to be ready with current, relevant information and to know who can help make sure that a proper screening and assessment has or will be done to provide accurate information and the opportunity for planning.

How do we use assessment information? Attempting to teach in the absence of assessment information or only to reflect on the meaning of assessment information is ineffective and does not meet children's needs. Easily the most important part of assessment is using the results. Too often the information on children is carefully gathered and then not used in planning for individual children, classrooms, and programs.

When examining information that has been gathered, consider the following questions:

- *What was I trying to find out?* Depending on what you want to know about the children in the classroom, there are endless numbers of possible assessments.

  - How much time did girls spend in the block area? (observation, anecdotal notes, checklist)

  - How much time did Gina spend playing alone? (observation, anecdotal notes)

  - How long did Roger cry after his mother left? (observation, anecdotal notes)

  - How many letters of the alphabet did Luisa recognize? (individual assessment)

  - How many pieces were in the puzzles that Anthony put together? (observation, anecdotal notes)

  - How long could the children remain engaged in whole group activities without getting wiggly? (observation, anecdotal notes)

  - What did children already know about magnets, and then what did they learn after our week of using magnets? (KWL chart, photographs)

- *What curriculum goals was the assessment linked to?* What goals did you have for a child or children?

  - Children benefit from all interest areas (curriculum goal)—Girls take more interest in the block area (linked goal)

  - Children play cooperatively with one another (curriculum goal)—Gina spends more time with other children (linked goal)

  - Toddlers separate successfully from their families (curriculum goal)—Roger is able to separate from his mother without crying (linked goal)

- Kindergarten children recognize all letters of the alphabet (curriculum goal)—Luisa learned six letters (linked goal)

- Children complete increasingly complex puzzles (curriculum goal)—Anthony put together a eight-piece puzzle (linked goal)

- *What did I do to adapt my teaching practices and make better use of the learning environment and materials*?

  - The girls seemed to enjoy the block area more when I added people and small animals to the available materials.

  - Gina enjoys stringing beads and using peg boards. When I set up a small table with two chairs and beads and pegs, another child often joined Gina at the table.

  - Roger's mother and I developed a plan for her to read a story in a small cozy place each day before she leaves. Roger chose the book, sat on his mom's lap, and then gave her a hug before she would leave.

  - I displayed alphabet letters at eye level and set out two new alphabet puzzles. The children sang the alphabet song and were helped to write their names on their work every day. Children made alphabet letters out of clay.

  - I worked in the puzzle area with the children each day. I watched the way they try and figure out where to put the pieces. Sometimes I made suggestions. When children got frustrated I offered support and assistance.

  - I had the children help decide what to read or do in whole-group activities. When children got wiggly, I shortened the activity and added some movement.

  - I used a KWL chart to find out what children knew before we started. I

found out some children knew a lot about magnets. I had those children help demonstrate how magnets work to the other children. Each day there was a new magnet activity in the science center. Children were able to experiment with the magnets and keep track of what they found out. At the end of the week I had the children tell what they learned.

What is an assessment plan? An assessment plan provides the information necessary and the steps required to (a) gather information in an organized fashion, (b) use the results to adapt the curriculum as well as specific teaching approaches and instructional strategies to meet individual needs

of children, and (c) use the results to inform overall program development. An assessment plan includes the following:

■ The tools and instruments selected by the program for use in assessment (sound child assessment is not based on a single measure)

■ The time line for gathering the information

■ The methods of organizing the information

■ The methods for interpreting the information and for using it to make decisions about curriculum and teaching strategies

■ The methods for discussing results with families and other adults

■ The process for maintaining confidentiality of the information

■ The methods for using assessment information for overall program improvement

An assessment plan—particularly one that is clearly written, well organized, complete, comprehensive, and well understood—is useful for the following reasons:

■ A *clearly written* assessment plan helps teachers know the multiple purposes and uses of assessments.

■ A *well-organized* assessment plan helps teachers integrate assessment into their regular schedule.

■ A *complete* assessment plan provides a basis for programming decisions that respond and attend to children's strengths and needs across all developmental levels.

■ A *comprehensive* assessment plan ensures that (a) developmental screening occurs for all children; (b) a systematic approach is used to monitor children's progress throughout the year; and (c) assessment information is used to choose or modify appropriate curriculum, adapt

teaching practices, and plan program improvement.

■ An assessment plan that is *well understood* by teachers serves as the foundation for communicating with families about assessment practices, procedures, and results.

What can and should be assessed?

Any and all areas of children's learning and development should be assessed. The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP 1997) identified five domains of children's development and learning that are important to school success: physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches toward learning; language development; and cognition and general knowledge.

■ Physical well-being and motor development
  • Health
  • Strength
  • Fine-motor development
  • Large-motor development

■ Social and emotional development
  • Ability to relate to other children and adults
  • Ability to regulate own behavior

■ Approaches to learning
  • Attitudes toward school and learning
  • Interest in the larger world
  • Self-confidence, willingness to try new things
  • Persistence

■ Language development
  • Ability to understand what is being said
  • Ability to express needs, wants, and ideas verbally or nonverbally

■ Cognition and general knowledge

• Children's ability to talk about, think about, and describe the world around them
• Ability to solve problems
• Acquisition of skills and understandings in all content areas
• Children's literacy and math skills

How can teachers be sensitive to cultural and language differences among children or to children's special needs in the assessment process?
Assessments must be culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate to provide useful information. Strategies to consider for achieving sensitive and appropriate assessments include the following:

■ Seek help and information from someone who knows the language and customs of the families with whom you work.

■ Read "Screening and Assessment of Young English Language Learners"— the NAEYC supplement to the *NAEYC Position Statement on Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation* (www.naeyc.org/about/positions/ELL.asp).

■ Distinguish the differences between (a) deficits and (b) language, cultural, ethnic, and social differences.

■ Eliminate barriers related to a child's disability that keep the child from demonstrating what he or she knows and can do.

Related NAEYC Accreditation Criteria

Criterion 4.B.01—Programs use a variety of assessment methods that are sensitive to and informed by family culture, experiences, children's abilities and disabilities, and home language; are meaningful and accurate; and are used in settings familiar to the children.

■ Modify the assessment materials or procedures to meet children's individual needs and characteristics.

For more information, see the sections in this chapter that address culture and language as well as special needs.

How should specific assessment tools or measures be selected? Is it better to develop one's own assessments or to purchase them? Often, curriculum models are already linked to related assessments. These integrated models help programs link their goals and objectives to the results of the assessments and can reduce the burden on the teaching staff. When considering various curriculum and assessment models, programs need to judge the model's comprehensiveness to be sure that the assessments address all important areas of development and learning. Special attention should be given to whether an assessment was developed for and tested with children from similar backgrounds, languages, and cultures as those for whom the assessment will be used. The selection of assessments should also include careful attention to the ages for which the assessment was developed. Developing your own formal assessment measures can be difficult because it requires the ability to appropriately standardize and validate the measures.

What is screening and how should it be used? Screening is a quickly administered assessment used to identify children who may benefit from more in-depth assessment. Families should be involved as important sources of information about the child. Screening may be used to identify children who should be observed further for a possible delay or problem. Screening results should never be used to diagnose children as having special needs, to prevent children from entering a program, or to assign children to a specific intervention solely on the basis of the screening results.

What training do teachers and other staff need to conduct assessments well? Professional development is key to effective child assessment. Program administrators and teaching staff should work together to develop a systematic plan for the assessment of child progress over time that emphasizes authentic measures (those that reflect children's real-world activities and challenges) and that focuses on outcomes that have been identified as important. In-service training is needed to ensure that teachers have the knowledge, skills, and support they need to use assessment strategies effectively. Collaboration and teamwork in which all members of an early childhood program come to agree on desired goals, methods, and processes for assessing children's progress can help to build more positive attitudes about assessment.

How should families be involved in the assessment process? It is essential for families to be involved in the assessment process. Families perspectives about their own children are an important resource for staff. Families have a right to be informed about the assessment of their children. Families of young children with disabilities have a legal right to be involved in assessment decisions. Early childhood program staff and administrators need to share the results of assessments, whether informal observations or more formal test results with families in ways that are clear, respectful, culturally responsive, and constructive and that use the language with which families are most comfortable.

What does *standardized* mean? To standardize something is to make sure that it is consistent with a defined standard. Commonly used terms relating to standardization are defined as follows:

- *Standardized procedure:* A uniform procedure (e.g., give the same instructions, allow the same amount of time,

provide the same materials, look for the same behavior, follow the same steps and record information on the same form) through which to assess different children either formally or informally for the same skill or understanding; used to increase the reliability and fairness of assessments.

- *Standardized assessment:* A more formal and structured arrangement in which procedures and instruments are specified; teachers are trained in how to use

them; and the assessments are consistent across classrooms, schools, and centers.

- *Standardized test:* A test that requires a trained examiner to administer it and interpret the scores; often used for program evaluation and in the screening and diagnosis of special needs.

How is a portfolio used to assess child progress? A portfolio provides a purposeful collection of evidence of an individual child's learning, collected over time, which demonstrates the child's efforts, progress, process, and achievements. A systematic process should be used to determine what goes in the portfolio. Possible processes might include the following:

- The same type of work from each child on a particular date (e.g., all children in a kindergarten classroom write their first name on the first day of school and then every two months after that).

- Work that a child chooses because he is proud of his achievement (e.g., a preschooler builds a farm using blocks and animals and asks the teacher to take a picture of it). Children should have the option of adding work to their personal portfolios.

- Documentation of children's drawings, conversations, and ideas on a project, including how teachers interacted with them to help them express themselves.

- Examples of work or ability from different developmental domains. This type of evidence can include (a) dated art work such as fine-motor work (scribbling, writing, cutting), photographs of block structures, and 3-D art; (b) documentation of physical abilities (riding a bike, shooting a basket, pulling up, sitting up, drinking from a cup); (c) language samples (children's dictations written down by the teacher or notes about what children have to say on particular topics); (d) lists of activities children engage in and how that changes or stays the same over time; and (e) children's attention to task.

What are some guidelines for the ethical and professional handling of assessment information? Three critical guidelines are stated here:

- Discuss results only with those who have a right or a need to know (typically the

child's parents or guardians, school or center administrators, and other teachers and specialists who work with the child).

■ Avoid labeling children; children are better served by keeping focused on what they can do.

■ Keep confidential any files containing sensitive information.

NAEYC's Code of Ethical Conduct (2005) includes additional guidelines. It is posted on the NAEYC Web site at www. naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/pseth05.pdf

What is program evaluation and accountability? Program evaluation engages program staff and families in examining all aspects of a program with attention to program improvement. Programs who are engaged in NAEYC Self-Study are engaged in program evaluation. The primary purpose of program evaluation is to improve the quality of education and other services provided to young children and their families. *Accountability* is defined as the responsibility of programs to do what they say they are going to do—to provide the services they have described to their customers and to their funders.

How Do Assessment Practices Differ Depending on Children's Age and Developmental Level?

Assessment practices clearly differ depending on children's age and developmental level. For this reason, each of the NAEYC Accreditation Criteria were carefully considered for their appropriateness across age categories—infant, toddler/two, preschool, and kindergarten. Many of the criteria have been determined to be universal, or important for all age categories; however, this designation does not mean that those criteria will be implemented the same way for each age category. All criteria have been considered in terms of age and devel-

What to Assess

Because assessment is closely connected with curriculum, it is important to consider all aspects of the curriculum for each age category as a guide to what should be assessed. The examples below are not required, nor are they complete descriptions of what might be focused on for children of different ages. Resources for more thoroughly considering developmentally appropriate assessment can be found at the end of this book.

Assessments That Are Relevant for Infants

■ Relationships with important adults—Ability to successfully separate from family members, make and maintain eye contact, be soothed and comforted by program staff

■ Language development—Ability to understand language and express needs and wants in verbal and nonverbal ways

■ Physical development—Ability to turn over, grasp, sit up, reach, crawl, pull up, use the whole body and the senses while manipulating toys and other safe objects

■ Social-emotional development—Interactions with other infants, ability to self-soothe

■ Interest in the surrounding world

Assessments That Are Relevant for Toddlers (including all of the above)

■ Emerging abilities to play with other children—Ability to take turns, share, wait, exchange materials

■ Ability to display their knowledge and abilities—Relevant verbal expression and interactions with materials

■ Development of positive relationships with adults—Ability to use adults as valuable resources for help, comfort, and affection

Assessments That Are Relevant for Preschool and Kindergarten Children

■ Ability to initiate activities and conversation

■ Ability to participate in activities individually, in pairs, as well as in small- and whole-group settings

■ Ability to negotiate relationships with adults—Express needs and wants appropriately, resolve conflicts, engage in discussion and conversation

■ Ability to tolerate frustration and to recognize achievement and competence

■ Ability to listen to and benefit from direction and instruction

■ Knowledge of basic skills—Letters, numbers, colors, counting, writing name, recognizing words

■ Abilities in oral and written language, mathematical and scientific thinking, social studies, and creative expression

■ Large- and fine-motor abilities—Ability to hold and use pencils, markers, and paint brushes; to throw and catch balls; to climb steps

opmental level, but the examples that fol-
low specifically refer to criteria in the
Assessment of Child Progress Standard.

For children of all ages, it is important
to think about the following:

■ Who is doing the assessing (which can
include observing, taking notes, com-
pleting a checklist, taking dictation, or
administering an individual assessment)?

  • Does the assessor have a relationship
    with the child?

  • Is the assessor well trained and
    comfortable with the assessment?

■ How is the child feeling?

  • Is the child working in a familiar
    and comfortable environment?

  • Is the child anxious or worried?

  • Is the child being asked to miss an
    activity that is important to him or
    her?

■ Does the assessment take into account
the cultural and language background
of the child?

■ Does the child have special needs and,
if so, what accommodations or modifi-
cations have been made to meet those
needs?

To some degree, information on older
children can be gained in specific content
areas in a more formal individual assess-
ment that examines, for example, children's
ability to count; identify colors, numbers,
letters, sounds, and words; understand con-
cepts such as hot–cold, soft–hard; and fol-
low multistep directions. Look at the
NAEYC Accreditation Criteria related to
curriculum content for preschoolers and
kindergartners for more information in
this regard. In addition, various standard-
ized tests provide information about chil-
dren's oral language development, physical
development, general knowledge, and
school readiness. People using standardized
tests need to be trained in their use and

need to recognize that such tests remove
the child from his or her day-to-day activi-
ties and comfort zone. It is important to
combine many types of assessments and
use several sources of information to make
sure you are getting an accurate picture of
the abilities of each child.

How Is Sensitivity to Diversity in Culture and Language Demonstrated in Your Program's Assessment Practices?

Culture includes values, beliefs, and
practices that stem from ethnic, racial, eco-
nomic, religious, and political experiences.
These historical dynamics affect the every-
day experiences of families and profoundly
influence the child's development and rela-
tionship with the world.

Increasingly, programs serve children
and families from diverse cultural and lin-
guistic backgrounds, requiring that all pro-
grams understand and respond to cultural
and linguistic differences. Incorporating
into program plans and practices knowl-
edge of the social and cultural contexts in
which children live ensures that assess-
ments are meaningful, relevant, and
respectful to children and their families.
Recognizing that development and learn-
ing are influenced by social and cultural
contexts does not require teachers to
understand all the nuances of every cul-
tural group they may encounter in their
practice; this effort would be an impossible
task. Rather, this fundamental recognition
sensitizes teachers to the need to
acknowledge how their own cultural expe-
rience shapes their perspective and to
realize that multiple perspectives, in addi-
tion to their own, must be considered
when making decisions or attempting to
understand more about children's devel-
opment and learning.

The Assessment of Child Progress
Standard requires particular attention to

What Criteria Look Like in Practice on a Developmental Continuum

The example presented here charts a way of thinking about assessing children based on their age and development that programs may find useful. Many instruments and tools are available to help you assess children of all ages in all developmental domains and curriculum content areas.

Assessment and Screening Areas	Infants and Toddlers	Preschoolers and Kindergartners
Large-motor ability and coordination	When do you begin to see a child • turning over by himself • sitting up unassisted • crawling • pulling herself up	Can children • run without stumbling or falling • catch and throw balls • hang from or cross monkey bars • jump rope
Fine-motor ability—manipulating objects	When do you begin to see a child • grasp a rattle or a finger • pick up small objects • press buttons on a busy box	When do you begin to see a child • hold and use a pencil or crayon • legibly write a number or letter • build with interlocking plastic blocks
Relating to adults	When do you begin to see a child • make and hold eye contact • smile at particular adults • be comforted by particular adults	In the classroom, does a child have an adult he goes to for • affection • assistance • comfort • conversation
Relating to children	When do you begin to see a child • notice other children • reach out to other children • share objects	Under what circumstances does a child • play near another child • play with another child • have conflict with another child • identify another child as a friend
Communicating	When do you begin to see that a child • understands what you are saying • uses gestures and sounds to get what she needs • uses words	Does the child communicate using • one or two words • three or four words • full sentences • correct grammar and syntax
Solving problems	When do you begin to see a child • tolerate waiting or frustration • try another strategy when the first one does not work • look to adults for help	Does the child • express his or her feelings in words when solving personal problems • try multiple approaches to problems (fitting puzzle pieces, getting a ball that has gone over the fence, figuring out what sinks and what floats)

family background, values and beliefs, and home language as assessments are planned and conducted. Assessment practices must meet the needs of diverse families in the program. For all children it is important to ensure that assessments

- fit well with children's family backgrounds and values.

- support children who are learning a second language.

- show respect for differences.

As you consider sensitivity to culture and language in your assessments of child progress, consider the following:

- How does the child's cultural background affect his or her development?

- What language does the family want the child to speak at school?

- Are the expectations at home the same as they are at school?

- Are there differences in expectations for self-help skills, behavioral expectations between adults and children, and expectations for school behavior between home and school? How might these affect a child's assessment?

- Are ways of interacting, for example, showing physical affection, giving praise, and demonstrating respect, the same at home as they are at school? How does this pattern affect a child's assessment?

When working with children from diverse backgrounds, program staff need to be aware that results of their assessments may not be accurate for a variety of reasons:

- The assessment is in English and the child is not fluent in English.

- An assessment that has been translated may be in the child's home language but could be in a different dialect (e.g., there are considerable differences in Spanish depending on the country the child or the child's family is from).

- Although the assessment has been translated, the pictures or examples used are more familiar to the group for which the assessment was originally developed (typically, white, middle-class children).

- The child may be learning in another language and particular "school skills" such as ability to recognize numbers, letters, and colors may be expressed in English. The assessment needs to consider this bilingual knowledge.

How Are Your Assessment Practices Responsive to Children Who Have Special Needs?

The category of special needs includes not only children with disabilities, emotional vulnerabilities, developmental delays, and physical or motor limitations but also those children who are notably ahead in one or more areas and require additional stimulation as well as challenge. Teachers need to be responsive to the special needs of children in the program and be ready to effectively manage the needs of children who may enter the program.

Programs who are screening or assessing children who have special needs in the program may need to adapt their assessment practices to make sure that each child has the opportunity to demonstrate skills and ability to his or her maximum potential. Programs will want to consider the following adaptations:

- Modifying the physical environment or setup of the classroom

- Simplifying or modifying the assessment

- Using other children for support and help

- Including the adult with whom the child relates best

Screening using these adaptations should be done before a referral is made for special education services. After an assessment

or screening has been completed and each child has had the opportunity to do his or her best, the results are then documented, and the information is shared with families. When families and program staff are concerned about the child, then the family—with the support of the teacher or administrator—may make a referral for further assessment from professionals in special education.

Documentation of concrete examples of successes and challenges for children is helpful in determining whether additional services are needed. Frequently, family members have a difficult time recognizing that their child may have a problem and will require support over time and regular evidence to help them accept the information. A referral ensures only further assessment. Information from that further assessment will help determine whether the child is eligible for services. In all cases, this additional assessment is done only with consent from the child's family.

Assessments can be modified or accommodations can be made for children who need them. Teachers need to consider the following:

■ *Physical development.* Does the child have any large- or fine-motor limitations that affect his ability to be assessed or that will affect the outcomes or results of the assessment?

■ *Language development.* Does the child have language? Is the child's language intelligible? Is the child unable to perform in the assessment because she cannot yet understand the directions? Is the child's vocabulary limited to an extent that answering may be difficult? (Language ability in these assessments should not be confused with typical age or developmental expectations for language or with abilities in a home language other than that being used in the assessment.)

■ *Sensory development.* Does the child have difficulty hearing or seeing? Is the

child easily stimulated by light, touch, or sound?

■ *Health.* Does the child have any medical or health problems that affect either his ability to be assessed or the outcomes or results of the assessment?

■ *Social-emotional development.* Does the child have difficulty sitting still, paying attention, or complying with simple requests? (Here again, these characteristics are not to be confused with typical developmental ability.)

■ *Gifted and talented children.* Does the child have gifts or talents that exceed those measured by the assessment? Will the child be able to fully demonstrate her knowledge or skill?

What Topic Areas or Criteria in the Assessment of Child Progress Standard Are Important to Discuss?

Some of the criteria in the Assessment of Child Progress Standard need to be discussed and thought about more than others. Some may be harder to understand, may produce different interpretations by different staff, and may be seem at first to be inconsistent with program or personal philosophy. Considering the following discussion topics and deciding on discussion topics for yourselves will contribute to efforts to gain shared understanding of the Assessment of Child Progress Standard in your program.

When engaging in discussion, it is helpful to have a leader who sets the following ground rules and manages the discussion:

■ There are set times for discussion.

■ Everyone helps decide on the topic.

■ Everyone has an opportunity to talk.

■ All points of view are important.

■ Someone will be responsible for keeping track of ideas for later use.

Discussion Topics That Are Linked to Specific Assessment Criteria

Criteria	Discussion

The Assessment of Child Progress Standard overall	1. What is the staff response to this standard?
	2. If staff have concerns about this standard, are they based on
	   • objections to doing assessments in general?
	   • objections to using some kinds of assessment?
	   • lack of knowledge of how to do the assessments?
	   • concern that assessments take up too much time?
	   • other?
	3. What steps can we take to deal with these problems?
	4. What kind of help or resources are available to us?
	5. What are other programs doing?

4.A.01—Programs conduct assessments as an integral part of the program. Programs use assessments to support children's learning, using a variety of methods such as observations, checklists, rating scales, and individually administered tests.	1. What does it mean to integrate assessments into the program? 2. Is that something we do, and if so, how we are using the information to help us respond to children and improve aspects of our program? 3. If not, what are the barriers for us? Are there any changes we could make that would work for us? 4. What is the value of assessing and screening children? Do we as a staff agree these procedures are important? 5. If we do not agree, then what problems might our disagreement cause as we try to comply with the assessment criteria?

4.A.02—The program has a written plan for assessment that describes assessment purposes, procedures, and uses of the results. The plan also includes:
 	
  a. conditions under which children will be assessed,
  b. timelines associated with assessments that occur throughout the year,
  c. procedures to keep individual child records confidential,
  d. ways to involve families in planning and implementing assessments, and
  e. methods to effectively communicate assessment information to families.
	1. Does our plan address all of these areas?
	2. Are all teachers aware of the plans? If not, what could be done to help them be more involved in the process?

General discussions on assessment may include topics such as the following:

■ Partnerships with families

  • In what ways do we demonstrate our knowledge of family background in our selection of assessment instruments?

  • Do we miss opportunities to value and include the families in the development of our assessment plans or in communicating results?

  • Do families and staff agree on the assessment plan?

- Inside our classrooms
  - How do we prepare children for assessments?
  - How do we make sure we have time to assess the children?
  - What do we do in our classrooms to support each other in our assessment efforts?
  - How do we make sure that we are not simply assessing for the sake of assessing but, rather, that the results are used regularly to make decisions about what to teach and how to teach it?

Are You Open to Changing Your Assessment Practices?

Regardless of how a program approaches Self-Study, it requires doing something very difficult—change. Because the object of Self-Study is for programs to commit to a process of continuous improvement, it may be helpful to think about and keep track of how your program approaches and is affected by change. Consider these questions:

- How important is tradition to you? Are you open to change, or do you usually prefer to keep things the same?

- Are you willing to think about yourselves and your work honestly, speak candidly, listen to the ideas of everyone, and consider program improvement an ongoing endeavor?

- Are you willing to gather evidence that will help you determine your strengths and weaknesses and do the work that will improve your program?

- How does change in the development and implementation of program assessment affect other aspects of the program?

Self-Study encourages you to reflect on your current practices and to really think about what is working and what could work better. This type of reflection can (a)

help you gain new ways of seeing children, (b) develop new insights about the effectiveness of your own practices in light of children's responses to the learning environment and the people in it, and (c) develop deeper understandings of children's experiences, including their feelings and development.

Following are some suggested questions

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Exploring Your Practice: How Do We Use Assessment Results?

One teacher could survey others to find out how different teachers use assessment results to achieve the following:

- Adapt instructional strategies
- Modify approaches
- Change the environment
- Meet the needs of individual children

Results could be shared with the whole staff to make everyone more aware of successes, challenges, and frustrations. In this way teachers, who are struggling to make good use of their results can hear from others who are feeling more successful.

Are you interested in finding further support for exploring your own practices? See NAEYC's Voices of Practitioners online (www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/vp) for articles and resources on teacher research.

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that can help you more fully explore your assessment practices and how they support positive outcomes for children:

- What assessments do we find most useful?

- How do we use assessment results?

- How can we improve on the assessments we use to get the kind of information we find useful?

Teachers who take the time and effort to explore their own practice become more able to decide what they want to know about their work as well as better able to describe what they do and why they do it.

What Does Your Program Need To Do for Self-Study?

Step 1: Enrollment/Self-Study is the first of four steps toward achieving NAEYC Accreditation. It is an essential step toward achieving NAEYC Accreditation, but programs also may enroll and engage in Self-Study even if they have no intention of seeking NAEYC Accreditation.

The purpose of Self-Study is to encourage programs to engage in a structured approach to program improvement that considers all of the necessary components of a high-quality program. The Self-Study process requires programs to methodically discern and document actual program practices and then determine how to improve them if necessary.

Pursuing NAEYC Accreditation and engaging in Self-Study demonstrates a commitment to best practice and continuous program quality improvement, including ongoing reflection on classroom and program practices. To make the most of the Self-Study process, NAEYC recommends six tasks:

- Creating shared understandings of key concepts about accreditation, the standards, the criteria, and implications for the program

- Gathering information by using the tools

- Determining strengths and weaknesses

- Developing improvement plans as needed

- Making improvements and documenting progress

- Evaluating results and determining next steps

Programs that complete these tasks in Self-Study will be better prepared for the formal Self-Assessment of program quality that occurs at Step 2: Application/Self-Assessment. The differences between Self-Study and Self-Assessment will be explored further in Section 5. Note that although NAEYC provides programs with guidelines, there are no requirements for Self-Study. Programs are not required to submit their Self-Study findings to NAEYC.

Create Shared Understandings

Creating shared understandings of key concepts about NAEYC Accreditation, the standards, the criteria, and implications for the program is an important component of a successful Self-Study process. Members of the program staff and leadership should understand the steps and requirements of the NAEYC Accreditation process. At a minimum, this group includes the program administrator, teachers and other teaching staff members, and representatives of the program's governance structure. Teaching staff members and program leadership should thoughtfully consider how their program policies and procedures demonstrate the 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria. The criteria are statements of best practice for children and families. They are sometimes complex statements that may seem open to multiple interpretations. NAEYC has developed guidance to help programs further understand the criteria and how they will be assessed. The guidance is regularly updated

and may be found at TORCH (see www.naeyc.org/selfstudy for details).

The following are suggested questions for programs to ask in Self-Study:

■ What are we trying to achieve in our classrooms?

■ Do our program policies and procedures help us achieve these goals?

■ How do our program policies and procedures as well as classroom practices demonstrate that the criteria are met?

■ Which criteria are not met?

More strategies for creating shared understandings were discussed in detail earlier in Section 3 of this book.

Gather Evidence

Evidence is a critical concept for NAEYC Accreditation. The process is designed to focus on evidence of a program's ability to meet the program standards and accreditation criteria consistently over time. Evidence includes *observable evidence* that can be directly seen—in classroom practices or as part of the program facility; *survey evidence* that reflects the opinions of key program stakeholders, including families and teaching staff members; and *portfolio evidence* that is specifically collected by members of the program staff to document the policies, procedures, and practices for not only individual classrooms but also the overall program.

NAEYC has developed specific tools to help you (a) assess your strengths and weaknesses as they relate to each standard and its associated criteria and (b) begin collecting evidence that your program is meeting the criteria and is likely to do so regularly in the future. Some of the tools are designed primarily to assist in your program improvement efforts; others are specific to the NAEYC Accreditation process and must be followed in Steps 2 and 3. Regardless of your program's intent about pursuing NAEYC Accreditation, the information you gather will provide tangible evidence to families and others in your community of how your program meets this important standard.

This section provides information about the tools that are available. The specific tools, as well as other resource information, are available at TORCH (see www.naeyc. org/selfstudy for more details).

Teaching Staff Survey and Family Survey

Opinions and thoughts from members of the teaching staff and families will inform program efforts to develop and improve child outcomes and program quality. Programs may choose to use surveys during Self-Study. However, they are not required to report to NAEYC the findings of the surveys conducted during Self-Study. Please note that if your program plans to seek NAEYC Accreditation, you will be required to conduct surveys as part of the Self-Assessment process.

The Teaching Staff Survey can help you collect information about the program from the staff perspective, and the Family Survey can help you collect information about how families perceive program practices. The surveys are designed to provide you with information from several anonymous viewpoints. Sometimes, members of the staff and families are not comfortable openly offering suggestions or ideas for fear of retaliation against them or their child; consequently, programs seeking the full range of ideas and concerns that truly represent members of the families and staff need to offer the opportunity for privacy by asking a trusted intermediary to collect the information or by taking other steps to ensure anonymity. (Steps to ensure anonymity are required during Self-Assessment.) The Teaching Staff Survey and Family Survey are available at TORCH (www.naeyc.org/selfstudy).

Teaching Staff Survey. The Teaching Staff Survey may be used to survey teaching staff members and gain their perspectives with respect to the program's strengths and weaknesses. You may choose to ask staff members to complete different sections at different times or to complete the entire survey at once. You may decide to use one or more of the statements as a springboard for discussion among groups of teaching staff members. Results of these discussions or surveys completed during Self-Study are strictly for the use of your program.

Providing an envelope with each survey and a box to which they are returned in a common staff area (and not the administrator's office) is one strategy that can help to ensure anonymity.

Family Survey. The Family Survey is designed to gather family perspectives on specific criteria. During Self-Study, you may choose to ask families to complete different sections at different times or to complete the entire survey. You may also adapt the survey questions and use them as a springboard for discussion with parents and family members. The results of your findings during Self-Study are strictly for the use of your program.

Survey Summary Forms. Once the surveys are completed by the staff members and families and collected, there are resources online to help your program summarize the data gathered to determine which criteria are met. The summary forms can be used to record information about the number of teaching staff and families surveyed and the percentage of those returning surveys. The more teaching staff and families return the surveys, the more representative the information will be. The summary forms can be used to help you identify key findings from the Teaching Staff Surveys and the Family Surveys. Make any notes concerning areas of strength and improvement after compiling and reviewing the feedback from

the teaching staff and family members. It can be especially helpful to review the findings of both surveys in conjunction with one another to identify common issues, concerns, and areas where perceptions of strengths or weaknesses vary. These resources are available online at TORCH at www.naeyc.org/selfstudy.

Observable Criteria

Observable criteria are those criteria that can actually be seen in practice or as part of a tour of the program facility. Classroom observations provide the most direct evidence of program quality and the results of program improvement efforts. During Self-Study, it is useful to provide teaching staff members the opportunity to observe one another's classrooms and give feedback to one another. Supervisory staff members can also conduct regular observations as a way of supporting teachers' ongoing professional growth and development.

As program staff members become more familiar with the criteria, it becomes easier to notice the number of ways observable criteria are fulfilled. Observable criteria should be apparent to an administrator who is visiting a classroom or other program areas, to a teacher who is evaluating his or her work, or to a parent who is visiting his or her child's classroom.

When conducting observations during Self-Study, you may want to consider

- focusing on learning activities during the program day.

- targeting specific age groups.

- observing the classroom at different times throughout the day, for example, when children arrive or depart, during indoor or outdoor time, during planned activities or free play, etc.

- focusing on a specific standard, or even a specific Topic Area within a standard, for example, using criteria from Topic Area 2.G. "Curriculum Content for

Area of Cognitive Development: Science" when observing a science activity.

As you conduct observations, it is helpful for you to make comments related to each criterion. When reflecting on the observation, consider the following:

1. What materials were used or accessible that are consistent with those identified in the criteria?

2. What affirming examples of the criteria were observed?

3. What opportunities to fulfill criteria were missed?

4. What criteria were not met? What were the contributing factors?

5. Did I observe conflicting evidence?

Programs enrolled in Self-Study can access specific forms for documenting observable evidence at TORCH at www.naeyc.org/selfstudy.

Portfolio Evidence

Portfolios were introduced as formal sources of evidence for the NAEYC Accreditation process as part of the reinvented system in 2005. Portfolios provide a systematic way of documenting policies, procedures, and practices that reflect how individual classrooms and the program as a whole are meeting specific criteria. A Classroom Portfolio is maintained for each individual classroom or defined group of children, and a Program Portfolio is maintained for the overall program. Each portfolio is organized around the 10 standards.

Classroom Portfolio Evidence. The Classroom Portfolio is an opportunity for programs to present evidence of each group's capacity to meet the accreditation criteria over time. It is a mechanism for documenting classroom practices and recording events to provide current evidence of implementation of specific criteria or indicators within criteria.

Guidelines for Observing

Following these general guidelines for conducting classroom observations will enhance your ability to collect valid information about program practices:

1. **Be unobtrusive.** You are here to observe others in the classroom, not to participate in the activities yourself.

2. **Take time to absorb what you are seeing and understand the context of what is going on.** This step may seem unnecessary when you know the program well, but it can be important to simply observe what is happening before starting your ratings. Plan on spending at least one hour observing to get a real sense of what is happening in the classroom.

3. **Consider what you are seeing from the perspective of individual children.** What is each child experiencing? Even if the experiences are positive for most children most of the time, what is happening to the child for whom things are not positive?

4. **Observe at different times of day and consider how the level of quality is maintained.** High-quality programs need to be consistently strong over the course of the day. Programs are often "best" in the morning when teachers and children are well rested and eager to learn, but what happens later in the day when people are tired is equally important to the quality of children's overall experience.

NAEYC defines a group or classroom as the number of children who are assigned for most of the day to a teacher or a team of teaching staff members and who occupy an individual classroom or well-defined space that prevents intermingling of children from different groups within a larger room or area. In most instances, it is expected that the Classroom Portfolio will be developed for a specific classroom or group by the teaching team responsible for that group. However, when the responsibility for planning and implementing classroom activities is shared among several teaching teams for multiple groups of children, then a single portfolio may be used to document the evidence for each of the groups included in the shared planning and implementation.

Classroom Portfolios are used by NAEYC Assessors as part of the site visit to supplement information gathered during

the classroom observations (only a sample of classrooms is observed and has portfolios reviewed during the site visit). Specific guidelines for assembling portfolios to meet requirements for evidence as part of the site visit are available at TORCH (www.naeyc.org/selfstudy).

Program Portfolio Evidence. The Program Portfolio is an opportunity for programs to present evidence of the program's capacity to meet the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria over time. It is a mechanism for tracking policies and record-ing events that provides current evidence of implementation of the standards and criteria.

Many programs have reported that it is helpful to begin working on the Program Portfolio as one early task in the Self-Study process. Simply making sure that your program has policies and procedures documented can be an important first step; then consider whether the policies and procedures specifically address what is stated in the criteria. Most programs have found that they need to give careful attention to this part of the process to ensure that policies and procedures are in place and align with the standards and criteria.

The Program Portfolio is used by NAEYC Assessors as part of the site visit to gather information used to determine the NAEYC Accreditation decision. Specific guidelines, including checklists, for assembling the Program Portfolio to meet requirements for evidence as part of the site visit are available at TORCH (www.naeyc.org/selfstudy).

Determine Strengths and Weaknesses

The purpose of this task is to identify your program's areas of strength and areas of weakness. Using the 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria as your measure of quality, consider the evidence you gathered, using the tools to help identify areas that need to be addressed. Is there a theme across the standards that you are not meeting? Is one standard particularly difficult for your program? For example, you may notice that your program is not meeting many criteria in the Curriculum Standard but that your program is meeting many criteria in the Relationships Standard. You may identify broad areas where improvement is needed during this step. You will also want to take this time to celebrate your program's strengths with others in the program.

Taking an honest and careful look at your current practices is essential for an effective Self-Study. It is easy to look at the criteria and say, of course we do that. But do you really? What did your families say? What did the teaching staff members say? What did you not see that you expected to see when observing each group? Is your program fully meeting each criterion, including all indicators?

During Self-Study, challenge your staff and program leadership to provide evidence of your program's policies and practices, using the accreditation criteria as your measure of quality. You will need to be open to thinking seriously about all aspects of your program practices as well as many of your personal and professional beliefs and behaviors. Being open to the possibility of needing to change is a critical factor in quality improvement.

Develop Program Improvement Plans

This period is the time to thoughtfully consider how you can use the 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria to truly inform practices in your program and create structures that will support quality over time. It may require some creative brainstorming and true collaboration from members of the program staff, but it will result in higher quality programming for the children and families you serve.

Using the results from your Self-Study, create a plan for program improvement. You will need to identify resources to address the challenges for your program. To help you get started, use the ideas identified in Sections 3 and 6 of this volume. Brainstorm with staff members and families about additional resources available in your local community and state. Be creative. Link up with other early childhood programs to share training resources.

Getting Started with Your Classroom Portfolio

Here is a brief list of items to get you started thinking about the types of documentation that could be used as evidence.

- Copy of classroom daily schedule
- Copy of written curriculum
- Copies of assessment forms, anecdotal observations of children, developmental checklists
- Copies of letters, e-mails, or notes sent to parents
- Information shared with parents on enrollment in the program
- Copies of lesson plans, planning webs, or other planning sheets
- Photographs or written documentation of children participating in activities
- Examples of work samples from children
- Photographs or other documentation of classroom displays of children's work
- Lists or photographs of materials and equipment available to children in the classroom space or additional supply closets
- Other items specific to your individual program

Be sure to keep track of your resources as part of your program improvement and development efforts. Describe who will be involved, how you will gather further information and evidence, and how you will use the results. Your improvement plan should also include time to implement changes and to assess your progress as you move forward.

Make Improvements and Document Your Efforts

Put your plans into action. Depending on the plans and the area of improvement, start making the identified changes. This phase is where you will begin to see the results of your improvement efforts, which can be an exciting time for your program. Be sure to encourage members of the program staff in their efforts and celebrate their accomplishments one step at a time.

Evaluate Results and Determine Next Steps

Program improvement efforts are ongoing. Staff members, families, program administrators, and other stakeholders need to evaluate the effects of the changes after sufficient time has passed for the changes to be fully implemented and thoroughly tested. Discuss the effects of the changes on the children, teachers, and family members. Examine the changes for both positive and potentially negative effects. If necessary, make modifications.

Document your evaluation efforts and the modifications that you make. Your next steps depend on the context of your efforts and the nature of your findings. If you are exploring the standards one by one, this might be a good time to begin reviewing the next standard. If you are enrolled in Self-Study and your findings suggest that further improvement is needed to meet the standards and their criteria, then you can repeat the cycle to plan improvements, make improvements, document your efforts, and evaluate your results. When the program staff members and families are confident that the program can document that it meets each of the 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards, then the program is ready to proceed to the next step and become an Applicant for NAEYC

Accreditation (Step 2 in seeking NAEYC Accreditation). In the application, the program will select a Candidacy due date, 3 to 12 months from the date of application. Programs are not required to submit documentation of their Self-Study process to the NAEYC Academy in their application. However, the program that applies for NAEYC Accreditation is making the commitment to complete a formal Self-Assessment and to report these results to the NAEYC Academy by the Candidacy due date chosen in the application. Programs that are accepted as Candidates for NAEYC Accreditation will receive a site visit within six months of the selected Candidacy due date.

Programs that are currently NAEYC Accredited should refer to the timeline for currently accredited programs at TORCH (www.naeyc.org/selfstudy) to determine what due dates they must meet to maintain their NAEYC Accreditation status with no lapse while pursuing re-accreditation. Currently accredited programs may choose to allow their NAEYC Accreditation to lapse if they believe that they need more time to conduct a thorough and meaningful Self-Study and to be successful during the next steps of the accreditation process. Programs that choose to allow their accreditation to lapse are not penalized for doing so, but their accreditation expires after their current accreditation expiration date has passed.

What Do Programs Need to Do during Self-Assessment for NAEYC Accreditation?

The formal Self-Assessment process is used to document that the program's administration (program administrator and members of the governing body or ownership), teaching staff members, and families all believe that the program meets each of the 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and is ready for a site visit by the NAEYC Academy.

What Is the Difference between Self-Study and Self-Assessment?

The purpose of Self-Study is primarily program improvement. There is no one way to complete Self-Study, and the results need not be shared with the NAEYC Academy. In contrast, the Self-Assessment must follow the specific guidelines outlined in the Guide to Self-Assessment that is available at TORCH (see www.naeyc.org/selfstudy) to all enrolled programs. In addition, programs must be prepared to share their Self-Assessment findings with the NAEYC Academy and must be sure that all families, teaching staff members, and members of the program's governance structure have the opportunity to participate in the assessment process.

Through Self-Assessment, programs prepare documentation that demonstrates their belief that they meet each of the 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards. Documentation is based on specific sources of evidence for each criterion. Evidence includes the results of observable evidence as well as infor-

mation in Classroom Portfolios, the Program Portfolio, and summaries of the Family Survey and Teaching Staff Survey results. Evidence collected as part of Self-Study may be used as evidence in Self-Assessment as long as the evidence is not more than 12 months old as of the program's Candidacy due date and complies with the guidelines outlined in the Guide to Self-Assessment.

During Self-Assessment, the program staff will also need to spend time documenting how their program meets the Candidacy requirements. These requirements are discussed in detail in *Getting Started,* included in the NAEYC Self-Study Kit, and they include documentation of the qualifications of a designated program administrator and teaching staff members as well as evidence that the program maintains good standing with its licensing/regulatory body.

By systematically documenting evidence that they meet each of the 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and the Candidacy requirements, programs will be prepared to complete their Candidacy Materials at Step 3: Candidacy. The NAEYC Academy provides programs with Candidacy Materials approximately eight weeks before their Candidacy due date in their online program record; this Candidacy due date is selected by the program in its application at Step 2 of the accreditation process. The completed Candidacy Materials and applicable fees must be submitted to the NAEYC Academy by the program's Candidacy due

date. The Candidacy Materials request general program information needed to arrange the site visit and sample evidence from the program's completed Self-Assessment.

What Do Programs Need to Do during Self-Assessment?

This section includes additional notes and requirements about the sources of evidence specific to Self-Assessment and supplements the information in Section 4. Note that these guidelines are general. Programs must follow the specific requirements outlined in the Guide to Self-Assessment that is available to enrolled programs at TORCH at www.naeyc.org/selfstudy. Requirements may change over time, so it is important to verify that the program is using current information and following the current requirements in their Self-Assessment. Please refer to TORCH or contact the NAEYC Academy should you need further assistance.

Observable Criteria

Observation results for a specific classroom or group should be agreed upon by all members of the teaching team and the program administrator(s) as an accurate reflection of what typically happens in that classroom or group. New observations may be conducted specifically for Self-Assessment, or observations conducted for Self-Study may be used if they are agreed upon by the teaching team and the program administrator(s) and the results are not more than 12 months old at the Candidacy due date.

Guidelines for Preparing the Classroom Portfolio and Program Portfolio

Guidelines are available for preparing the Classroom Portfolio and the Program Portfolio to meet the requirements for Self-Assessment. Programs should ensure that their portfolios include evidence for each criterion for which the portfolio is a source of evidence (see the charts in Section 2 or refer to TORCH at www.naeyc.org/selfstudy). One

piece of evidence may be used to document more than one criterion. In such cases, multiple copies of the evidence do not need to be included in the portfolio; however, it is important to clearly label the evidence with any and all applicable criteria numbers. It is also helpful in these cases to have an index of the included criteria, referencing the location of the evidence.

Things to keep in mind:

■ Many of the criteria clearly articulate the specific evidence required, while other criteria comprise multiple indicators. Carefully review each criterion to be sure that the evidence in either the Classroom or Program Portfolio truly and fully supports its intent.

■ Each document or other evidence included within a Classroom or Program Portfolio must be clearly labeled with the number of the criterion that it supports. If your program is submitting a document that is several paragraphs or pages in length and only a portion is the actual evidence for that criterion, please highlight or flag that portion. Highlighting will assist Assessors in their review of the particular portfolio during the site visit.

■ Not all evidence needs to be copied and placed in the Classroom or Program Portfolio if it can be readily provided to the Assessor along with the portfolio. However, if evidence is provided along with a particular portfolio, then a "place holder" should be added to the portfolio in the appropriate section, listing the criterion number and a detailed explanation of where the evidence is located.

■ It is critical to refer to the full language of a criterion when selecting evidence to demonstrate that it is met.

■ Some of the activities presented in the Classroom or Program Portfolio will demonstrate evidence of multiple criteria.

This situation is an opportunity to provide the Assessor with examples of the richness of the classroom community over time. Evidence should be selected to provide an authentic reflection of children's classroom experience.

■ Most important, remember that Assessors will use the Classroom and Program Portfolios to determine whether or not criteria are met. Therefore, anything you can do to help Assessors efficiently locate needed evidence will make the site visit process an easier experience for both the program and the Assessor(s).

Instructions for Collecting Family and Teaching Staff Surveys

Perspectives of families and teaching staff members are important sources of evidence in the Self- Assessment, just as they were in Self-Study. The surveys are quantitative (Yes/No format) and do not provide the more open-ended options to give feedback for program improvement that is an option for programs during Self-Study.

Programs are responsible for making sure that all teaching staff members and all families served by the program are informed in advance of the survey and have the opportunity to provide anonymous responses to the survey. Programs are asked to document their compliance with the survey requirements as part of the summary forms. Your program will report findings from the summary forms as part of your Candidacy Materials.

Specific Instructions for Family Surveys. Family Surveys may be distributed at any point in the program's school year. For programs operating on a school-year calendar, results from the previous year's families may be used as long as the survey was completed within 12 months of the Candidacy due date. For the survey results to be considered valid, at least 50 percent of all families enrolled (at the time of the survey distribution) must have responded.

As part of their Candidacy Materials, programs must provide documentation of how they publicized the opportunity for families to respond to the survey and how they made sure that families could provide a confidential, anonymous response to the survey.

Specific Instructions for Teaching Staff Surveys. Guidelines for the distribution and reporting of the Teaching Staff Survey are similar to those for the Family Survey, with the following exception. At least 80 percent of all teaching staff members must have responded to the survey for the results to be considered valid.

Resources

This section on resources provides various documents and sources of information that will support your efforts to complete the Self-Study process. In it, you will find the following:

- Selected Publications and Web Sites, including TORCH (www.naeyc.org/selfstudy)

- Literature Review

- Bibliography

The Web sites will provide you with additional information and will lead you to other valuable resources. The literature review will give you a thorough background for the concepts, issues, and research that pertain to the area of teaching. The bibliography will enable you to access particular relevant work that has been done in this area.

Selected Publications and Web Sites

NAEYC offers a wide range of publications through its online catalog at www.naeyc.org. Here we highlight a few especially pertinent to the Assessment of Child Progress Standard. These are presented as resource information only, and are not required for the Self-Study process.

Developmental Screening in Early Childhood: A Guide, 5th edition, by Samuel J. Meisels & Sally Atkins-Burnett (NAEYC #121) Covers the basics of screening used to identify children who may have learning problems or disabilities.

Basics of Assessment: A Primer for Early Childhood Educators, by Oralie McAfee, Deborah J. Leong, & Elena Bodrova (NAEYC #257) Focusing on children's development and learning, this book provides an overview of assessment concepts, approaches, and challenges.

Basics of Developmentally Appropriate Practice: An Introduction for Teachers of Children 3 to 6, by Carol Copple & Sue Bredekamp (NAEYC #259) This introductory book explains core concepts and makes them meaningful to everyday practice. A 30-minute companion video (VHS #860 or DVD #861) is also available. For a comprehensive discussion, see the 2009 edition of ***Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8***, (NAEYC #375).

Web Sites

Programs enrolled in Self-Study should check TORCH (www.naeyc.org/selfstudy). TORCH includes resources for early childhood programs in all steps of the NAEYC Accreditation process. At TORCH you can

- 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 NAEYC Academy Information Center

In addition, you may find the following site of interest.

Children and Family Web Guide

describes Web sites on topics of interest to parents and professionals. Sites listed on the Web Guide have been systematically evaluated by graduate students and faculty in child development, and selected to give the public easy access to child development information on the Web. A section on testing is included under Education/Learning. www.cfw.tufts.edu/

Literature Review

This literature review was prepared by Brandt Chamberlain and Ellen Smith under the direction of Carollee Howes. Assessment can be defined as the planned and systematic collection and analysis of information that is used to make educational decisions (McLean, Bailey, & Wolery 1996). Four major purposes of assessment in early childhood education are to (1) support learning, (2) identify special needs, (3) evaluate programs and monitor trends, and (4) allow school accountability (Shepard, Kagan, & Wurtz 1998). Multiple validated sources of information from parents, teachers, and children are needed for the comprehensive assessment of children's interests and needs. These sources include criterion lists, running records, anecdotal notes, checklists, structured interviews with children and families, work product evaluation, portfolio collections of work, time sampling of behavior, and standardized assessments.

The key to appropriate assessment, whether formal or informal or whether using purchased or program-created materials, is that the assessment's intended use must match the valid uses for the assessment tool in a manner that (a) is sensitive to the culture, language, and identity of the child and family and (b) takes into account the context of the assessment. Comprehensive assessments are multidisciplinary. They involve children's families not only in the

reporting of results but also in assessment planning and implementation. In addition, they are used for designing classroom curriculum and for modifying it to meet individualized needs (Pretti-Frontczak, Kowalski, & Brown 2002). A multifaceted approach to assessment considers not only the child's individual skills and abilities but also the whole child within the larger ecological contexts of classroom, family, and community.

Published assessment tools must meet established standards of validity and reliability; however, standardized scores are meaningful for particular children only to the extent that the norms are drawn from samples that are reasonably similar in terms of age, culture, language, and socioeconomic status. The issue of appropriate comparison groups becomes especially complex when considering the assessment needs of children who are English-language learners or who have other special needs. Informal, unpublished, program-specific assessments also must be sensitive to children's backgrounds, assessing children across multiple domains and recognizing that no single assessment method can capture the wide array of children's abilities and learning styles.

The NAEYC position statement on curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation emphasizes that assessment must be ethical; must examine strengths and progress in addition to children's needs; and must use culturally appropriate, family-centered methods embedded in activities (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2003). Assessment is part of an overall trend in U.S. society toward greater accountability: programs that cannot show benefits for children will not be funded. However, if assessment methods are chosen poorly and thus represent a poor match with children's cultures or developmental levels, then children can be harmed not only by tests that underestimate or overestimate learning problems but also by the resulting inappropriate curriculum decisions. If assessment

methods are too narrow, the result can be a narrowing of curriculum and teaching, also known as "teaching to the test." Programs and teachers must use the right test for the purpose (validity), and the test must consistently measure what it purports to measure (reliability). In particular, screenings designed for use with a large population to identify individuals for more intensive assessment run a risk of being misused, either to exclude children from settings or to evaluate program effectiveness. Screenings should never be used for diagnostic purposes (Sandall, McLean, & Smith 2000; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2003).

Recommendations of the NAEYC position statement include the following: when using assessment to support teaching and learning and to identify special needs, caution must be used in interpreting standardized testing and screenings. More comprehensive follow-ups are generally needed. In addition, teachers must be trained in the use of assessment and must know how to incorporate families effectively in the process. Several indicators denote effective assessment, including a commitment to ethical use; the selection of high-quality instruments as indicated by established psychometric properties; the comprehensiveness of assessment targets as opposed to a focus on a narrow sets of skills; evidence of benefits for children; the use of multiple methods and time points; the couching of assessments in ordinary classroom activities; follow-ups on preliminary screenings; and a commitment to continued training of teachers, specialists, and families in the appropriate uses of assessment (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2003).

Similar elements of quality assessment are identified in Meisels's framework (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett 2000). Meisels identifies five elements of effective early childhood assessment: (1) appropriate selection of the target skills and abilities, (2) consideration of the context, (3) awareness of and respect for the limitations of assessment, (4) clarification of the roles of personnel, and (5) the "fusion" of

assessment and intervention. He also identifies 10 essential principles underlying ethical assessment in early childhood, along with samples of specific measures and practices, including the use of an integrated developmental perspective, the incorporation of multiple sources of information, and the recognition of the sequences of development. Meisels stresses the importance of basing assessment in the foundation of caregiver relationships and using typical timetables as the framework for interpreting differences in children's development, viewing children as involved in "continuous growth." Children's abilities to self-organize their emotional and cognitive experiences are especially key in establishing their availability for learning. Collaborative assessment, regularly revisited in classroom and family activities, is viewed as a first step in intervention if needed. Further concerns involve context: naturalistic assessment methods gain in social validity, but homogeneity across settings is reduced, limiting generalizability. Other factors affecting the validity of assessment findings include variations in children's motivation, similarities or differences between the child and the examiner, the examiner's own level of competence, and differences in either the child's comfort in the setting or the child's familiarity with the test or the person administering it. Any of these factors can affect the results positively or negatively (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett 2000).

Meisels also reviews psychometric properties that can affect the comparability between tests that appear similar. For example, tests may have different floors (lowest possible scores) or ceilings (highest possible scores) beyond which differences are flattened out. Tests may differ in the gradient of increasing difficulty between items or in the ages represented in the norms tables: when the ages of passing from one table to the next differs, then the comparison groups for two different tests may not themselves be comparable. Tests may also differ in their levels of reliability, the skills or content represented, the dates the tests were published, and the

characteristics of the norming samples used. All of these differences must be taken into account when interpreting the results of multiple assessment tools with a particular child. The use of normed tests is especially problematic with children who have special needs and whose performance on any particular scales or subscales may have no appropriate comparison among the norming samples; hence, standardized scores will have limited meaning for these children (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett 2000).

Fortunately, methods of "authentic assessment," embedded in the curriculum and documenting children's participation in daily activities, include features that are beneficial to the individualized assessment concerns of children with special needs. These methods integrate the evaluation of performance and behavior instead of addressing either in isolation; they focus on assessing the learning process in context rather than simply measuring content that has been learned. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), initially enacted in 1975 as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, was a major impetus behind the development of multiple assessments by multiple individuals. To be of value, early childhood assessment must have both consequential validity and treatment utility. Many concepts that were first developed for children with special needs, for example, individualizing assessment and adapting curriculum to meet the needs of individual children, are now incorporated into standard, developmentally appropriate early childhood practice (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett 2000).

The review *Eager to Learn* (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns 2000) identifies three major purposes for assessment in preschool settings: (1) instructional planning, (2) selection and diagnosis, and (3) policy decisions as well as program evaluation and accountability. Of these purposes, the third falls under NAEYC Standard 10: Leadership and Management; the first and second purposes fall under the purview of this Assessment Standard. Assessing children's competencies for instructional planning can include clinical interviews of the type pioneered by Piaget, though these are challenging to implement in the classroom, or Vygotskian-influenced assessments of children's capabilities with and without assistance, which establish the limits of the zone of proximal development. Naturalistic assessments are likely to give the most accurate picture of preschool children's actual abilities. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics advocates naturalistic assessment in mathematics, using informal interviews at the beginning and conclusion of each new topic. Listening to how children think prevents the errors that can occur when children give the right answer but use the wrong process (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns 2000).

A recent survey of 25 national Head Start leaders and 36 state-funded preschool programs found a discrepancy between aspects of assessment considered most important and actual practices nationwide. Specifically, the aspect considered most important was the link between assessment and the design of curriculum; however, only 56 percent of states reported systematic linkages between curriculum and assessment. Other highly regarded elements of assessment included weekly teacher meetings, annual or semiannual program self-evaluations, parental involvement, annual developmental screenings of children, and portfolios of student work. Opinion was divided concerning the value of anecdotal records and standardized tests, the latter of which were considered appropriate only for program accountability, not for individual assessment. Overall, considerable improvement in practice was noted since the mid-1970s, when only one state required developmentally appropriate informal assessment. As of 2001, 70 percent of the 36 state-funded prekindergarten programs did so. In the recent survey, 75 percent of the states reported using portfolios, checklists, and anecdotal reports. However, only eight of the state programs

require training in at least two informal assessment methods, and only nine reported routinely using parent involvement, weekly teacher meetings, or regular program self-evaluation (Horton & Bowman 2001).

Assessments focused at the child's level include screenings for school readiness, medical evaluations of biological vulnerabilities, and behavioral evaluations of children's communicative intentions. School readiness screenings have received extra attention in recent years, with the current focus on enhancing children's preparedness to enter kindergarten (and to enhance the schools' readiness for the children). A recent meta-analysis reviewed 70 longitudinal studies correlating prekindergarten, preacademic, and social-behavior skills to similar competencies in first and second grade (La Paro & Pianta 2000). The meta-analysis found moderate effect sizes for academic and cognitive indices but only small effect sizes for the social-behavioral index, indicating a small to moderate predictive ability of school-readiness markers.

Knowledge of biological markers, including signs of normal and abnormal functioning of the central nervous system, is also important in assessing young children's educational needs (Shonkoff & Marshall 2000). Children may be vulnerable to developmental delays or disabilities resulting from genetic chromosomal syndromes such as Down, Fragile X, and Prader-Willi; single-gene defects such as Tay-Sachs or PKU; mitochondrial defects; brain malformations such as spina bifida, hydrocephalus, or microcephaly; central nervous system infections or toxic insults such as congenital rubella or fetal alcohol syndrome; malnutrition; or prenatal brain injuries. Treatment and early intervention for children with these and similar conditions require the interdisciplinary efforts of medical, therapeutic, and early childhood special education professionals (Sandall, McLean, & Smith 2000; Shonkoff & Marshall 2000).

Behavioral assessments are also essential, especially for children with certain identified disabilities that have strong behavioral components, for example, autism or emotional-behavioral disorders (Wolery 1999). Current behavioral practice bears little resemblance to the historical model, which focused narrowly on contingent reinforcement and punishment of desired and undesired responses. However, the underlying principles of stimulus and response are in effect regardless of whether they are recognized or consciously implemented. Behavioral approaches include the differential reinforcement of other behaviors, alternative behaviors, and incompatible behaviors (whereby more desirable behaviors are consistently rewarded and more problematic behaviors decrease or end because they are not reinforced). Assessment procedures include identifying both desirable and undesirable behaviors and contingent reinforcers for each; these reinforcers are used to develop the behavioral plan.

More recent behavioral techniques extend into analyzing the motivations for behavior, in particular, viewing behaviors as expressions of communicative intent. Under this approach, assessment also includes determining what children are attempting to communicate and identifying acceptable methods to achieve the intended communication in reinforceable ways. Assessment is needed to determine the features of non-aversive approaches, including skill building, choice making, functional communication training, and "behavioral momentum" in which desirable responses are shaped through repeated practice. Assessing phases in the learning of new behaviors, from acquisition and fluency to maintenance and generalization, is needed for the development of appropriate interventions at each phase. Techniques such as milieu language teaching and peer-mediated structured play use stimulus control (the presentation of target stimuli with contingent positive reinforcement) to help young children develop skills in relatively naturalistic social situations with teachers and peers (Wolery 1999).

Combining these types of child-focused behavioral assessments with classroom-based assessments (which are described in the next section), the ecological congruence model involves identifying settings, listing critical tasks, assessing the child's competence at the tasks, and assessing the child's motivational variables and tolerance of the environment. Simultaneously, this model calls for determining the environment's tolerance of the child's behaviors and identifying objectives for increasing the ecological congruence between the child's behaviors and the environment's tolerance of these behaviors. The key here is that the problem is seen as residing not within the child but, rather, in the fit between the child and the environment. These two simultaneous assessments, of the child and the environment, are used to identify strategies to accomplish needed changes and assess the effectiveness of the interventions. Similarly, Dunst and Trivette (cited in Wolery 1999) propose a resource-based approach to early intervention, assessing both sources of support and needs. Early intervention is seen as the providing of support to families from formal and informal support networks, which has an effect on the functioning of the child, parent (or parents), and family.

The assessment process required to set early intervention goals using ecobehavioral analysis involves establishing what changes in environment and behavior are needed and how to accomplish them (Barnett et al. 1997). Using "planned activities" as the unit of analysis, this assessment method involves sampling across multiple points in time a variety of teacher-planned activities in which problems have arisen and then documenting the behaviors during and between activities. Because the ecology is seen as having reciprocal effects on problem situations and educator behaviors, the child is not the unit of analysis. Parents' and children's plans as well as teachers' plans, "natural" plans, and constructed plans should all be considered in assessment and intervention. In the "PASSKey" assessment method, planned activities (PA) are strategically sampled (SS) with special attention given to a "keystone variable" that is expected to have the most significant desirable consequences. In some situations, a teacher-created hostile environment may contribute to a child's problem behaviors, for instance, using "time out" procedures without teaching functional alternatives. In these cases, "environmental enrichment" can be an effective intervention strategy (Barnett et al. 1997).

Other approaches to assessment also focus on the child's functioning in the classroom environment. McConnell (2000) notes three themes for early childhood special education assessment: (1) the individual and group assessment of growth, (2) the ecobehavioral assessment of environmental conditions in relation to children's performance, and (3) assessment linked to intervention and curriculum. The Creative Curriculum model (Dodge, Colker, & Heroman 2001) monitors the child's rate of change and also considers classroom and family factors. Similarly, the Work Sampling System (WSS) (Meisels et al. 1996) is distinguished by its focus on children's performance within the classroom and the extent to which it is embedded in the ongoing curriculum. WSS documents children's skills and accomplishments across multiple occasions and domains over time. Assessment components include developmental guidelines and checklists, portfolios, and summary reports. A reliability and validity study with 100 kindergarten children assessed in fall and spring with both WSS and norm-referenced testing found very high internal reliability for the WSS and moderately high interrater reliability. The system predicted norm-referenced outcomes, controlling for gender, age, and initial ability. By using children's actual accomplishments rather than their test-taking skills, WSS identifies both strengths and weaknesses and uses teachers' perceptions while structuring and expanding them (Meisels et al. 1996).

Classroom-based assessments, including WSS, the Primary Language Record, and the Concepts About Print Test, provide a useful alternative to standardized testing, which does little to address the constructivist viewpoint on learning (Salinger 2002). Standardized tests are more useful for program improvement, accountability, and the monitoring of societal trends. For children under age five especially, observation should be the primary mode of assessment. Although classroom-based assessments represent a wider range of behaviors and time points, there is some question about whether these data are collected with sufficient rigor and reliability to be useful when aggregated across schools, districts, or regions. The challenge is to develop assessment techniques that are based in classroom observation and children's actual accomplishments yet involve reliable and valid measures suitable for "external" reporting as well as "internal" use within the classroom. One solution is the K–2 Reading Writing Scale, a developmental checklist with constructs such as "early emergent," "advanced beginning," and "early independent reader." Checklists such as these depend on teachers' understanding of the constructs and can be biased by teachers' desire for their students to do well. However, if construct validity is established, then teachers' repeated use of checklists such as these can provide information for their scaffolding efforts while also providing a common language for communicating with other educators and parents (Salinger 2002).

Differing views of school readiness can have a strong influence on the choice of assessment tools and the resulting interpretations (Johnston & Rogers 2002). Historically, the readiness viewpoint has been misused to screen children out of school if they were considered to lack the requisite "mental age" to start learning to read. This viewpoint is based in the belief that literacy learning cannot begin before certain cognitive milestones are reached.

These kinds of ideas are based in Piagetian-style stage theories where "development precedes learning"; for instance, phonemic awareness may be considered necessary before "reading" is thought to be possible. A contrasting viewpoint is the Vygotskian notion that "learning leads development." In this view, children are socialized into literacy through exposure to materials that they "appropriate" to their own use in mediated interactions with more knowledgeable others. Formal assessment procedures tend to follow the Piagetian-style approach, assuming no relationship between the assessor and the child. Informal assessment procedures, in contrast, tend to be preferred by early literacy researchers because they are based in the teacher-child relationship, which is seen as the source of literacy learning. Validity and reliability have different meanings in this type of less formal, "documentary" assessment. For instance, instead of attempting to eliminate "error" as in traditional reliability procedures, documentary assessment is interested in identifying unexpected performances for the information they contain about hidden or emerging abilities (Johnston & Rogers 2002).

Although sharing assessment results with families is the expected practice in developing and adapting curriculum to meet children's individual needs, some assessment approaches go one step further and explicitly include families and communities as subjects of the assessment itself. For example, the Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System for Infants and Children includes evaluation tools for families as well as children and also suggests links between assessment and curriculum objectives in the form of specific IEP and IFSP goals that correspond to assessment items (Bricker 1993; Bricker & Pretti-Frontczak 1996). These kinds of direct linkages can be used to support hand-in-glove coordination of assessment and curriculum. Among family characteristics to be assessed are parent-child interaction, family needs and priorities, family functioning, and social

support (Krauss 2000). Specific measures such as the Parent-Child Early Relational Assessment and the Parent-Child Interaction Scales, assess parent and child characteristics both individually and jointly, including levels of reciprocity and affect in dyadic interactions (Kelly & Barnard 2000). Respect for the family's values is essential for developing an effective parent-professional relationship.

Finally, to incorporate contextual models explaining children in families within communities, assessment at the macrolevel can include identifying characteristics of the larger communities in which families are found (Earls & Buka 2000). One of the first concerns is to define the unit of measurement: what is considered "the neighborhood"? Levels can include the "face block," defined as a "single street of facing dwellings"; the block group, consisting of two or three face-blocks; neighborhoods, consisting of clusters of block groups; local communities; and larger economic and political systems such as counties and health districts. Within an identified level of community, it is important to obtain representative samples of ethnicity and socioeconomic status. The appropriate level of community may vary depending on the age of the children under study; for instance, infants, being less mobile, may be defined primarily in terms of a face-block level of community whereas adolescents' identities may be more closely related with subcommunities such as those defined by gang membership. The use of out-of-home care certainly would influence the definition of community for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Data may include federal and local records, observations of neighborhoods, interviews with residents and providers, and ethnographic data about communities. Questions to be asked can include indices of trust and exchange such as how often neighbors trade favors or visit each other, the extent to which neighbors watch out for trouble, who can be trusted, what after-school programs are available, and other similar indicators of community commitment and involvement (Earls & Buka 2000).

Assessment procedures must be valid, reliable, and sensitive to the cultural, linguistic, and family values of the children being assessed. Numerous alternatives to standardized testing have been developed to assess many aspects of young children's experiences and accomplishments. Each of these alternatives carries with it implicit and explicit assumptions concerning what is to be assessed and what implications and interpretations are likely to result from the assessment. Ethical assessment is tied to the development and individualization of plans for enhancing children's learning, and it uses the participation and involvement of the family, both in gathering evidence and in discussing the implications of the evidence once it has been collected. Assessment is the point in the process where reflection meets action. Action in the absence of data and reflection on the meaning of the data is directionless, ineffective, and harmful to children. Only when guided by developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive assessment, with families involved, can the early childhood curriculum offer children the benefits intended.

The topic of assessment during the early childhood years has been conceptualized in different ways over time. In current times, assessment is often considered a means of program accountability, particularly in the elementary years and beyond. This notion of accountability has made a downward spiral to a certain extent, influencing policymakers, parents, and early childhood educators alike (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett 2000; Santos 2004). For the present purposes, however, assessment is not construed as a measure of program success; rather, assessment is used as one of many tools to enhance children's learning and development (Bredekamp & Rosegrant 1995; Shephard, Kagan, & Wurtz 1998; Meisels & Atkins-Barnett 2000;

Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp 2000; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2003; McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova 2004; NAEYC 2005).

Assessment serves as a valuable tool for all participants in early childhood programs (Wagner 2003). Children, teaching staff, and parents benefit from detailed analysis of children's learning styles, strengths, and weaknesses. Children can be assessed on many aspects of development and skill, depending on the particular purpose of the assessment and the aspect of curriculum being analyzed. Many of the references cited throughout the text, especially those related to specific aspects of curriculum (movement, art, math, etc.), address the topic of assessment. It is considered an essential and ongoing part of quality programming in that the continual analysis of children's behavior and performance in a range of domains enhances children's learning and development.

The conducting of assessments for each child in a classroom requires keen observation and thorough documentation by teachers over time and from a variety of sources. Because it is not possible to represent all behavior and performance, teachers rely on the careful sampling of behavior and documentation over time as a basis for judgments. This analysis facilitates teachers' understanding not only of individual children but also of the success of the teaching practices they implement as well as the activities and materials they provide.

In terms of NAEYC Accreditation, assessment serves a twofold purpose:

- Identification of children in need of special services, identification of learning disabilities, and other issues that may require outside intervention

- Guidance for teachers in the development of curriculum and activities to support learning goals for each child

NAEYC does not endorse specific assessment protocols, nor does it endorse use of published materials. Programs may choose to use entire assessment tools, use portions of published tools, or devise their own assessment devices. Programs are encouraged to develop assessment strategies that reflect their mission, values, and learning goals for children. In addition, the criteria within the Assessment Standard reflect the belief that assessment is a valid, useful, and essential tool for early childhood programs to integrate into their practices (McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova 2004; NAEYC 2005).

Several definitions of assessment have been offered in the literature (Shephard, Kagan, & Wurtz 1998; Meisels 2001; McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova 2004; Hyson, Copple, & Jones 2006). These definitions all share common themes:

- Assessment is the process of obtaining information for the purpose of maximizing children's development and learning.

- Assessment relies on several forms of evidence collected over time.

- The conduct and evaluation of assessment requires well-trained staff.

- Assessment information benefits children, teachers, and families.

Assessment can be defined as the planned and systematic collection and analysis of information used to make educational decisions (McLean, Bailey, & Wolery 1996). Meisels (2001) defines assessment as "the process of obtaining information for the purpose of making evaluative decisions. Assessment can be a positive educational process—one that has potential to enhance teaching and learning, and that corresponds to the values we live by."

The actual tools for making assessments and goals for assessment may vary. For example, assessment for the purpose of determining children's interests and needs differs from assessment for determining school readiness. The means by which information is gathered and the nature of the information will differ based on the objective of the assessment.

Topic Area A: Creating an Assessment Plan

Most programs engage in informal assessment on a regular basis. Teachers gain a sense of every child's individual learning style, developmental needs, and progress by interacting with and observing them. Informal assessment, though important and valuable, may lack definition, structure, and clarity. The creation of an assessment plan brings intentionality and form to teacher's assessments.

Development of a written assessment plan serves several functions for programs. First and foremost, the creation of an assessment plan provides a framework for teacher's efforts to evaluate children's learning and development. A list of behaviors and learning objectives helps teachers focus their attention on relevant behaviors in the midst of a complex and demanding day. Assessment is only one component, albeit an important one, of the teacher's job. Identification of behaviors across a variety of domains will guide teachers in the evaluation and assessment process. Written assessment plans reflect program goals and values. The development of a written assessment plan encourages program administrators and teachers to reflect on program goals and values as they decide on the content, procedures, and approach to assessment. The written plan may also help teachers integrate their assessment work into their daily schedule (see the *Assessment Tools* book for a more elaborated discussion of these issues).

The criteria within this topic area provide guidelines for the content and purposes of assessment of all young children in programs pursuing NAEYC Accreditation. Programs are encouraged to refer to the joint position statement on curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation developed by NAEYC and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) for additional support (2003). In addition, NAEYC (2005) has revised their statement to more accurately address the needs of English-language learners as they relate to assessment in early childhood environments.

The criteria provide an outline or framework for the contents of a written curriculum plan. The plan addresses not only the content, purposes, and uses of assessment but also additional related considerations. For example, the plan includes the need for staff training in the area of assessment; identification of the conditions under which children will be assessed; and the need for collaboration with families, both with respect to planning and implementing assessments as well as effective communication strategies for conveying findings. These issues are consistent with program goals and values, serving to support staff, families, and children.

Comprehensive assessment plans include consideration of factors on various levels to successfully integrate assessment into early childhood programs and practice as well as to maximize its potential for contributing to children's development.

Topic Area B: Using Appropriate Assessment Procedures

Using appropriate assessment procedures is a fundamental component in the success and value of an overall assessment strategy (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett 2000; NAEYC 2005). This topic area addresses the of appropriateness of assessment procedures in providing a framework for determining what procedures will best measure children's learning and progress.

A variety of considerations factor into the methods deemed most appropriate for assessment. Age, language, and disability are of primary importance in making assessment decisions. Appropriate assessment procedures will often vary based on the age of the children being evaluated. Infants and toddlers are typically preverbal; therefore, observation is most often used as an assessment technique (McAfee & Leong 2002; Dichtelmiller & Ensler 2004)

Sensitivity to and awareness of children's cultural and linguistic background enhance the utility and validity of assessment procedures. As Shephard, Kagan, and Wurtz (1998) note, "Regardless of whether an assessment is intended to measure early reading skills, knowledge of color names, or learning potential, assessment results are easily confounded by language proficiency, especially for children who come from home backgrounds with limited exposure to English, for whom the assessment would essentially be an assessment of their English proficiency" (6).

NAEYC (2005) recently issued a supplement to its earlier position statement that addresses issues related to early childhood curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2003). This supplement highlights the need to consider factors that affect the validity and methods of screening and assessment for young English-language learners. It builds on the principles delineated in the earlier position statement but expands on the need for cultural and linguistic sensitivity. Inappropriate or misinterpreted assessment findings can compromise children's development and lead to unnecessary referrals for special services (NAEYC 2005).

Appropriate assessment procedures will also vary based on the type of behavior, skill, or area of development being evaluated. Evaluation of children for special services more commonly uses screening instruments (Meisels 2000) whereas assessment for purposes of determining children's interest and needs more likely incorporates observational and conversational data.

Topic Area C: Identifying Children's Interests and Needs and Describing Children's Progress

The identification of children's interests and needs in a timely fashion benefits children and teachers. The use of screening instruments can identify the need for special services or areas of development that may require extra effort or attention to promote progress (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett 2000). In-depth screening within the first few months of children's participation in a program provides structure and content for teachers to evaluate a child's strengths, weaknesses, and learning style. Obtaining developmental information about children can translate into providing services, which can contribute to children's development.

NAEYC does not endorse specific screening instruments; however, they do provide points for programs to consider as they determine the most appropriate screening instrument for their purposes. Many screening instruments available on the market today can be successfully incorporated into overall assessment strategies. Screening instruments should be evaluated by informed, educated staff members who understand the "language" and implications of these instruments. The ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the instrument and interpret results also requires training.

In terms of choosing appropriate instruments, programs are encouraged to choose those instruments that meet professional standards for standardization, reliability, and validity; that have normative scores available on a population relevant for the child being screened; and that reflect multiple domains of children's development.

This topic area includes one universal criterion that addresses the issue of developmental screening. The criterion identifies desired time frames and guidelines for choosing screening instruments. One of the primary objectives of assessment in early childhood programs is to use the information obtained to describe children's developmental progress. Developmental progress refers to progress and skill development across the domains of development that are emphasized in the program's curriculum. Attention to and documentation of children's social-emotional, physical, and cognitive

development paints a multifaceted portrait of children's progress at a given point in time. Assessment also provides valuable information to families about children's development, both in terms of reassurance and identification of areas of concern (Meisels 2001; Dichtelmiller & Ensler 2004).

Assessment in and of itself reflects behavior and performance at a given point in time. It does not and cannot reflect or evaluate every aspect of children's behavior; it is a representative sampling of children's behavior and progress. Accurately and comprehensively depicting children's developmental progress requires a variety of assessment strategies and techniques.

Description of children's developmental progress may vary as a function of children's age. Because younger, pre-verbal children cannot verbally articulate concepts, observation is often the most appropriate means of assessing the progress of very young children (Meisels et al. 2003; Dichtelmiller & Ensler 2004).

One research study assessed planned and actual use of assessment techniques among early childhood practitioners and early childhood students. Brown and Rolfe (2005) found notable differences in plans and usage depending on whether the respondents were practitioners or students. Practitioners emphasized providing a comprehensive portrait of children's development whereas students emphasized identification of children who were at risk as their primary concern. These differences in actual and intended use have implications for training and practice. It seems that teachers in the field, who already engage in assessment, stress the importance of assessment as providing a framework for interpreting children's behavior and promoting their development. Students, who have limited field experience, show more of a tendency to focus on the identification of problems.

Topic Area D: Adapting Curriculum, Individualizing Teaching, and Informing Program Development

One of the many benefits of assessment is that it provides critical, ongoing information that furthers the educational objectives of high-quality early childhood programs. Teachers and children alike benefit from analysis of children's learning as well as the analysis of teaching practices, activities, and materials. Teachers who reflect on their own behavior within the classroom, in terms of interactions with individual children and on a more general level, can modify their practices to better support children's development (Jones & Nimmo 1994; Tertell, Klein, & Jewett 1998; Jalongo & Isenberg 2004).

As Dichtelmiller and Ensler (2004) note, "A major reason for regularly assessing infants and toddlers is to translate the assessment information into individualized plans for children. Uncovering infants' strengths and areas of difficulty allows the caregiver to tailor interactions, routines, materials and activities to each child's individual needs and interests" (18). The latter analysis is equally relevant to older children.

Topic Area E: Communicating with Families and Involving Families in the Assessment Process

Communicating with families and including families in the assessment process is an essential component of a comprehensive, effective assessment plan. Communication with families is important because parents have a vested interest in their child's progress and learning; provide a unique perspective on the child; and as partners in children's education, can work with programs to reinforce and support children's learning and development (Greenman 1998; Sanders 2002). In addition, because families know children as they behave and learn in a variety of contexts, parents can offer invaluable insight and information, supporting teachers' efforts within the early educational program. For example, parents might

express concern about a particular area of their child's development, alerting teachers to a potential problem and promoting dialogue about an issue. A parent might express concern about children's peer interactions or language development. The teacher can focus his or her observations on those areas of development and communicate the findings to the parent. Observations may provide reassurance that the child seems to be developing typically, or they can lead to further evaluation or intervention services.

Policies and procedures developed by programs can promote successful and meaningful dialogue with parents with respect to assessment. Sharing information and knowledge about the tools of assessment as well as the uses of assessment and providing that information in a language parents can understand bolsters their involvement in the process. A teacher's skill in communicating the intentions and results of assessment can further contribute to the response, to the assessment's value, and to the outcome of assessment data. For example, emphasis on children's uniqueness and strengths or in other ways accentuating positive information can affect parents' responsiveness to the information (Dodge et al. 2004).

Edmiaston (2002) notes the complexities of sharing assessment information in the context of constructivist early childhood learning environments. She pointed to the efficacy of including children in the process of presenting assessment findings to parents. She describes how one kindergarten classroom chose to invite parents to class to demonstrate what they learned after a six-week study of shadows. The demonstration provided parents with firsthand knowledge of what their children had learned, which might otherwise have been difficult to explain. Communication with families and involving families in the assessment process is yet another way in which programs affirm the importance and value of parents as partners in children's education (Shephard, Kagan, & Wurtz 1998; Meisels 2001).

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Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation

Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children Birth through Age 8

A Joint Position Statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE).

Introduction

High-quality early education produces long-lasting benefits. With this evidence, federal, state, and local decision makers are asking critical questions about young children's education. What should children be taught in the years from birth through age eight? How would we know if they are developing well and learning what we want them to learn? And how could we decide whether programs for children from infancy through the primary grades are doing a good job?

Answers to these questions—questions about *early childhood curriculum, child assessment, and program evaluation*—are the foundation of this joint position statement from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE).

The Position

The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education take the position that policy makers, the early childhood profession, and other stakeholders in young children's lives have a shared responsibility to

■ construct comprehensive systems of curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation guided by sound early childhood practices, effective early learning standards and program standards, and a set of core principles and values: belief in civic and democratic values; commitment to ethical behavior on behalf of children; use of important goals as guides to action; coordinated systems; support for children as individuals and members of families, cultures, and communities; partnerships with families; respect for evidence; and shared accountability.

■ implement curriculum that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, comprehensive, and likely to promote positive outcomes for all young children.

■ make ethical, appropriate, valid, and reliable assessment a central part of all early childhood programs. To assess young children's strengths, progress, and needs, use assessment methods that are developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children's daily activities, supported by professional development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes: (1) making sound decisions about teaching and learning, (2) identifying significant concerns that may require focused

intervention for individual children, and (3) helping programs improve their educational and developmental interventions.

■ regularly engage in program evaluation guided by program goals and using varied, appropriate, conceptually and technically sound evidence to determine the extent to which programs meet the expected standards of quality and to examine intended as well as unintended results.

■ provide the support, professional development, and other resources to allow staff in early childhood programs to implement high-quality curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation practices and to connect those practices with well-defined early learning standards and program standards.

Recommendations

Curriculum

Implement curriculum that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, comprehensive, and likely to promote positive outcomes for all young children.

Indicators of Effectiveness

■ *Children are active and engaged.*
Children from babyhood through primary grades—and beyond—need to be cognitively, physically, socially, and artistically active. In their own ways, children of all ages and abilities can become interested and engaged, develop positive attitudes toward learning, and have their feelings of security, emotional competence, and linkages to family and community supported.

■ *Goals are clear and shared by all.*
Curriculum goals are clearly defined, shared, and understood by all "stakeholders" (for example, program administrators, teachers, and families). The curriculum and related activities and teaching strategies are designed to help achieve these goals in a unified, coherent way.

■ *Curriculum is evidence-based.*
The curriculum is based on evidence that is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically relevant for the children who will experience the curriculum. It is organized around principles of child development and learning.

■ *Valued content is learned through investigation, play, and focused, intentional teaching.*
Children learn by exploring, thinking about, and inquiring about all sorts of phenomena. These experiences help children investigate "big ideas," those that are important at any age and are connected to later learning. Pedagogy or teaching strategies are tailored to children's ages, developmental capacities, language and culture, and abilities or disabilities.

■ *Curriculum builds on prior learning and experiences.*
The content and implementation of the curriculum builds on children's prior individual, age-related, and cultural learning, is inclusive of children with disabilities, and is supportive of background knowledge gained at home and in the community. The curriculum supports children whose home language is not English in building a solid base for later learning.

■ *Curriculum is comprehensive.*
The curriculum encompasses critical areas of development including children's physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development; and cognition and general knowledge; and subject matter areas such as science, mathematics, language, literacy, social studies, and the arts (more fully and explicitly for older children).

■ *Professional standards validate the curriculum's subject-matter content.*
When subject-specific curricula are adopted, they meet the standards of relevant professional organizations (for example, the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance [AAHPERD], the National Association for Music Education

[MENC]; the National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE]; the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics [NCTM]; the National Dance Education Organization [NDEO]; the National Science Teachers Association [NSTA]) and are reviewed and implemented so that they fit together coherently.

■ *The curriculum is likely to benefit children.*
Research and other evidence indicates that the curriculum, if implemented as intended, will likely have beneficial effects. These benefits include a wide range of outcomes. When evidence is not yet available, plans are developed to obtain this evidence.

Assessment of Young Children

Make ethical, appropriate, valid, and reliable assessment a central part of all early childhood programs. To assess young children's strengths, progress, and needs, use assessment methods that are developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children's daily activities, supported by professional development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes:

(1) making sound decisions about teaching and learning, (2) identifying significant concerns that may require focused intervention for individual children, and (3) helping programs improve their educational and developmental interventions.

Indicators of Effectiveness

■ *Ethical principles guide assessment practices.*
Ethical principles underlie all assessment practices. Young children are not denied opportunities or services, and decisions are not made about children on the basis of a single assessment.

■ *Assessment instruments are used for their intended purposes.*
Assessments are used in ways consistent with the purposes for which they were designed. If the assessments will be used for additional purposes, they are validated for those purposes.

■ *Assessments are appropriate for ages and other characteristics of children being assessed.*
Assessments are designed for and validated for use with children whose ages, cultures, home languages, socioeconomic status, abilities and disabilities, and other characteristics are similar to those of the children with whom the assessments will be used.

■ *Assessment instruments are in compliance with professional criteria for quality.*
Assessments are valid and reliable. Accepted professional standards of quality are the basis for selection, use, and interpretation of assessment instruments, including screening tools. NAEYC and NAECS/SDE support and adhere to the measurement standards set forth in 1999 by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Center for Measurement in Education. When individual norm-referenced tests are used, they meet these guidelines.

■ *What is assessed is developmentally and educationally significant.*
The objects of assessment include a comprehensive, developmentally, and educationally important set of goals, rather than a narrow set of skills. Assessments are aligned with early learning standards, with program goals, and with specific emphases in the curriculum.

■ *Assessment evidence is used to understand and improve learning.*
Assessments lead to improved knowledge about children. This knowledge is translated into improved curriculum implementation and teaching practices. Assessment helps early childhood professionals understand the learning of a specific child or group of children; enhance overall knowledge of child development; improve educational programs for young children while supporting continuity across grades and settings; and access resources and supports for children with specific needs.

■ *Assessment evidence is gathered from realistic settings and situations that reflect children's actual performance.*

To influence teaching strategies or to identify children in need of further evaluation, the evidence used to assess young children's characteristics and progress is derived from real-world classroom or family contexts that are consistent with children's culture, language, and experiences.

■ *Assessments use multiple sources of evidence gathered over time.*

The assessment system emphasizes repeated, systematic observation, documentation, and other forms of criterion- or performance-oriented assessment using broad, varied, and complementary methods with accommodations for children with disabilities.

■ *Screening is always linked to follow-up.*

When a screening or other assessment identifies concerns, appropriate follow-up, referral, or other intervention is used. Diagnosis or labeling is never the result of a brief screening or one-time assessment.

■ *Use of individually administered, norm-referenced tests is limited.*

The use of formal standardized testing and norm-referenced assessments of young children is limited to situations in which such measures are appropriate and potentially beneficial, such as identifying potential disabilities. (See also the indicator concerning the use of individual norm-referenced tests as part of program evaluation and accountability.)

■ *Staff and families are knowledgeable about assessment.*

Staff are given resources that support their knowledge and skills about early childhood assessment and their ability to assess children in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways. Preservice and inservice training builds teachers' and administrators' "assessment literacy," creating a community that sees assessment as a tool to improve outcomes for children. Families are part of this community, with regular communication, partnership, and involvement.

Program Evaluation and Accountability

Regularly evaluate early childhood programs in light of program goals, using varied, appropriate, conceptually and technically sound evidence to determine the extent to which programs meet the expected standards of quality and to examine intended as well as unintended results.

Indicators of Effectiveness

■ *Evaluation is used for continuous improvement.*

Programs undertake regular evaluation, including self-evaluation, to document the extent to which they are achieving desired results, with the goal of engaging in continuous improvement. Evaluations focus on processes and implementation as well as outcomes.

Over time, evidence is gathered that program evaluations do influence specific improvements.

■ *Goals become guides for evaluation.*

Evaluation designs and measures are guided by goals identified by the program, by families and other stakeholders, and by the developers of a program or curriculum, while also allowing the evaluation to reveal unintended consequences.

■ *Comprehensive goals are used.*

The program goals used to guide the evaluation are comprehensive, including goals related to families, teachers and other staff, and community as well as child-oriented goals that address a broad set of developmental and learning outcomes.

■ *Evaluations use valid designs.*

Programs are evaluated using scientifically valid designs, guided by a "logic model" that describes ways in which the program sees its interventions having both medium- and longer-term effects on children and, in some cases, families and communities.

■ *Multiple sources of data are available.*

An effective evaluation system should include multiple measures, including program data, child demographic data, information about staff qualifications, administrative

practices, classroom quality assessments, implementation data, and other information that provides a context for interpreting the results of child assessments.

■ *Sampling is used when assessing individual children as part of large-scale program evaluation.*
When individually administered, norm-referenced tests of children's progress are used as part of program evaluation and accountability, matrix sampling is used (that is, administered only to a systematic sample of children) so as to diminish the burden of testing on children and to reduce the likelihood that data will be inappropriately used to make judgments about individual children.

■ *Safeguards are in place if standardized tests are used as part of evaluations.*
When individually administered, norm-referenced tests are used as part of program evaluation, they must be developmentally and culturally appropriate for the particular children in the program, conducted in the language children are most comfortable with, with other accommodations as appropriate, valid in terms of the curriculum, and technically sound (including reliability and validity). Quality checks on data are conducted regularly, and the system includes multiple data sources collected over time.

■ *Children's gains over time are emphasized.*
When child assessments are used as part of program evaluation, the primary focus is on children's gains or progress as documented in observations, samples of classroom work, and other assessments over the duration of the program. The focus is not just on children's scores upon exit from the program.

■ *Well-trained individuals conduct evaluations.*
Program evaluations, at whatever level or scope, are conducted by well-trained individuals who are able to evaluate programs in fair and unbiased ways. Self-assessment processes used as part of comprehensive program evaluation follow a valid model. Assessor training goes beyond single workshops and includes ongoing quality checks. Data are analyzed systemati-

cally and can be quantified or aggregated to provide evidence of the extent to which the program is meeting its goals.

■ *Evaluation results are publicly shared.*
Families, policy makers, and other stakeholders have the right to know the results of program evaluations. Data from program monitoring and evaluation, aggregated appropriately and based on reliable measures, should be made available and accessible to the public.

Creating Change through Support for Programs

Implementing the preceding recommendations for curriculum, child assessment, and program evaluation requires a solid foundation. Calls for better results and greater accountability from programs for children in preschool, kindergarten, and the primary grades have not been backed up by essential supports for teacher recruitment and compensation, professional preparation and ongoing professional development, and other ingredients of quality early education.

The overarching need is to create an integrated, well-financed system of early care and education that has the capacity to support learning and development in all children, including children living in poverty, children whose home language is not English, and children with disabilities. Unlike many other countries, the United States continues to have a fragmented system for educating children from birth through age eight, under multiple auspices, with greatly varying levels of support, and with inadequate communication and collaboration.

Many challenges face efforts to provide all young children with high-quality curriculum, assessment, and evaluation of their programs. Public commitment, along with investments in a well-financed system of early childhood education and in other components of services for young children and their families, will make it possible to implement these recommendations fully and effectively.