

Kindergarten

The assessment process plays a key role in helping children, many of whom are attending an education program for the first time, get off to a good start in kindergarten. Through anecdotal observations as well as informal and formal assessment tools, teachers get to know children, incorporate input from families, and plan an engaging curriculum.

Examples of Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Examples of Practices to Avoid

Support transition to kindergarten

- Educators conduct required kindergarten entry assessments in a way that is familiar to children and supportive of families as much as possible.
- Focusing on how children perform on one-time, formal readiness or achievement assessments and denying age-eligible children entry or requesting families hold their children back from of kindergarten as a result of reliance on such tools

Support transition to kindergarten (cont.)

- Educators collect information from children's family members through both informal assessment tools (such as checklists or questionnaires) and informal conversations to gain insight into children's capabilities as well as their previous learning experiences (such as whether the child attended a pre-K program). They look for clues about what children have had the opportunity to learn and what educational experiences they have had.
- Educators receive and use assessment information and other documentation from settings where children were enrolled prior to kindergarten whenever possible.
- Using unfamiliar assessment tasks administered in unfamiliar settings to make judgments about children's readiness for kindergarten and/or placements
- Discounting information from families that would help teachers understand the child's development and previous learning experiences
- Overlooking assessment information and other documentation from children's prior learning programs/settings

Purposeful and strategic

- Educators use a balanced approach to assessment to provide a more complete picture of children's capabilities. They rely on anecdotal observations and informal assessment methods more than formal scripted assessment tasks and computer-based assessment tools and use authentic assessment methods such as anecdotal notes from observations and conversations, work samples, and teacher-made informal assessment tools (e.g., checklists to record children's knowledge of basic kindergarten concepts).
- Using formal scripted assessment tasks, written tests, and/or computer-based assessment methods as the main source of information, without investigating what children know through informal assessment methods

Inclusive of families

- Educators involve families in the assessment process at kindergarten entry and throughout the year. They collect family members' observations and discuss their priorities for their child's learning goals.
- Educators schedule conferences, send notes home to families, and share children's work across the year. They ask family members what they think about their children's learning and solicit input for learning goals.
- Administering kindergarten entry assessment tools without collecting input or observations from children's family members
- Not sharing assessment results with families; not asking them for input as part of the assessment process over the course of the year

Kindergarten (cont.)

Examples of Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Examples of Practices to Avoid

Responsive to individual children

- Educators use assessment tools that target skills ranging from the preschool through first grade age range to capture the full range of kindergarten children's learning and development.
 - Educators set up informal assessment activities to assess children when they are collaborating with peers and adults to see what children can do with support from others.
- Using assessment tools that target a narrow age range (i.e., just 5-year-olds)
 - Assessing only what children can do independently and not trying to provide support to see if children might demonstrate more advanced skills
 - Relying only on assessment of children working or playing by themselves, not in small group activities with peers or other adults

Integrated with teaching and learning

- Educators use assessment tools that are consistent with their state's kindergarten learning standards and curricula as well as learning goals for individual children.
 - Educators develop informal assessment strategies such as checklists and anecdotal notes to document children's learning during instructional activities.
 - Educators use their state's learning standards in combination with assessment results to set learning goals for individual children as well as small groups of children with similar learning strengths and needs.
 - Educators use formative assessment tools regularly to monitor children's progress on the goals and use summative assessment tools to document children's competencies.
- Using assessment tools that are required by the school and/or are developed by the teachers without considering how these tools are related to state kindergarten standards, curricula, and/or learning goals for individual children
 - Assessing children separately from teaching; not collecting informal assessments of children's learning during instructional activities
 - Neglecting to use state standards and/or results from the assessment process to set learning goals for individual children or small groups of children
 - Using only summative assessment tools to monitor children's progress across the school year

Children involved

- Educators talk with children about what they are interested in learning and the types of activities they enjoy.
 - Educators involve children in collecting documentation to show what they have learned. For example, children may take pictures and videos, collect their completed written work, and use software programs to gather evidence of their learning.
 - Educators regularly have children reflect on their learning experiences and evaluate documentation of their learning, noting their own strengths and areas for growth.
- Not involving children in the assessment process
 - Drawing conclusions from assessment results without giving children the chance to reflect on their own learning

Kindergarten (cont.)

Examples of Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Examples of Practices to Avoid

Appropriate for purpose and populations

- Educators are particularly careful about the use of assessment results for labeling children or making high-stakes decisions such as placement recommendations for kindergartners, especially at the beginning of the year. They make placement decisions based on multiple sources of assessment information as well as anecdotal observations of children's performance.
- Educators make sure that formal assessment methods are used for the purpose for which they were designed. For example, screening assessment tools are used only to identify children with potential disabilities, not for other purposes.

- Placing entering kindergartners in groups, labeling children, and/or making placement decisions based solely on results from assessment tools not designed for this purpose and/or administered only at kindergarten entry, without advocating for a different or more comprehensive assessment process or following up with further anecdotal observations

8.4 The Importance of Learning About Children's Experiences from Family Members

Ms. Thompson, a kindergarten teacher, looks over results from the kindergarten entry assessments for the children in her class. She notices that José has low scores across all areas. On the assessment of his knowledge of basic concepts, he did not point to letters, count blocks, or do the other tasks. José's family did not return the rating scale that asks family members to rate their child's social and emotional development, so Ms. Thompson was unable to gather their perspective on this area of José's development. In the classroom, Ms. Thompson has observed that José observes but seldom joins in during activities, and he says very little.

Ms. Thompson realizes that the kindergarten assessment may not accurately represent José's language abilities, so she plans a meeting with the family to learn how they use language at home. Ms. Thompson asks another teacher who speaks Spanish to join the conference with José's family to interpret, and they discuss the need for keeping what they share and learn in the meeting confidential. During their meeting with the family, Ms. Thompson shares what she has observed in the classroom and discovered through the assessment. José's father and mother explain that José is an only child and spends most of his time with his grandmother, whom he calls Abuela. Prior to entering kindergarten, he has not been around other children. Abuela speaks Spanish and his parents usually speak Spanish at

home. His parents share that José loves listening to Abuela tell stories, sometimes asking her to tell several in a row.

After learning more about José's previous experiences, Ms. Thompson better understands the results from his kindergarten entry assessment and her observations of José in the classroom. She takes stock of José's strengths and assets—his grandmother gives him a lot of attention and supports his language development by telling him stories, he is developing skills in two languages, and he is able to pay attention to stories for extended periods of time. Ms. Thompson realizes that José has had limited exposure to the types of tasks that are on the formal assessment tool. Plus, the classroom setting is all new to him and he does not yet understand or speak much English, so he has difficulty understanding and communicating with Ms. Thompson or most of his peers.

Putting together results from José's assessment and from the family conference, Ms. Thompson recognizes that José has many strengths to build on and decides to make some changes to help him feel more comfortable and encourage his participation by using materials and activities he enjoys. For center time, she groups José with two other children who speak Spanish and quickly observes them helping José understand classroom routines. She uses hands-on activities where José can learn from the other children and indicate

his understanding by pointing to or moving the manipulatives around. Ms. Thompson invites José's abuela to visit and tell stories; the other children who speak Spanish enthusiastically call out some of the story in English so everyone can understand. José beams with pride and sits on her lap as Abuela tells stories. After a few weeks, Ms. Thompson observes José beginning to participate in activities and talk with more of the other children. She reassesses José on the kindergarten entry assessment tool and finds that his score is higher. He can complete more of the tasks now, using some

Spanish and a few English words. He points to several letters when she says the letter names and counts some blocks in Spanish.

Ms. Thompson's conversation with José's family gives her a better understanding of how to support him by making some changes to the curriculum and routines. In vignette 3.2 on page 50, another teacher's careful observation of a DLL's play revealed that the child was developing more receptive language than the teacher realized. Both vignettes illustrate the importance of using a variety of ways to accurately assess the understanding of DLLs.

Primary

In the primary grades, educators use a variety of different types of assessment tools to gauge children's learning. Anecdotal observations and informal assessments are particularly important strategies to ascertain individual children's strengths in content areas as well as domains of development.

Examples of Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Examples of Practices to Avoid

Purposeful and strategic

- Educators consult with children's teachers from the previous grade at the beginning of the year to learn about children's strengths, learning goals, and experiences. They use this information judiciously as they begin planning, balancing what they learned from children's previous teachers with their own assessment process.
- Educators use a balanced approach to the assessment process. They rely on anecdotal observations and informal assessment methods as well as formal achievement tests and computer-based assessment tools. Educators use observations, work samples, and other types of authentic assessment measures to provide a more complete picture of children's capabilities in all developmental domains and academic subject areas. They use daily classroom activities, homework assignments, and educator-developed tests as formative assessment methods to gauge what children are learning.
- Missing opportunities to use information from children's previous teachers to better understand children's learning experiences, or using information from previous teachers without making a personal assessment of children's strengths and areas for growth
- Relying heavily on standardized tests and/or computer-based assessment tools without collecting additional types of informal assessment information to better understand children's capabilities
- Assessing only children's academic performance and overlooking other areas of children's development