Learning About Young Children: Play-Based Screening in Early Childhood

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"Next year, we have to start to school... you realize that'll be the end of life as we know it."
Purpose of Screening

- To learn about children’s developmental status
- To identify potential problems or disabilities
- To make decisions about kindergarten placement and curriculum design
Different Methods of Screening

- **Standardized**
  - based on averages of large sample of children
  - report scores in percentiles, developmental age

- **Adapted Criterion-based**
  - teacher constructed
  - pick-and-choose, linked to expected classroom behaviors, knowledge and skills
  - based on teacher preference/bias
  - results of individual children compared to teacher’s “ideal average child”

- **Authentic**
  - not a strange person asking strange questions in a strange place
  - observe children involved in a more natural environment doing what they do naturally
  - *Play-based screening*
Designing PBS

1. What are you looking for?
2. Why are you looking for them?
3. Where in your classroom or school grounds will these skills, knowledge, and behaviors be evident?
4. How will you use the information to make what decisions?
5. Which items do you want to “order” rather than just having on the menu?
Designing Environments and Experiences

1) Identify interest areas:
   - Writing center near entrance
   - Block area
   - Book corner
   - Dramatic play
   - Manipulatives (puzzles, playdough, legos, geoboards, etc.)
   - Art area / table
   - Water table
   - Gross motor / playground
   - Circle area
   - Snack table

2) Identify materials for interest areas to increase the likelihood that the desired skills, knowledge and behaviors will be revealed

Offer choice without overwhelming children
Staffing and Training

Roles for adults
- greeter
- parent partner
- play facilitator / observer – either follow child or stationed at a learning center
- roving observer
- specialists (SLP, guidance, nurse, phys ed)

Adults should know
- child development
- how to engage and interact with children (and when to step back)
- ask probing questions and set up situations for behavior to emerge
- targeted behaviors, skills, knowledge
- observation and recording skills
- communication skills with parents
**Time**

*One hour clock*

- Children and parents arrive on the hour for 40 – 45 minutes.

- Greeted at the door, child goes with play facilitator and parent with parent buddy to complete forms.

- After stopping at the writing center to the child to make a name tag, play facilitator accompanies child for a tour of the room and introduction to activities. Facilitator follows child lead but encourages involvement in different areas.
  - Facilitator may take notes periodically.

- After 30 minutes, invite all children to listen to a story in a group. Follow with snack.
  - Non-reading adults can discuss findings with parents.
Using Observational Results

- Note gaps in observations. Try to fill in gaps with information from parents, early care providers, others.

- Compile a basic profile using the different domains, citing abilities and possible concerns. Be specific.

- Ask parents if this information seems accurate.

- Describe how the school will use this information and make recommendations for parents before they leave (referrals, follow-up, things to do at home).

- Complete your documentation, including impressions for making decisions while things are fresh in your mind.
Questions and Comments?
Educators as Translators

What is this teacher doing? The children are just playing!!

I'm developing mobility of thought...

I'm practicing cooperation.

I'm developing a sense of story and enhancing my story comprehensions.

I'm developing more elaborate language.

I'm making generalizations about the properties of various objects.

I'm following a mental plan.

I'm problem-solving.

I'm developing hand-eye coordination.

I'm organizing and conceptualizing my world.

I'm developing classification skills.

I'm testing my balancing-system.

I'm developing gross motor skills.

I'm learning to "decenter" my viewpoint.

I value play as an important medium for learning. I have developed a broad range of developmental goals with the focus on play. This program provides children with play experiences that enable them to develop and accumulate their own knowledge.

I'm developing number concepts.

I'm learning how to take turns.

I'm developing a good self-concept.

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“What one loves in childhood stays in the heart forever.”

Mary Jo Putnam, American novelist