

Let's talk about....NAC Standard: *Teachers make on-going observations of each child and routinely make formal assessments of developmental progress.*

By Lois Gamble

Many widely accepted theories of child development resulted from experiences of individuals who, in the past, observed the lives of children around them. Today, there are important reasons for early childhood professionals to observe and make developmental assessments of children in their care.

Observation and developmental assessments:

1. Aid in Curriculum Planning

Appropriate curriculum builds upon what a child already knows and is age appropriate and individually appropriate. Observations and assessments made across all domains of children's learning provides information about a child's capabilities, interests, and ways of learning. With this information the teacher can plan appropriate activities and experiences to help children continue to make progress.

2. Enable More Effective Parent Communication

Parents are the primary audience for what is learned from assessment of their own children. They want evidence their children are making progress. Observations provide precise and graphic examples of child's behavior and development. Selected observational records, work samples that show the difference in quality of work over time, photographs of work products in the classroom, and artwork samples allow parents to get a realistic picture of their child at school. An even more complete understanding of a child emerges when parental observation is added to such a portfolio of information.

3. Identify Special Needs

Areas of special need may become apparent when observations and assessments indicate a pattern of interactions, conversations, and/ or behaviors that are outside the expected range. Unbiased observations can reveal new understanding about classroom situations and/or a child and the possibility that the teacher can do something to help improve the situation and/or child.

4. Appraise the Program's Effectiveness

The child care program, through its philosophy and mission statement, has certain stated goals. A program's success in meeting its goals becomes evident in realizing identified outcomes for children and parents.

***Developmental Checklists*** are appropriate for the formal assessments of preschoolers. Checklists include milestones for normal development in specific age groups across four developmental areas: Physical/Motor Development; Social Development; Cognitive Development; and Emotional Development. The skills and characteristics on such checklists can be endless. Select and use those that are consistent with your philosophy.

Developmental checklists are the easiest assessment tools for beginning teachers. They are quick and easy to use and help teachers become attentive to details in each area of a child's growth and development.

Assessments for young children are not a test! Many commercially available assessment instruments are stressful to young children and do not accurately reflect many abilities. Assessments for young children are not report cards! They are used to learn about a child at a point in time. When used several times over the year, assessments will indicate progress made over time.

Authentic assessment of young children includes the use of developmental checklists in conjunction with other observation tools. We will talk about observation methods in the next issue.