

Selecting specific assessment instruments for testing young children

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The perfect assessment

- Well-suited to the goal at hand
 - Can evaluate individual children as well as classrooms, and can be used to provide feedback and direction to teachers
 - See Kelly Maxwell's list of 5 major purposes of early childhood assessments
- Strong psychometrics
 - Reliable
 - Construct and "empirical" validity (Hirsh-Pasek et al, 2005)
 - Ecologically valid for children from different populations and subgroups
- Easy and quick to administer (10 minutes or less) by teacher or easily trained professional
- Comes in different languages and sensitive to language variants
- Allows for a holistic approach to child development
- Identifies child or program strengths and weaknesses
- Can be used with children with varying physical abilities

And then there's reality
in an imperfect world

A New Emphasis: Process-oriented Tests

- Hirsh-Pasek, K, Kochanoff, A, Newcombe, N.S., and de Villiers, J. (2005). *Using Scientific knowledge to inform preschool assessment: Making the case for Empirical Validity*. Social Policy Report, 19, 1.
- These researchers introduce two important concepts in testing
 - Product measures vs. process measures
 - Considering a test's "Empirical validity"

The Product-Process Distinction

■ *Product Measures*

- *Measures outcomes of current conditions*
- *Assesses children's knowledge*

■ *Process Measures*

- *Measures children's progress along a developmental course*
- *Measures Children's process, approach*
- *"Empirically valid" i.e. based on developmental research*

Examples

■ Product oriented measures

- Ability to write one's own name
- Comparison of numbers of objects
- Knowledge of particular vocabulary words
- Color and alphabet knowledge

■ Process oriented measures

- Ability to quickly map a word onto an object and event
- Word diversity – use of quantities, connectors, understanding morphology
- Ability to organize words hierarchically (e.g. a kitten is a cat, is an animal)
- Ability to connect sentences in story lines
- These skills are gateways to reading and writing, the building blocks of school readiness and success.

Currently Available Tests

- Stage 1 tests: Curriculum-consistent measures
- Stage 2 tests: Specific early learning skills measures
- Stage 3 tests: measures designed specifically to be administered in a disability sensitive manner
 - Often take place as part of a formal referral process regarding special education services

About Stage 1 Tests: Curriculum - Consistent Measures

- Reflect the content and values of the curriculum
- Can be observation or individually administered
- Can be completed by parents, teachers, or professionals
- Can be screeners or more in depth
- Can range from 10 to 90 minutes in length

Examples of Stage 1 Curriculum – Consistent Measures

- *ASQ: Ages and Stages Questionnaire*
- *Battelle Developmental Inventory*
- *Early Screening inventory*
- *Bracken Basic Concepts Scales*
- *Kaufman Survey of Early Academic and Language skills*
- *DECA: Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment Program*
- *SSRS: Social Skills Rating System*
- *Vineland Social-Emotional Early Childhood Scales*

Stage 2: Recommended Specific Early Learning Skills Measures

- Reading pre-academics
 - *Get Ready to Read*
 - *Test of Early Reading ability (TERA-3)*
- Language
 - *Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation (DELV)*
 - *Preschool Language Scale (PLS-4) (auditory subtest)*
- Mathematics
 - *Test of Early Mathematics Ability TEMA-3*

Few Stage 2 Tests Measure Social and Emotional Competence

- Denham, S. and Burton, R. (2003) *Social and emotional prevention and intervention programming for preschoolers*, New York: Kluwer-Plenum.
- Emotional competence skills include
 - Expression of experiences
 - Emotional regulation
 - Knowledge of emotion
- Social Competence
 - Self regulation and impulse control
 - Sustained positive engagement with peers

Stage 2 Recommended Social and Emotional Assessments

- HELP - Hawaii Early Learning Profile
- Preschool Strands
- DECA – Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment System
- Battelle Developmental Inventory
- ITSEA - Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment
- Penn Interactive Preschool Play Scale

Social Emotional Assessments

- Should be integrated with the curriculum
- Should be Based on teacher observation with parent input
- Should be Heavily reliant on children's everyday activities
- Should **not** be used for high stakes decisions

The Future of Child Assessment

A brave new world

- where tests can be administered faster and easier
- to children as young as preschool
- to measure relevant child outcomes for high stakes testing?

or

A world in which we can evaluate children in context

- where teachers can teach to the tests in a healthy way,
- and where assessment can be used to improve children's educational experiences?

For Additional Reference

- Using science to inform preschool assessment. Report of the Temple University Forum on Preschool Assessment, January 30-31, 2003. <http://astro.temple.edu/~mweinrau/>