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# Observation as a formal assessment tool in early childhood classrooms : a professional development module

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# Observation as a formal assessment tool in early childhood classrooms : a professional development module

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this professional development module is to explore various purposes and methods of implementing observational techniques in assessment tools in early childhood classrooms. The research reviewed focused on early childhood assessment types, including a brief review of six specific instruments, and implementation methods available to infant and toddler through preschool-aged teachers. This professional development module's base is a resource support system to help advance the observational skills of current and future teachers in the early childhood field.

OBSERVATION AS A FORMAL ASSESSMENT TOOL IN EARLY CHILDHOOD  
CLASSROOMS: A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODULE

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

Division of Early Childhood Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By

Kathleen M. Thornton-Lang

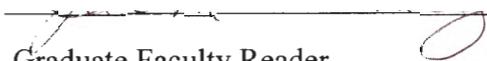
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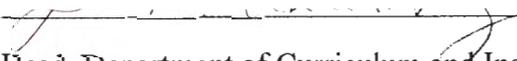
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The purpose of this professional development module is to explore various purposes and methods of implementing observational techniques in assessment tools in early childhood classrooms. The research reviewed focused on early childhood assessment types, including a brief review of six specific instruments, and implementation methods available to infant and toddler through preschool-aged teachers. This professional development module's base is as a resource support system to help advance the observational skills of current and future teachers in the early childhood field.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Description of Topic**

The purpose of this project is to provide a professional development module to help teachers to use observation as an assessment tool in early childhood classrooms. The focus will be on birth through age four, in classroom settings. There are many forms of observation used as assessment tools in classrooms. Direct observation is used by raters to determine, through anecdotal writing, what observable behaviors a child is demonstrating in the course of learning, and therefore what strategies might work best for an individual child in that child's daily learning environment. Pictorial or video observations are used as concrete evidence of standards or benchmarks from various developmentally appropriate goals and objectives being met. Checklists are quick ways for teachers and raters to determine if a child is meeting goals set for that child's individual age or developmental level, according to standardized assessment measures. Time and Event Sampling are often used to take specific note of a child's behavior in order to determine the next course of action in that specific child's learning environment. If teachers notice a behavior happening within their classrooms, frequency counts and duration records can be kept to determine the severity of that behavior. In terms of a child's work in the classroom, a teacher can do Work Sampling, keeping many specific items or products the child has completed throughout the year. The teacher can also create a pictorial or sampled portfolio of the child's work. There are many forms of observational assessments that can take place in a classroom setting to determine whether students are performing to their age or developmental abilities, rather than using traditional or formal forms of assessment, such as tests.

There are many observation measurement tools that focus on preschool ages, a few that focus on the infant and toddler ages, and some that adapt to both age groups. The Iowa Early Learning Standards, or IELS (2006), were created to fulfill requirements set forth by the federal government in order for teachers, families, communities, and administrators to better understand the growth and development of young children in five basic domains (i.e., physical well-being and motor development, approaches to learning, social and emotional development, math and science, and creative arts). The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment Program (2012), or DECA, has a focus on a child's social and emotional development in initiative, attachment, and self-control, using written anecdotal observations as the basis for analysis. The Ounce Scale (2012) focuses on very similar domains for children ages birth to preschool age. These assessments, along with many other measurements, all use various forms of observation to assess the growth and development of young students in a valid manner.

### **Rationale**

Observation is used in many forms in elementary and school-age classrooms. Its effectiveness can be immeasurable in everyday classrooms and can lead to success in meeting previously set goals for the age or developmental area of an individual child. The child reaches these goals by using the strengths a rater observes; thus a teacher can begin to build upon those strengths in a scaffolding method with the child. Jablon, Dombro, and Dichtelmiller (1999) stated, "observing provides the information you need to build relationships with individual children and enable them to be successful learners; watching and listening to children helps us understand what they are feeling, learning, and thinking" (p. 1). By knowing all this about our students, we can be one of the first enablers in their learning and development.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2009) stated that to best assess young children's strengths, progress, and needs, teachers are to use assessment methods that are developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children's daily activities, supported by professional development, inclusive to families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes. (Assessment section, para.1)

Observing children in their natural environment and then using those observations to assess their development and growth is by far the most developmentally appropriate assessment practice, if teachers are trained to do this correctly.

By using observations, and translating those observations into valid assessment tools, in early childhood classrooms, a teacher can determine if a child is meeting developmental expectations. A very young child cannot physically or mentally take a standardized test. Observations, whether they are from photographs, anecdotal records, video recordings, checklists, or portfolios, show how each standard or benchmark may be met for each child, and how to build upon what the child has learned to help the teacher set the next goal for learning.

### **Purpose of Project**

Throughout the course of this project, various tools that are based in observations will be examined. Observing and getting to know students is key to a successful student outcome. According to Berhenke, Miller, Brown, Seifer, and Dickstein (2011), "research using behavior-based assessment with young children, such as observing children's exploratory behavior with objects and whether they prefer challenging or easy tasks, has shown that preschool-age children show individual differences in interests and pursuits" (p. 2). However, obtaining valid

information about young children is challenging due to the fact that they grow and change rapidly, and they are easily distracted. Therefore, it is important to use various assessment measures to accurately assess young children's development to account for the various developmental changes and possible distractions an individual child may encounter. In addition, if teachers are not prepared to make accurate and objective observations, misinformation regarding children's growth and development may be recorded as fact. By using the various observation based measurement tools available to early childhood educators today appropriately, a teacher can use what is learned from the observations to meet developmentally appropriate standards for all children.

Ongoing assessment is used throughout a child's education, from birth all the way through the college years, and even into their work environment. Gathering information objectively in the context of everyday activities provides a representative picture of children's abilities and progress (Dodge, Heroman, Charles, & Maiorca, 2004). Data can be collected in a variety of ways, such as documenting what children say and do, objectively; collecting samples of children's work over the course of the year; talking with children about what they are doing and thinking and recording that information in some way; and exchanging information with families. This observational "data enables teachers to learn more about each child, plan for children's learning, track children's progress, and, when required, generate outcomes reports" (Dodge et al., 2004, p. 10).

My proposal is to develop a professional development training module, using multimedia (Microsoft, 2012) slides and small- and large-group activities. This module will be presented to early childhood educators and pre-service teachers in order to demonstrate how to properly make valid observations within a child's classroom setting, and translate those to formal assessment

measurements. By learning to properly make observations and use them as assessment tools, early childhood educators will be equipped with a valid and natural way of assessing a child's learning and growth, while also gaining perspective into how each child learns. This professional growth for teachers, their assistants, future teachers, even families and administrators, will show how accountable we can all be in observing and assessing a child's growth and development.

### **Importance of Project**

Systematic assessment is a form of observational assessment, with attention being directed to a child, a particular pattern of behavior, a situation or problem, or progress toward an identified goal (McAfee & Leong, 2011). Simply stated, observation is important to understand how that individual student learns, along with setting and implementing goals for that student within the context of his or her everyday learning. Objective observation offers information that helps to structure a teacher's classroom to individual students' needs and developmental abilities. For example, one year, a 3-year-old classroom may be very involved in pre-writing activities; therefore established writing methods are used easily and without specific instruction in every center in the classroom (i.e., tablets for taking orders at the pretend play restaurant, blueprint paper to make drawings of block towers). The next year, however, the teachers may observe the different class of students lacking understanding of what to do with such materials, so writing materials are scaled back in each learning center at the beginning of the year to allow the children and teachers to learn together how to integrate writing materials into classroom life. Teachers in developmentally appropriate classrooms will be able to modify their expectations for children's growth and development within plans for observation and assessment.

Observations can help meet a child's individual needs in terms of his or her development and in terms of any special needs that child may have. If a child has been diagnosed with

Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder, then a teacher and other professionals will use observations to determine what might work best with that child when he or she is not focusing on the task at hand. For example, making a checklist of what books a child enjoys in order to engage him or her in the text will make reading more enjoyable for that child.

Observations need to be written objectively. Bias is a controversial topic in all aspects of education, and, as humans, we do tend to put emotions into all we do and see. But when writing about a child's development and learning styles, being objective about observed behaviors will not only allow those observation techniques to be more valid in terms of standardized viewing, but also will allow a student to be viewed as a new student, with no preset notions by his or her teachers based on previously written or documented observations. Making objective observations is a learned skill and will be a key component of the professional development module.

There are many early childhood classrooms in various settings where teachers implement few, if any, assessment opportunities for children ages birth through four. This may be due to the fact that they are unaware such measurements exist, or that teachers do not know how to implement the assessments. My project will be designed to show that there are valid assessment tools and ways to help all young children learn and grow in a meaningful way.

### **Importance of Effective Professional Development within the Early Childhood Field**

Professional development for pre-service and currently practicing teachers is always a component within the educational setting. Professional development is used to keep current practitioners abreast of current trends in education, as well as to keep the teacher learning. By continuing to learn about teaching styles, and various assessments available, whatever the course may be for a practitioner, a teacher can effectively continue his or her own reflective teaching.

The most common mode of professional development currently implemented by practitioners is that of workshop trainings aligned with field experiences. Winton, McCollum, and Catlett (2008) stated that “workshops in conjunction with classroom coaching result in teachers [using] new ideas” (p. 8). These workshops need to be more than one session, and consist of sustainable information that can be shared among participants, and then implemented within the participants’ field, continually providing feedback and evaluation of those implementation methods used in the classroom. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 defined “high-quality professional development as programs that are sustained, intensive, and classroom focused; [they] include instruction in how to use data and assessments to inform classroom practices; and that are not 1-day or short-term workshops or conferences” (§ 1901, p. 1963). These workshops are often referred to as modules. Modules need to be offered by those within the field who are considered experts, defined either by a presenters’ record of continued education, or by his or her current level of education and field work. Winton, McCollum, and Catlett (2008) stated that:

The success of [a workshop training] will be strongly influenced not only by the expertise of the instructor and the relevance of the content, but also by the participants’ purposes of assessments, as well as their willingness to incorporate new assessment approaches into their current practices.

Practitioners will be more likely to implement and sustain new assessment approaches and practices if they are allowed the time to research and discuss new assessments, to meet in teams, to make their own decisions about assessment approaches that are most appropriate for the children and families they serve, and to see evidence that the new assessment approaches result in better instructional decisions. (p. 178)

Nadelson, Seifert, Moll, and Coats (2012) conducted a study of a STEM education summer institute, known as i-STEM, which focused on the structure of an intensive four-day professional development workshop designed to increase grades 4-9 teacher preparation in the teaching of STEM content areas. The researchers wanted to determine how structure and content of a professional development training influenced its participants' comfort level with teaching the content, the participants' efficacy in teaching the content, the participants' actual knowledge of the content, and perceptions of the STEM educational system. Participants in the study were educators in K-12 school systems, voluntarily signing up for the workshop, and expected to sign-up as teaching teams from the same school. The majority of the mostly 40-year-old, female elementary educators who participated in the workshop held degrees in various domains of elementary education. Surveys of comfort level with STEM, knowledge of STEM, and perceptions of STEM were given to collect data in a demographic instrument. The workshop, or institute, as it was called, was held during the summer, over a 4-day period, the participants having completed 32 hours of instruction with STEM. The workshops were given as a presentation to distribute information, then presenters offered the opportunity for participants to implement STEM information and content. The goal of the research for this institute was "to provide a professional development opportunity for teachers to enhance their STEM content/subject matter knowledge, their comfort with teaching STEM, perceptions of efficacy for teaching STEM, pedagogical contentment related to teaching STEM and use of inquiry for teaching STEM" (p. 79). The results indicated that there were:

...gains in the participating teachers' perceived efficacy, comfort, contentment, and knowledge related to STEM education [which] supports the effectiveness of [the workshop] in increasing teacher capacity to teach STEM and [provides] a model for

others seeking to respond to calls for enhancing quantity and quality of STEM education.

(p. 81)

What this shows is that, despite the lack of consistent and quality professional development available to all educators, if such support is given, then professional development will help to enhance a teacher's classroom teaching abilities. Such support is necessary, even at the early childhood education level, as there is often a rarity of high quality professional development made available. Rhodes and Huston (2012) discussed this issue by bringing to light that education and training within the early childhood field is not required in most early childhood environments, and that very few systems reward their workers who go beyond the minimum requirements for such work. One reason given by the authors is that "quality and effectiveness of trainings are variable" (p. 15). There are ways to effectively use early childhood professional development opportunities in a similar fashion to that of elementary education, and beyond modules or workshops. As Rhodes and Huston (2012) stated, "strategies include coursework; on-site support through mentoring, coaching, and technical assistance; video with modeling and feedback" (p. 15). Also, "the wide range of needs of the workforce means that professional development does not fit one mold, and must take into account the logistical hurdles that teachers and caregivers face" (p. 15). Teachers with early childhood education backgrounds and their relative field work are already overcoming these hurdles. Their continued success in doing so, and helping to implement further professional development models may pave the way for the early childhood field to flourish in the current state of educational assessment.

## Terminology

The review of research I located for this project generated a list of terms for observation, assessment, and all of its components. For this particular project, I will be using the following terms and definitions:

*Alternative Assessment* – “draws from functional assessment and intervention approaches that focus on observing children’s behavior in everyday home and classroom activities; comprise various methods to assess children’s performance including structured in-depth observations, checklists, anecdotal notes, children’s work samples, tallies, and time sampling” (Winton, McCollum, & Catlett, 2008, p. 164).

*Anecdotal Records* – “informal observation” that “teachers make for future reference and as an aid to understanding some aspect of the child’s personality or behavior” (Bentzen, 1993, p. 97).

*Assessment* - “basic process of finding out what the children in [the] classroom, individually and as a group, know and can do in relation to their optimum development and to the goals of the program;” more specifically, it is “the process of gathering information about children from several forms of evidence, then organizing and interpreting that information” (McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova, 2004, p. 3).

*Authentic (Assessment)* – “not false or imitation; real, actual” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2011).

*Checklists* – “any record that denotes the presence or absence of something” and used “to record the occurrence of specific behaviors in a given context” (Bentzen, 1993, p. 106).

*Child Care Resource and Referral* - “a program to support quality child care throughout the state of Iowa. CCR&R is available to assist families in selecting child care providers who best meet the needs of a child and their family. Child care consultants provide on-site consultation to

licensed preschools, centers, non-registered home providers, and child development home providers” (Child Care, 2012).

*(Direct) Observation* – “an act of gathering information by noting facts or occurrences” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2011).

*Duration Records* - “variation of the frequency count” that takes place “when the length of the behavior is more useful to know than just its frequency” (Bentzen, 1993, p. 101).

*Event Sampling* – “samples from the child’s behavior stream, namely, specifically defined behaviors or events” (Bentzen, 2003, p. 88-89).

*Evidence* – “an outward sign or indication” that, in child assessment “would be an indication of a child’s development or learning” (McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova, 2004, p. 3).

*Frequency Count* – “observer makes a mark on an observation sheet every time a particular event occurs” (Bentzen, 1993, p. 101).

*Infant/Toddler Age* – “children ages birth to 36 months” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 53).

*Portfolio* – “purposeful collections of work that illustrate children’s efforts, progress, and achievements;” “work that children do in the school as part of the ongoing learning process in the classrooms” (Helm, Beneke, & Steinheimer, 1998, p. 57)

*Preschool Age* – “children ages 36-42 months” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 53).

*Rater* – “a person who estimates or determines a rating” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2011).

*Scaffold(ing)* – “a supporting framework” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2011).

*Screening* – “a brief assessment procedure designed to identify children who, because they might have a learning problem or disability, should receive more extensive assessment” (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2005, p. 5).

*Systematic Observation* – “gathering information about children [by] watching and listening to them” (McAfee & Leong, 2011, p. 51).

*Time Sampling* – an “observer watches and records selected behaviors during preset uniform time periods and at regularly recurring or randomly selected intervals” (Bentzen, 1993, p. 77).

*Work Sampling* – “performance assessment that provides an alternative to group-administered, norm-referenced achievement tests in preschool through fifth grade;” “its purpose is to document and assess children’s skills, knowledge, behavior, and accomplishments across a wide variety of curriculum on multiple occasions” (Helm, Beneke, & Steinheimer, 1998, p. 2-3).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide the review of research regarding observation as an assessment tool in early childhood classrooms. These questions will provide the foundation for this project.

- 1 How is observation used in assessment for preschoolers?
- 2 How is observation used in assessment for infants and toddlers?
- 3 What are some of the formal observations available to use in early childhood classrooms?

## Chapter II

### Methodology

#### Procedures to Develop Project

I began this project as a review of observational methods in early childhood classrooms. As I continued to review research on tools used in classrooms, and various ways they are implemented, I realized that I wanted to share the ways observation can be used as assessment in early childhood classrooms, instead of standardized testing, which is not developmentally appropriate with young children. As Berhenke et al. (2011) stated, “the survey- and interview-based methods traditionally used to assess constructs are not as useful for young children, due to young children’s less-developed capacity to incorporate information about outcomes and task difficulty” (p. 2). I continued my research, and found that this would make a worthwhile training module for my fellow teachers, the university student staff we employ, and the field experience students who come in and out of the classrooms daily, who do not realize the extent to which we use assessment tools with young children. I will use this project to explain some of the observational tools that are available, how they are used, their effectiveness, and how we can all be observational assessors.

I will begin by using the formal tools and various observational assessment models available through literature, resources, and websites to research why observation is developmentally appropriate for early childhood ages. I will then delve into six of those tools, along with specific measures used to validate each tool that uses various observational techniques. Finally, I will take what I have learned about the tools available and techniques used in various classroom settings to create a training module using a PowerPoint (Microsoft, 2012)

presentation targeted to early childhood educators in practice and in training so they may see the value of and use of observation in their current or future classrooms.

## **Literature Review**

This project is based on how observations can be used in early childhood classrooms, infants through preschoolers, as an assessment tool. Preschool classroom teachers use documentation to learn how each individual student learns and to assess how those individual children learn in developmentally appropriate ways. Observations are used in infant and toddler classrooms to develop individual outcomes for children with both the families and school involved, as well as to access early intervention, if needed. Both age groups have various implementation methods that can be effectively used. And, finally, six different early childhood assessment tools will be discussed.

### **Research Question 1: How is observation used in assessment for preschoolers?**

*Assess children's learning in a developmentally appropriate way.* Standardized testing, with a question and answer, pencil and paper format, is generally the norm for school-age classrooms. The reason for this norm is to determine if students are learning what they need to be learning, and in the appropriate time frame. When teaching early childhood, pencil and paper assessment is not considered a developmentally appropriate form of evaluation. Children at the preschool level, approximately ages 3-5, learn better by being engaged in an activity that allows their thinking to progress in a scaffolded manner. Thus, assessment is best accomplished through embedded assessments where the child demonstrates his or her development or learning within the activities themselves (McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova, 2004). As the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2003) stated, "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” (p. 2).

Implementing a curriculum based on what is developmentally appropriate will help children become engaged in their learning, help them become challenged to further their learning, and take into account a child’s personal cultural identity, allowing for that child to become an effective learner.

A study by Perlman, Zellman, and Le (2004) looked at an assessment tool used to measure early childhood teachers’ teaching quality and how that related to developmentally appropriate learning by the students involved. The *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Revised* (ECERS-R) was used to collect data from 66 classrooms of 35 early childhood teachers. The providers had all used the ECERS-R prior to this two-year study. Early childhood education practitioners collected data from these classrooms, looking at typically observed domains used in the assessment tool in order to determine if teachers were taking into account their students’ developmentally appropriate abilities. The domains assessed included: environment, materials, child to child interactions, teacher to child interactions, motor development, literacy development, and guidance. What was shown from this study was that more research about such a useful tool needs to take place. The results showed that observations using the ECERS-R may show that teachers are strong in many developmentally appropriate ways, but that they may be strong in other areas that are not necessarily observed, due to lack of time or funding available to complete more extensive studies. However, the authors of the study did believe that, with more examination of similar assessment tools, then “the nature of child-care quality [will be] more accurately [reflected] in provider ratings” (p. 408).

Many teachers believe that observing children in their natural settings, while considering what is developmentally best for the students, will have long lasting positive effects on students’

education. Observation is used to gauge in what children of “all ages and abilities can become interested and engaged, [which] develops positive attitudes toward learning” (NAEYC, 2003, p. 2). Observation is used in developmentally appropriate assessments in early childhood classrooms when:

used as part of the program evaluation, the primary focus [being] 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. (NAEYC, 2003, p. 4)

***Determine individual students’ learning styles.*** Along with helping teachers teach their students in a developmentally appropriate manner, observation in assessment can also help teachers reach their students in an individualized manner. Every student, young or old, learns in his or her own way. Therefore, a teacher must find what works for each individual student and use that information to teach in the most effective way possible to gain success from that student.

Observation measures are used in assessment to determine what works best for each individual student in many areas. Socialization and classroom management are two of these factors addressed by assessment tools to help students learn in a productive environment. A study designed by Stipek and Byler (2004) discussed such purposes. The research used a sample of 127 5-year-olds from 99 schools in 46 districts from three different states, in both rural and urban communities (Stipek & Byler, 2004). The classrooms were observed by trained observers, watching math and literacy instruction. Teachers were given goals by the observers to meet for each individual student, the goals having been “identified as important for young children to develop in school” (p. 384). With these goals, a description of practices that can be used with each item was listed in the goal. At the end of the observation time, classrooms were assessed on

the percentage of time the given practices were seen during the observations. The purpose of the practices was to meet the goals of each individual student, which is why more than one open-ended practice was offered to the teachers being observed. Examples of suggested practices included 1) the teacher giving a student clearly stated goals, but allowing individualized processes for goal gaining; 2) lessons were connected to children's previous knowledge; 3) children were encouraged to be active participants throughout instruction; 4) varied instructional approaches were used by teachers; and 5) allowing children to use manipulative materials to reach a goal. Results suggested that more studies need to be done in these areas of development for young children. However, the authors of this study noted that, overall, children being involved in their own learning can be meaningful to them as students.

Margaret MacDonald (2007) conducted a study of documentation on five-year-olds, in order to investigate the potential for observation as a means of formal assessment in literacy instruction. The teachers involved in this study were selected by the researcher based on their initiatives and teaching positions within the classroom (MacDonald, 2007). The researcher, after selecting the participating teachers, began to develop a working relationship with the children, parents, and teacher's assistants, along with the teachers. Documentation was introduced to the classrooms "using a hands-on approach" (p. 235). The researcher discussed observational processes and photograph selection. The researcher also used running records, anecdotal records, and audio recordings to discuss observations. Teachers were shown how to objectively use these tools in observational assessment, mainly using the photographs to determine learning styles of their students. Teachers were then encouraged to use these learning moments to expand on topics the children enjoyed and at which they excelled. The results found that "documentation is useful to teachers as a way to document the interests of the children in the

class when literacy activities are presented” and that teachers had a “deeper understanding of the children’s strengths, interests, and curiosities beyond what is traditionally assessed” (p. 241). The teachers realized they could build greatly upon their classroom curriculum, while meeting program learning standards in an effective manner.

MacDonald (2007) concluded:

documentation has the potential to communicate ideas, and provoke and inspire responses from others that may lead to further action or self-awareness. In this way, it may facilitate conversations about learning moments and focus teachers and children more thoughtfully on how learners’ [sic] construct knowledge. (p. 234)

Teachers who are sensitive to children’s individuality will greatly impact their future development. If teachers are willing to build upon what children already know, as well as how they learn, incorporating what is interesting to a student will greatly increase that effectiveness.

***Implementation methods used in preschool programs.*** There are many ways to implement observational techniques within an early childhood classroom in order to make the documentation valid for future assessment tool usage. The following are just a few of the effective methods used by many teachers. Every teacher finds his or her own most productive way of implementing these, as well as other documentation techniques.

Checklists are often used to record a presence or absence of something, such as a group event with specific goals in mind (Bentzen, 1993). For example, a teacher of three-year-olds can be giving a big book reading lesson and have a checklist at her side to quickly mark which goals are being met. The goals might include whether students are engaged in the book, speaking along with the content of the book, or answering questions about each page appropriately when asked. The teacher records this simply by making a check mark next to the selected box on chart. Once

the checklist is completed, a teacher can see if the students as a whole are ready to move on to a more complicated book, or if some of the children need review in the selected goals.

There are many types of sampling available for early childhood teachers. Event sampling (Bentzen, 2003) looks at specific events that occur with a specific behavior; usually negative, in order to aid in preventing such a behavior from occurring in the future. Time sampling is when an “observer watches and records selected behaviors during preset uniform time periods and at regularly recurring or randomly selected intervals” (p. 77).

Within these sampling periods, various records can be kept on children and their behavior. Frequency records are when an “observer makes a mark on an observation sheet every time a particular event occurs” (Bentzen, 1993, p. 101). If a child is exhibiting a negative behavior fairly consistently throughout the day, tallying how often such a behavior occurs, and, if possible, when the behavior occurs, will aid a teacher in figuring how that specific child may react to, for example, a transition from one activity to another. A very similar record described by Bentzen is a duration record. Bentzen described this as a “variation of [a] frequency count” that takes place “when the length of [a] behavior is more useful to know than its frequency” (p. 101). An example would be a 4-year-old girl having fairly consistent negative reactions to being told to do routine tasks in the classroom (i.e., yelling at her classmates and teachers, throwing materials around her, or throwing her body against furniture in a hurtful manner). This little girl’s reactions require the teacher to attend to both the frequency of behaviors and the duration. The total time it takes her to reach some kind of compromise with her teachers or to calm herself down will be a much more beneficial observation than how many times in a day she may react in such a way.

A third type of sampling that can be used as an observational tool is work sampling. This is a “performance assessment that provides an alternative to group-administered, norm-referenced achievement tests in preschool through fifth grade;” “its purpose is to document and assess children’s skills, knowledge, behavior, and accomplishments across a wide variety of curriculum on multiple occasions” (Helm, Beneke, & Steinheimer, 1998, p. 2-3). Work sampling helps provide the whole picture of what children are learning throughout their time in the classroom. It can be composed of what the teacher deems important to save to show progress, or even be selected by the child to show off his or her learning and developmental milestones.

There have been many studies done to determine the best practices in terms of assessment for preschoolers, in both their developmental needs and in terms of preparing them for the schooling that lies ahead for them in the primary grades and beyond. MacDonald’s (2007) results have shown that observations of how students relate to certain likes or dislikes will affect their learning in all subject areas and developmental domains. Doabler, Smolkowski, Fien, Kosty, and Cary (2010) conducted observational studies in mathematics areas in kindergarten classrooms, in order to measure interactions and determine if the positivity from those interactions affected the mathematical scores from standardized testing. Participants included 66 teachers and over 1400 5-year-old students, located in rural and urban schools. A researcher-developed instrument measured instructional interactions between teachers and students during math instruction. Start and finish activity times, targeted activity content, and the use of small-group or large-group format were some of the environmental factors observed in relation to the students’ final outcomes. Conclusions of this study showed that the tool used as documentation in the classroom was “reliable and valid for documenting the quantity and quality of student-teacher interaction (Doabler et al., 2010, p. 5). The study also stated that those in educational settings will need

reliable tools for determining whether students' high scores in content areas are aligned with state standards, which requires more research to be done in the early childhood field.

Project LINK (*A Partnership to Promote LINKages among Assessment, Curriculum, and Outcomes in Order to Enhance School Success for Children in Head Start Programs*) is a project intended to utilize recommended practices in early childhood assessment as a means for properly documenting a child's development and growth, leading to validity in assessment tools in early childhood programs (Hallam, Grisham-Brown, Gao, & Brookshire, 1999). The Assessment, Evaluation, and Planning System (Briker, Cripe, & Slentz, 2012), or AEPS, was used for 26 Head Start classrooms within this study to determine observation usage in activity-based assessment, individual learning goals and planning, group curriculum planning, ongoing data collection, and portfolio sampling (Hallam et al., 1999). The Early Childhood Environmental Ratings Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) was used to establish how these observations affected classroom quality. Findings suggested that the type of authentic assessment approach used in Project Link may have positive impacts on language and literacy development. However, this is only one pilot study and the authors discussed the need for more research in this area with early childhood assessment tools being used in classrooms.

**Research Question 2: How is observation used in assessment for infants and toddlers?**

*Involve family and school in children's individual developmental outcomes.* A child of the infant or toddler age (birth to 3 years) develops in many capacities, some say more so during this time span than at any other in their lives. Children need to develop their cognitive skills, communication skills, gross and fine motor skills, and their social and emotional skills. When intertwining all these elements, or domains, as they are often referred to by early childhood

educators and in assessment tools, a child has the potential to succeed and become the person he or she, ultimately, was meant to be. A parent's and early childhood educator's job during these core years is to help mold these skills positively and successfully.

A home environment intervention study was conducted by Bennett, Algozzine, Fleming, and Hellring (1986) that discussed the importance of proper materials and maternal involvement with children. The researchers evaluated 23 families with children with disabilities, ages birth through five years, using various assessment tools, play observations, established familial needs, optional parent and sibling participation within a group setting, and the Individual Family Support Plans (IFSP) and Individual Education Plans (IEP) developed for each child. Families were asked to use play and learning activities in the home between observer visits. It was found that "maternal involvement, availability of play materials and overall home environment ratings significantly increased" (p. 4) for the families receiving the observer guidance activities. From this study, the researchers suggested "that family-oriented intervention which recognizes the needs of families can be effective as measured in the HOME [*sic*], particularly in regard to appropriate play materials and maternal involvement with the child" (p. 5) This study targeted specific, individualized family needs in order to fully assess what was needed to help the children meet the goals as stated on their IEPs and IFSPs. As Bennett et al. (1986) stated,

A family system is a diverse and complicated system. Family members may be at different points in the acceptance process (about their child's specific needs). A therapeutic approach using professionals trained in counseling techniques and the use of a family therapist for parents facing major crisis is useful. (p. 8)

Family involvement in school is essential to a child's effective learning environment. Families are the first teachers in a child's life, with the classroom teacher building upon the

child's learning in a different venue. By working together, the family and the teacher can prepare a child for the future as a student.

**Early intervention.** One of the main reasons to document what and how children are learning is that many developmental delays, learning disabilities, and other factors may create challenges to a child's learning from an early age. Parents and educators alike will help their children and students become more successful if they target early what possible challenges may lie ahead. Knoche, Sheridan, Edwards, and Osborn (2010) discussed a program called Getting Ready Intervention, which was "an integrated, multi-systemic, ecologically-based intervention that promotes school readiness through enhancing *parent engagement* for children from birth to age five" (p. 1). There were 54 participants in the study using the Getting Ready Intervention who were early childhood professionals in Early Head Start and Head Start. The teachers were given strategies "as part of the intervention [that] were intended to strengthen parental responsiveness, confidence, and competence in the context of parent-child interactions" (Knoche, et al., 2010 p. 6). These strategies were "individualized, responsive, and applied uniquely with families" (Knoche, et al., 2010, p. 7) in order to help the families and teachers work together to better meet the individual needs of their children. Early childhood professionals administered the intervention strategies to the families in naturalistic contexts, such as home visits, socialization with other children, and center activities within the context of the child's daily classroom. Observations were collected in video recordings of home visits completed by the early childhood teachers throughout the intervention process. The purpose of these observations was to build upon parental observations of their own child's development and to recognize their own strength within the family unit. Observers then discussed both dynamics with the families within the study. The results were indicative of the fact that early intervention

“improved functioning and well being in both children and families in the treatment group” (Knoche et al., 2010, p. 2), particularly in that of social-emotional competence building, when “after 8 months of participation in the intervention, families demonstrate improved levels of parental responsiveness” (Knoche et al., 2010, p. 3).

There can be issues with collecting assessment data within the early childhood setting. A study conducted by Hua-Kuo Ho at the College of Humanities at Nanhua University in Taiwan (2008) was designed to “investigate the current system of early intervention needs assessment in Taiwan in order to understand the problems encountered and provide the coping strategies for improving the system” (p. 2). Documentation, phone interviews, and observation was used with 18 educational professionals from 14 cities. All this information was “used to understand the current status of [the] early intervention needs assessment system, [and] problems and coping strategies” (p. 3) offered with these services. The results showed that functional problems, such as shortage of funding and professional manpower, poor coordination among social welfare, health and education agencies and organizations, low rate of notification screening (especially for ages 0-3), weak parental willingness to receive services, lack of assessment and intervention resources, as well as the reliability and validity problems in assessment instrument, (p. 2)

were the main core reasons why intervention was not conducted in a more timely and appropriate manner. Much could also be said about our own educational system. There is limited research available in the early childhood field, especially for children from birth to three years, that helps show how any assessment is valid and worthwhile to use in a classroom of very young children. While there are a few assessment tools available, these limitations do make it difficult to reach the many early childhood professionals in the field.

Early intervention for children who have disabilities is key to a child's success from the earliest age, especially for those children who come from an unsupportive setting instructionally, or who just need a little extra help. Unfortunately, there is much less support for such needs in very young children than there is at the elementary and older educational levels. Children receiving services from an earlier age may diminish later needs. By observing a child's growth and development, teachers can determine if such resources are needed for that child's success in all educational and developmental domains.

***Implementation methods used in early childhood programs.*** Early childhood programs have many techniques available to accurately record observations for future assessment usage. Assessment needs to be considered authentic, in order to be valid for the tools for which it is being used.

Direct observation, which is described by Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2011) as "an act of gathering information by noting facts or occurrences," is used frequently and in many valid forms within an infant and toddler classroom. For example, recording on a Post-It what a child does during a water play activity is a valid way to show which standards for the Creative Curriculum Gold assessment tool that child is meeting.

Anecdotal records are also used in early childhood classrooms. Bentzen (1993) describes these as "informal observation [that] teachers make for future reference and as an aid to understanding some aspect of the child's personality or behavior" (p. 97). This record can be used when analyzing why a 13-month old child is not walking yet. If distraction is an issue, the teacher can use what he or she has written to remember that it might work better to take that child to a hallway or less active location in order to eliminate distractions when helping the child learn to walk.

A portfolio is often used with early childhood professionals. These are described by Helm, Beneke, and Steinheimer (1998) as a “purposeful collection of work that illustrates children’s efforts, progress, and achievements; work that children do in the school as part of the ongoing learning process in the classroom” (p. 57). Collecting young children’s art work, compiling pictures showing them meeting The Ounce Scale developmental domains, and creating videos of their ongoing development and learning are great ways of creating an infant or toddler portfolio.

One of the biggest developmental assessment domains to be observed in an infant or toddler class is that of the social-emotional realm, relating to young children’s interactions with other children and teachers, while also learning about themselves in their role within the society of the classroom. Ridley, McWilliam, and Oates (2000), observed children between the ages of one and three years from 58 classrooms, with lead teachers within 17 child care centers, using the Infant and Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS). Data included observations in group engagement by raters repeatedly counting the percentage of the children engaged throughout various points of the day. The researchers found through observation that children were more engaged in group settings based on the quality of the center being observed and the positive interactions among the students and the caregivers or teachers present.

### **Research Question 3: What are some formal observations available to use in Early**

#### **Childhood Classrooms?**

While assessment tools available for the early childhood field aren’t as widely known, there are a few that exist to assess the youngest of children, from birth through age 5. Standardized testing in the form of paper and pencil tests is not considered developmentally appropriate for these young children, as they are still learning about the world around them.

These children lack the physical skills to manipulate pencil and paper tests. The observational assessment tools available to early childhood educators and professionals help to scaffold a child's learning, which will help pave the way for future schooling and standardized testing. The following early childhood observational assessment tools were created to meet various infant, toddler, and preschoolers' developmental milestones. From social-emotional growth to math and science, these tools use various forms of observations from the teachers administering them to help guide a child to developmental success.

***Creative Curriculum Gold.*** Creative Curriculum Gold is a new assessment system from Teaching Strategies (2012). Its purpose is to serve children from birth through kindergarten focusing on key elements that research indicates are more predictive of school success, and align those elements with the expected outcomes identified by state early learning standards, while also serving the needs of English-language learners. It is an observation-based assessment that combines ongoing, authentic assessment in many areas of development and learning, by using intentional and focused performance assessment tasks for selected predictors of school readiness in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

This assessment uses technology to store and analyze data. Early childhood teachers can transcribe any written, pictorial, or video documentary observation to an online portfolio, tracking that specific observation in one or more of the following domains, with various goal-driven objectives within it:

- Social-Emotional Development
- Physical Development
- Language Development
- Cognitive Development
- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Science and Technology
- Social Studies

- The Arts
- English Language Acquisition

These 10 domains with their 38 intertwined objectives are placed on various graphs, and can be organized into various reports. The reports will show how individual students are meeting pre-determined developmentally appropriate goals for their specific ages. The reports can even be generated to show how a class is meeting or struggling in various developmental areas. The rainbow chart from birth through 5 years of age, showing their progress from beginning to end, is very family and administratively friendly.

***The Ounce Scale.*** The Ounce Scale is “an assessment system for use with infants and toddlers from birth to three and one half years (Ounce, 2012).” It has three components with its observational record, family album, and developmental profiles and standards. This tool is purely observational in terms of its assessment style. Observations, whether written anecdotally, in checklists, on video, or in picture format are to be collected regularly throughout the child’s education, both by his or her teacher and at home with his or her parents or guardians.

The Ounce Scale (2012) consists of three components: the observation record, the family album, and the developmental profiles and standards. The observation record is used by teachers to record children’s behaviors and to keep track of their overall development. The family album is used with teacher guidance to collect family observations, photographs, mementos, or anything that is related to a child’s growth and development. The developmental profiles and standards are a rating scale used to evaluate growth and development at the end of the eight age levels within The Ounce Scale. The items being addressed on the developmental profiles are described in its accompanying standards.

There are six areas of development, which offer questions for the teachers and family members to answer and discuss together (Ounce, 2012). Personal Connections describes how

children show trust within their environment. Feelings About Self is focused on how children learn about themselves and how they express who they are. Relationships With Other Children observes how children act around other children. Understanding and Communicating looks at baby, toddler, and preschooler talk. Exploration and Problem Solving discusses how children explore and figure things out through various baby, toddler, and preschooler discoveries. Movement and Coordination looks at how children move their bodies and use their hands.

A helpful tool, The Ounce Scale provides is a division of the age levels (Ounce, 2012). The age levels are broken down between babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. In The Ounce Scale, the babies category is further broken down into four more categories: Babies I (Birth-4 months of age), Babies II (4-8 months of age), Babies III (8-12 months of age), and Babies IV (12-18 months of age). The Toddler category is broken down into three categories: Toddlers I (18-24 months of age), Toddlers II (24-30 months of age), and Toddlers III (30-36 months of age). Preschoolers are defined as 36-42 months of age. The defining of these ages helps to focus in on a specific child and the growth and development of that specific age.

The purpose of all this information and the use of it with The Ounce Scale (2112) is to help build family-professional relationships. Working together, the family unit and educational team can focus on a child wholistically, and individualize for that child's specific learning and development. The Ounce Scale is considered to be more than just an assessment. It is a tool that will allow teachers to observe and get to know individual children.

*Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ).* The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (2012), or ASQ, is a screening tool for children ages one month through 5 ½ years. It looks at strengths and areas of concern in developmental areas, including communication skills, gross motor skills, fine motor skills, problem solving skills, and personal-social skills. It is meant to be family friendly,

in that neither teacher nor parents need to be specially trained in order to administer an ASQ. The only items needed are materials easily found in a home or school environment, the tool itself, and the child being observed. This tool is used by early childhood educators within preschool and child care settings, home care settings, by parents, and even by pediatricians.

The ASQ's intention is to establish from the earliest age possible whether there is an area of concern that needs to be addressed by a family member or professional. The earlier a potential concern can be addressed by a doctor, early interventionist, or teacher, the better chance a child can be given the extra support he or she needs to be successful in schooling and in everyday life.

***Devereux Early Childhood Assessment Program (DECA)***. The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) (2012) is a standardized norm-referenced behavior rating scale. Its purpose is to generate an individual profile that identifies the strengths and comparative weaknesses of a child's social-emotional status, focusing on three domains: initiative, attachment, and self-control. The tool is also used to generate a classroom profile indicating the strengths and comparative weaknesses of the children in the classroom as a whole. Identifying children who may be exhibiting emotional or behavior concerns is a great use of this tool in order to further develop children's resilience in such matters. By supporting "teachers, families, and communities in their efforts to minimize the impact of risk factors that hinder healthy social and emotional development" (Goals section, para 2), children who are at risk can overcome these risk factors. Head Start uses this tool to meet its Performance Standards in fostering healthy social and emotional growth in children. There are strategies offered to teachers and parents, alike, to promote positive social-emotional development, if such strategies are needed. The DECA can be used for infants and toddlers (DECA/IT) for children ages birth through 18 months, and 18-36 months, respectively, and another assessment is available for children ages 2-

5 years. Anyone can complete the questionnaire for a DECA without special training, the person completing the scale being considered the “rater.” The rater should base answers to the questions on direct observations that occur within a specified four week period.

DECA is considered a highly reliable instrument for assessing preschool children’s possible factors in evaluating social-emotional concerns. There have been adaptations made to the DECA for younger ages, forming the DECA-Infant/Toddler assessment, which focuses on ages birth through 18 months of age. By expanding this tool to include the youngest of ages, the administrators have opened the range of reaching children early on in an observational assessment format.

***Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)***. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System™ (CLASS™) is an observational tool that provides a common lens and language focused on what matters—the classroom interactions that boost student learning (Classroom, 2012). The purpose is to use data, through observational techniques, to set and meet school wide learning and developmental goals, and to “shape system-wide reform at the local, state, and national levels” (Tool section, para. 2). The CLASS tool is broken up into three domains: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Within those domains are more specific *dimensions*, including positive climate, negative climate, teacher sensitivity, regard for student perspectives, behavior management, productivity, instructional learning formats, concept development, quality of feedback, and language modeling. Within each of these dimensions is a further breakdown of indicators, followed by behavioral markers to establish a clear and consistent assessment product. Observers trained in CLASS procedures “visit classrooms or view classroom video, recording observations and [assign] numerical codes related to each of the CLASS dimensions” (Observation section, para. 4). The codes are to explain how

classroom interactions take place within that specific classroom, and show where areas of growth are needed or areas of strength are already set in place. The goal of CLASS is to also help teachers build upon their own teaching strengths, grow as professionals, and have more effective interactions with their students.

Downer, Booren, Lima, Luckner, and Pianta (2010) conducted a study on the effectiveness of CLASS on the observers trained in its procedures, the individual differences observations showed in children ages 3-5, and the three-factor structure of CLASS, “to test whether inCLASS scores covary in expected directions with key socio-demographic variables, namely children’s age and gender; and to assess criterion-related validity of inCLASS observations with teacher ratings of children’s behavior”(p. 5). Participants were 164 children, ages 3-5, from 20 different preschool programs in a mid-Atlantic state who were observed using CLASS as the primary assessment tool base. Only 145 children were available for complete data, 82 girls and 63 boys. Caucasian students represented the largest group, with the second being that of African-American. The familial structure among the participants was largely similar in “maternal education, family income, and race/ethnicity” (p. 6). The same can be said for the classroom demographics among the participant teachers’ age and education. Observation visits from the research coordinators to the classroom participants were made twice throughout a semester’s time frame (3-4 months), with observers watching children participate in a series of natural classroom activity settings (i.e., center time, group time). Teachers also showed their usage of CLASS observational techniques throughout their observed visit from the research coordinators. From all the observations and statistical data gathered, findings “suggest that the inCLASS has the potential to provide an authentic, contextualized assessment of young children’s classroom behaviors, with implications for complementing other early childhood

education assessments, understanding children's adjustment to classroom situations, and linking assessment with relevant intervention" (p. 11).

### ***Development Assessment of Young Children (DAYC)***

The Developmental Assessment of Young Children (DAYC) is a norm-referenced assessment targeting ages birth through 5 years (Development, 2012). Its purpose is to determine eligibility for special educational services, and to monitor progress as a result of possible special instruction. There are five domains assessed within the DAYC: adaptive behavior, cognitive development, communication, physical development, and social-emotional development. You cannot validly complete this assessment without being specially trained in its program details. The assessment is completed through the use of interviews, observations, or direct assessment.

The tools mentioned above are widely used in early childhood settings, from Early Head Start, to Area Education Agencies, to home child care centers. The tools' purposes range in assessing a child's overall growth in all areas of development, to more specific areas, such as child-teacher interactions and possible special needs services support. The various types of observational techniques used in early childhood classrooms can help make these tools valid for families' learning. They can also help administrators realize the potential of an early childhood program, and the teachers with the children can be given the support needed to help each student grow and flourish.

## **Chapter III**

### **The Project**

#### **Describe the Project in Detail**

This module will be offered in three evening sessions, the sessions taking place for two hours each, and be available to current early childhood educators, or those in training, either in a preschool, daycare, or home-based child care environment. The interested participants for this training will register through Child Care Resource and Referral's online training registry. This module can also be offered to college students hoping to learn more about observational and assessment techniques. Based on a specific professor's request, the training also could be provided to university students during an extended class period.

#### **General Overview of Project**

There will be three training sessions to attend, with a four week observational and information gathering period in between sessions. At the first session, there will be information given, via PowerPoint, that offers participants the background information previously presented in this review, as well as training on the formal assessments mentioned. Formal assessment tools will be examined, exploring their components and how they can effectively be implemented in an early childhood classroom. The lecture will include reference to research based articles to provide credence to the content of the lecture. The second session will consist of viewing videos of children in their natural classroom settings and participating in using various examples of assessment tools available to early childhood providers. Participants will also have the chance to discuss their current observational data and implementation tools that worked best for them in the classroom. The third session will be to discuss the final reflections from each individual teacher about how observation is effective in early childhood classrooms, stating various

strategies and tools used to best gain success from students. In between sessions, an online discussion board will be established, via blogger. Participants will be required to visit the discussion board twice a week with questions and comments. Each participant will be asked to give input on at least two other participants' questions or comments, as well as post their own question or comment.

Participants of this training will be provided a variety of handouts upon arrival at each session. They will receive a copy of the PowerPoint presentation, with space for notes to be taken under each slide. There will be a variety of assessment tools used throughout the training, with participants having the opportunity to practice completing assessments, and keeping them for future reference. Participants will also receive various articles and reference lists as resources on assessment tools and information for the future.

At the end of each presentation session, an evaluation of the presentation will be available to attendees, to be collected by the presenter. The data compiled from the evaluations will be used to update the presentation annually and to prepare for the next session of the series, as well as to gather insight on how to make the presentation more effective to various students engaging in the process.

### **Presentation**

In this section, I will provide a detailed agenda for the professional development module's overview. The presentation will be offered as a three session course, running two hours each session, with a four week observational and informational gathering period in between each session. Participants will need to register for the course prior to the first session. The first session will be offered during the second week of public school attendance, the first Monday of September, from 6:30-8:30 pm. There will be a 10 minute break offered from 7:10-7:20 pm. The

second session will take place the first Monday of October, with the same time frames. The third session will be completed on the final Monday of October with the same time frames.

Participants receive full credit for this module if they attend all three sessions and participate in the online discussions throughout module.

### **Session I: Observation as an Assessment Tool in Early Childhood Classrooms**

Session I of the observational professional development module will look closely at research related to using observation techniques in completing assessment tools in early childhood classrooms. Participants will arrive at the designated classroom site, where they will sign in on the attendance sheet. They will gather the handouts prepared for them. A PowerPoint presentation will begin. A handout of the presentation will be available, with note taking spaces embedded. The trainer will discuss the techniques and options available to each participant. After a 10-minute break, the participants will look closely at the components of various assessment tools available to use in early childhood classrooms: Creative Curriculum Gold, The Ounce Scale, Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQs), Devereux Early Childhood Assessment Program (DECA), Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and Development Assessment of Young Children (DAYC). There will be copies of example tools to explore, and make notes on. Adapted sample forms will be available for participants to take with them to the field for practice work. If the participants school or center already uses the tools available, those may be used in the field, as well. Participants will also discuss more closely the various implementation measures available and used in early childhood classrooms, hopefully deciding what techniques might work best for them in their classrooms. At the end of the session, participants will be asked to implement these techniques in classrooms for four weeks, documenting how they used

the techniques, what worked, what did not. Also, participants will be encouraged to preview the tools to be discussed in the next session.

### **Session II: Data Gathering and Assessment Tool Usage.**

Session II will take place after the participants examine what they learned from session I, and begin to implement observation techniques in their own early childhood classrooms. Participants were to have used observational techniques offered in session I. They will bring these observations to session II with them, and we will begin to look at the fundamentals of effective observation writing, and how that translates to valid assessment tools. We will also look at various videos and photographs for more observational writing practice, as well as begin to fill out assessment tools. At the end of session II, participants will have a more comprehensive view of exactly how to validly record observations and implement them in their classroom. They will practice for another four weeks, continue with observational gathering, and complete formal assessments on all their students. The goal will be to come back to session III and discuss findings of effective techniques used.

### **Session III: The Final Products and Outcomes**

Session III will look at the final product of the assessment tools and offer insight into the purpose of observational techniques as a formal assessment tool in early childhood classrooms. Observations recorded will be discussed among the participants. Final assessment observations on specific students will be examined and their validity discussed. Participants will have the opportunity for an open-forum of what worked best for each individual classroom, teacher and student.

Once the sessions are completed, the participants should have a better understanding of how assessment tools can be effectively and validly used in early childhood classrooms.

Participants will be able to return to their own classrooms with insight as to what techniques worked best when observing their students. A second outcome will be for teachers to understand their individual students' learning styles and gain the best outcome for their students' development through observation and assessment.

## Chapter IV

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Conclusions

Observation is used as assessment in early childhood for both preschoolers, and the infant and toddler ages. By supplying a model of how to incorporate observational techniques that can be used by educators in assessment tools, younger students can learn and succeed in school with valid curriculums and authentic goals being met.

For preschoolers, observation is used in developmentally appropriate ways in order for children to feel engaged. Observation is also used to individualize for each student in order to gain insight on how to set up the curriculum to best meet their needs. Various implementation methods are used to show how these observational techniques can be measured on valid assessment tools, such as checklists, work sampling, and running records.

Infant and toddler early childhood teachers use documentation to involve the family unit in the students' developmental milestones. Families are the child's first teacher, so their input and involvement will allow the child to flourish and engage in school, as well as at home. Early intervention professionals are also proponents for using observation in assessment tools in home settings. The earlier a child can receive services for various disabilities or other risk factors that could lead to educational or developmental delay, the better final outcome for that child. Direct observation, anecdotal records, and portfolios are used to aid classroom teachers in exploring the observations recorded and show the students' progress in their developmental stages.

#### Identification and Synthesis Insights

Observational techniques in the classroom are widely available, and I have used many in order to effectively complete formal assessment tools in my own infant and toddler early

childhood classrooms. For example, writing down quick notes on a Post-It about a child doing a water activity, with goals for math and science knowledge (learning how the water splashes or watching it drip from a strainer) and fine motor skills (to squeeze water from a sponge), is a quick and easy way to gain an anecdotal observation that can be used when filling out a child's Creative Curriculum Gold assessment chart. I have found that having video and pictorial evidence to look back on is also quite helpful when completing observations and completing assessments.

For group work, in older preschool classrooms, running records have been used to quickly gather data to be used in assessment tools. When having a group math lesson for 4-year-olds using patterning and sequencing, a teacher can have a record available to record how many times the students place the tiles in the correct sequence.

### **Recommendations**

There are many effective techniques of observational implementation and each teacher needs to find his or her own way of successfully using them within the classroom. What works best for one teacher in the classroom, might not work for another. The same can be said for each classroom, from year to year: what works best for a group of children one year, in terms of assessing specific goals, might not work for the next year's children. For example, a teacher with a class of 13 5-year-olds, may have a group who is very content with reading and writing, which makes it much easier to assess and observe their specific literacy levels and determine what they know about early writing. However, the next year, the new group of 5-year-olds coming in may be more high energy, so finding a different way to assess their writing may have to be implemented (i.e., making blueprint plans in the block center).

### **Future Projects/Research**

There is not enough research to help early childhood teachers fully implement observation in all classroom settings. Lack of professional development training for teachers also leads to the inadequate number of tools used by teachers in the early childhood field. My goal is that this professional development module will help colleagues explore questions and assessment tools, leading to further research about the positive effects of early childhood assessment tools and how they can be implemented in all early childhood settings.

### **Educational Policies**

Formal assessment usage among teachers, and teachers in training, is essential to establish appropriate assessment of children's development and learning. Having required and worthwhile professional development to discuss the importance of assessment tools from the earliest of ages, and ways to implement such tools, is a needed by many early childhood educators. For example, if the Department of Human Services (DHS) were to state that, when relicensing a center, its director and lead classroom teachers have to complete sessions about assessment each year, then that center would improve its use of observational assessment of children.

Administrators need assessments to prove that children are learning what they are intended to learn, hence providing an argument for the funding needed to set that learning in motion. While this is more prevalent for K-12 and college atmospheres, the use of assessment tools in early childhood programs from birth has the same affect. There needs to be proof that there is a reason to keep such programs alive, and testing is one of those ways. Using the observational techniques mentioned, these assessments can be performed validly, and appropriately for the youngest of children to gain their best potential. Teachers should be required to seek professional development trainings, and training within the assessment realm

would be ideal. It would also be helpful for all educational institutions to require their teachers in training to complete an assessment course before entering the teaching field. Informing all teachers about the quality of observational assessment for all children, from an early age, is essential.

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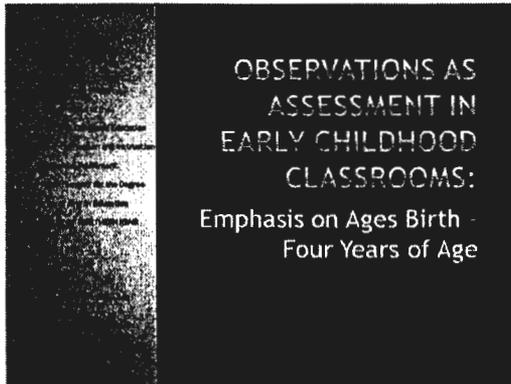
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## Appendix

### PowerPoint Slides



#### PURPOSE OF OBSERVATIONS

- Show growth
  - Children's development
  - Teacher's ability to teach
  - Families as a unit
  - Center/Program goals being met
  - Licensing/Accreditation/Governing facilities keeping track of all growth
- Use for specific assessment tools
- Meet licensing/accreditation/administrative goals

#### VALUE OF OBSERVATIONS

- Children's individual learning styles
- DAP
- Family unit involved
- Early intervention when needed/special needs capitalized on
- Objectivity required
- Not enough research on use of
- Not many tools available

#### DEFINITIONS

- **Alternative Assessment** - "drawn from functional assessment and intervention approaches that focus on observing children's behavior in everyday home and classroom activities. comprise various methods to assess children's performance including structured in-depth observations, checklists, anecdotal notes, children's work samples, tables, and time sampling." (Wolman, McCubbin, & Carbery, 2006, p. 104)
- **Anecdotal Records** - "informal observations" that "teachers make for future reference and as an aid to understanding some aspect of the child's personality or behavior" (Bentzen, 1993, p. 177)
- **Assessment** - "basic process of finding out what the children in [the] classroom, individually and as a group, know and can do in relation to their optimum development and to the goals of the program"; more specifically, it is "the process of gathering information about children from several forms of evidence, then organizing and interpreting that information" (McAlise, Long, & Bodrove, 2004, p. 3). **Assessment** - "act of or instance, real actual" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2011)
- **Checklists** - "any record that denotes the presence or absence of something" and are used "to record the occurrence of specific behaviors in a given context" (Bentzen, 1993, p. 106)
- **Direct Observation** - "an act of gathering information by noting facts or occurrences" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2011)
- **Duration Records** - "variation of the frequency count" that takes place "when the length of the behavior is more useful to know than just its frequency" (Bentzen, 1993, p. 101)
- **Event Sampling** - "only one samples from the child's behavior stream, namely, specifically defined behaviors or events" (Bentzen, 2002, p. 88-89)
- **Evidence** - "an outward sign or indication" that in child assessment "could be an indication of a child's development or learning" (McAlise, Long, & Bodrove, 2004, p. 3).
- **Frequency Count** - "observer makes a mark on an observation sheet every time a particular event occurs" (Bentzen, 1993, p. 101)

#### DEFINITIONS

- **Infant/Toddler Age** - "children ages birth to 36 months" (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009, p. 53)
- **Portfolio** - "purposeful collections of work that illustrate children's efforts, progress, and achievements"; "work that children do in the school as part of the ongoing learning process in the classrooms" (Helm, Baneka, Stamminger, 1999, p. 57)
- **Preschool Age** - "children ages 36-42 months" (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009, p. 53)
- **Rater** - "a person who estimates or determines a rating" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2011)
- **Scaffolding** - "a supporting framework" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2011)
- **Screening** - "a brief assessment procedure designed to identify children who, because they might have a learning problem or disability, should receive more extensive assessment" (Meyers & Adams-Burnett, 2005, p. 5)
- **Systematic Observation** - "gathering information about children (by) watching and listening to them" (McAfee and Legons, 2011, p. 51)
- **Time Sampling** - an "observe watches and records selected behaviors during preset uniform time periods and at regularly recurring or randomly selected intervals" (Bentzen, 1993, p. 77)
- **Work Sampling** - "performance assessment that provides an alternative to group-administered, norm-referenced achievement tests in preschool through fifth grade"; "its purpose is to document and assess children's skills, knowledge, behavior, and accomplishments across a wide variety of curriculum on multiple occasions" (Helm, Baneka, Stamminger, 1999, p. 2-3)

#### OBSERVATIONS IN PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM SETTING

- Individual learning styles
- Assess learning in DAP way
- Implementation methods
  - Checklists
  - Event Sampling
  - Frequency Records
  - Duration Records
  - Work Sampling

## OBSERVATIONS IN INFANT/TODDLER CLASSROOM SETTINGS

- Family and school involvement
- Early intervention
- Implementation methods:
  - Direct Observation
  - Anecdotal Records
  - Portfolio

## TYPES OF ASSESSMENTS USING OBSERVATIONS

- Creative Curriculum Gold
- Ounce Scale
- Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)
- Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
- Development Assessment of Young Children (DAYC)

## SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

- Creative Curriculum Gold
  - [Creative Curriculum Gold](#)
- Ounce Scale
  - [Ounce Scale](#)
- Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)
  - [Ages & Stages Questionnaire \(ASQ\)](#)
- Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)
  - [Devereux Early Childhood Assessment \(DECA\)](#)
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
  - [Classroom Assessment Scoring System \(CLASS\)](#)
- Development Assessment of Young Children (DAYC)
  - [Development Assessment of Young Children \(DAYC\)](#)

## PRACTICE

- (QRS Videos)
- (Classroom Videos)
- (Classroom Portfolios)

The Observation Record	Used by [teachers] to record observations of children's behavior and keep track of their development.
The Family Album	Used by families with [teacher] guidance to collect their observations, photos, and mementos of their child's growth and development.
The Developmental Profiles and Standards	A rating scale used to evaluate children's growth and development at the end of each of the eight age levels contained within The Ounce Scale. Each item on the Developmental Profiles is described in the accompanying Standards.

Personal Connections	It's About Trust	How children show trust
Feelings About Self	Learning About Me	How children express who they are
Relationships With Other Children	Child to Child	How children act around other children
Understanding and Communicating	Baby, Toddler, and Preschooler Talk	How children understand and communicate
Exploration and Problem Solving	Baby, Toddler, and Preschooler Discoveries	How children explore and figure things out
Movement and Coordination	Babies, Toddlers, and Preschoolers in Motion	How children move their bodies and use their hands

Babies I: Birth - 4 months Babies II: 4-8 months Babies III: 8-12 months Babies IV: 12-18 months	Toddlers I: 18-24 months Toddlers II: 24-30 months Toddlers III: 30-36 months	Preschoolers: 36-42 months
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