

DAP: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing Children's Development and Learning

The following practices for observation, documentation, and assessment are developmentally appropriate for children from birth through the primary grades.

A. Observation, documentation, and assessment of young children's progress and achievements is ongoing, strategic, reflective, and purposeful. Educators embed assessment-related activities in the curriculum and in daily routines to facilitate authentic assessment and to make assessment an integral part of professional practice. They create and take advantage of unplanned opportunities to observe young children in play and in spontaneous conversations and interactions, in adult-structured assessment contexts as well as when children are participating in a group activity and doing an individual activity. Observations, documentations, and the results of other formal and informal assessments are used to inform the planning and implementing of daily curriculum and experiences, to communicate with the child's family, and to evaluate and improve educators' and the program's effectiveness. Especially in K–3 classrooms, care must be taken to avoid overuse of standardized assessments, which can cause stress for young children and interfere with time for learning. Educators limit the use of digitally-based assessments, especially for young children who (appropriately) should have limited exposure to screen media.

B. Assessment focuses on children's progress toward developmental and educational goals. Such goals should reflect families' input as well as children's background knowledge and experiences. They should be informed by developmental milestones including use of state early learning standards. Goals should be aspirational and achievable and should foster a sense of pride and accomplishment for educators, families, and children. Children, educators, and families should have opportunities to celebrate both small and large achievements, while recognizing that all children need time to build mastery on a current skill before progressing to the next challenge.

C. A system is in place to collect, make sense of, and use observations, documentation, and assessment information to guide what goes on in the early learning setting. Educators use this information in planning curriculum and learning experiences and in moment-to-moment

interactions with children—that is, educators continually engage in assessment for the purpose of improving teaching and learning. Educators also encourage children to use observation and, beginning in the preschool years, documentation to reflect on their experiences and what they have learned.

D. The methods of assessment are responsive to the current developmental accomplishments, language(s), and experiences of young children. They recognize individual variation in learners and allow children to demonstrate their competencies in different ways. Methods appropriate to educators' assessment of young children, therefore, include results of their observations of children, clinical interviews, collections of children's work samples, and children's performance on authentic activities. For children who speak a language the educators do not know, native speakers of the child's language such as family or community members may need to be recruited to assist with the assessment process. A plan should be in place for employing volunteer and paid interpreters and translators as needed and providing them with information about appropriate interactions with young children and ethics and confidentiality, as well as about the features and purposes of the screening or assessment tool. Once collected, the results are explained to families and children (as appropriate) in order to extend the conversations around what is collected, analyzed, and reflected upon.

E. Assessments are used only for the populations and purposes for which they have been demonstrated to produce reliable, valid information. If required to use an assessment tool that has not been established as reliable or valid for the characteristics of a given child or for the intended use, educators recognize the limitations of the findings, strive to make sure they are not used in high-stakes decisions, and advocate for a different measure.

F. Decisions that have a major impact on children, such as enrollment or placement, are made in consultation with families. Such decisions should be based on multiple sources of relevant information, including that obtained from observations of and interactions with children by educators, family members, and specialists as needed.

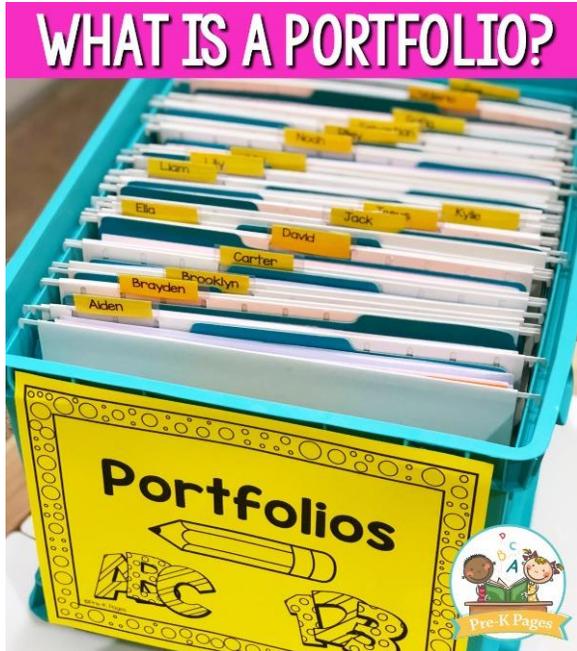
G. When a screening assessment identifies a child who may have a disability or individualized learning or developmental needs, there is appropriate follow-up, evaluation, and, if needed, referral. Screening is used to identify issues needing more thorough examination by those qualified to do so; it is not used to diagnose

or label children. Families are involved as essential sources of information.

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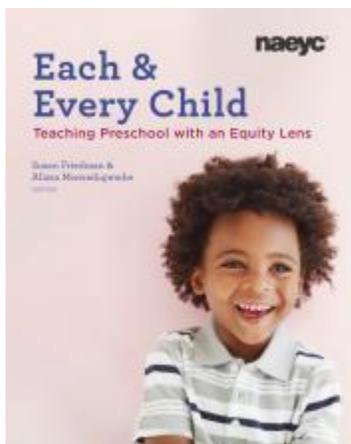
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The following article is an excerpt from [Each and Every Child: Teaching Preschool with an Equity Lens](#).



Using the Thinking Lens to reflect further on my role with the children, families, and colleagues, I thought about the following:

- **What is my role as the children’s teacher?** I would like to learn alongside the children as well as be a leader in helping to guide their critical thinking and problem solving around social justice issues. I want them to be well prepared for their future history and civics classes and, as an essential part of that preparation, I want them to develop their power to make the world better.
- **What do children want to know? What do children already know and understand?** Children have questions about

what is happening in the world today and about history. I planned to observe, listen, and think deeper with the children about these questions.

- **What is developmentally appropriate and socially and emotionally appropriate for young children?** As I listened to the children’s questions, I thought about the best way to answer. How much should children know about past and present injustices? How much background knowledge did I need to provide for them to think meaningfully about social justice issues? Was I telling them enough? Was I going too far? I planned to do research and collaborate with my colleagues and the children’s families to agree on what is appropriate for the different age groups.
- **How can I help children feel safe with all the scary things going on in our world?** Often children come to school and share knowledge they have learned at home about our current political climate or about violence in their communities or other places. What is my role when these conversations emerge? How can I help them develop their sense of safety?
- **How can I introduce powerful “Peace Heroes” in a positive way?** An important part of my anti-bias teaching is exposing children to a diverse group of leaders we call Peace Heroes from history and from today. I purposefully select Peace Heroes from around the world, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malala Yousafzai, and Mahatma Gandhi, and also from our community, such as Harvey Milk (California’s first openly gay elected official). I know I have to provide context to explain these leaders’ accomplishments, but should I include information about the violence that was often a part of these people’s stories? If yes, how might I do that?

[“What About People Like Me?” Teaching Preschoolers About Segregation and “Peace Heroes” \(Excerpt\) | NAEYC](#)



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**If toddlers ran the
Oscars it would
have categories
like:
"Best Dramatic
Tantrum in a
Costco."**

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