OFFICE OF
Early Learning
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Director Toolkit: Decision Making
Data-Informed Decision Making

Formal and Informal Assessments

What is Assessment?

Assessment is a method for collecting information about something you want to measure. Educators collect information by conducting observations, screenings or using a variety of assessment tools to determine if children are meeting learning goals. Assessment information can be used to make instructional changes and curriculum adjustments. Instructors assess their children both informally and formally.

Formal Assessments are pre-planned, prescribed i.e. may include time limits, instructional and scoring procedures, and administration guidelines. Scores from formal assessments are usually compared to the scores of a normative (or comparison) group to ensure they are reliable and valid. Formal tests usually fall into the following categories: Achievement tests, Readiness tests, Developmental screening tests, Intelligence tests and Diagnostic tests. Examples of formal assessments are *Battelle Developmental Inventory, Learning Accomplishment Profile (LAP-D), Developmental Indicators for Assessment of Learning (DiaL-3).*

Informal Assessments such as observing children during both instructional and non-instructional activities are not data driven but rather content and performance driven. Informal assessments rely more heavily on observational and work sampling techniques that continually focus on child performance, processes, and products over selected periods of time and in a variety of contexts. Informal assessments use observation and screening techniques to provide information. Examples of informal assessments include observation, portfolios, anecdotal notes and checklists.

Screening assessments give teachers valuable information about where children are developmentally. They sort information based on defined criteria and help determine individual learning goals. Examples of screening assessment are *Early Screening Inventory, Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL-3) and Ages and Stages Questionnaire*.

Screening is a process designed for the purpose of identifying potential problems in learning or development. Screening instruments are quickly and easily administered to identify children who need more extensive assessment. Screening is a vital assessment activity in almost all early childhood programs because positive developmental and academic outcomes are associated with early identification of and attention to problems.

Progress Monitoring assessments provide teachers information on each child's progress toward learning goals and whether the core curriculum is effective for the majority of the children. Progress monitoring assessments are administered multiple times throughout the year both formally and informally and can guide next steps in planning for instruction. Examples of progress monitoring assessments are *HighScope Child Observation Record (COR), Learning Accomplishment Profile-Diagnostic (LAP-D) and Teaching Strategies GOLD^{TM} (Creative Curriculum).* The Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Assessment is a formal progress monitoring assessment used in many preschool classrooms in Florida early learning programs.

Instructors make decisions about children's needs every day. Gathering data about children to make decisions about their learning and development is a central part of the instructor's role. A good portion of this data is based on informal assessment with learning outcomes and instructional decisions determined by formal assessments.