

Topic: Use assessment data from multiple sources to create, modify and adapt a safe learning environment that promotes the achievement of all learners.

Bagnato, S. J., McLean, M., Macy, M., & Neisworth, J. T. (2011). Identifying instructional targets for early childhood via authentic assessment: Alignment of professional standards and practice-based evidence. *Journal of Early Intervention, 33*, 243-253.

Context

Since the passage of PL 99-457 in 1986, much has been accomplished in the field of early childhood intervention in identifying proper assessment and intervention practices for children birth through 5 years of age with disabilities. Several approaches to assessment, intervention, and performance evaluation have been developed over the past 25 years and continue to be the foundation of what is practiced today.

Purpose of Article

The purpose of this article was to review assessment practices in early childhood intervention (ECI) since the passage of PL 99-457 and outline important issues for future practices.

Influences of PL 99-457 on Assessment Practices

One of the most important influences of PL 99-456 on assessment practices was the support for services in inclusive settings or natural/typical environments. This provision reinforced the notion that assessments and interventions would need to be conducted through ongoing observations of the child in everyday classroom activities and home routines.

The publication of recommended practices by the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) also influenced assessment practices. Today, eight standards for developmentally appropriate and authentic assessment procedures serve as the guide for assessment practices. Those standards include:

1. Acceptability: social worth and detection of socially desired competencies,
2. Authenticity: natural observation methods and context,

3. Collaboration: parent- professional teamwork,
4. Evidence: disability design/evidence-based,
5. Multifactors: synthesis of ecological data
6. Sensitivity: fine content/measurements gradations
7. Universality: equitable design/individual accommodations, and
8. Utility: usefulness for intervention based on functional, teachable competencies. (p. 245)

Influence of Practice-Based Research on Assessment Practices

Although much has been written about the importance of using evidence-based practices (EBP) based on randomized clinical trials and experimental control group research to guide educational practices, researchers in ECI have supported practice based evidence (PBE) “emphasizing research that is conducted in real-world settings with real-world challenges (vs. contrived, laboratory-like circumstances)” (p. 246). Five assessment methodologies were developed from PBE over the past 25 years, including:

1. Authentic assessment: assessments that used observations and documentation in everyday routines to identify functional skills and needs,
2. Curriculum-based assessment: assessments that are linked to a curriculum for goal planning, instruction, and progress monitoring (i.e., Assessment, Evaluation, Programming Systems for Infants and Children –AEPS),
3. Functional content and objectives: assessments that focus on competencies that were deemed socially valued, functional, strength based, universal, generalizable, and promoted success & personal independence,

4. Curriculum alignment with early learning standards and outcomes: assessments and curriculum that align with state and/or national early learning standards (i.e., Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Frameworks),
5. Individually designed instructional targets: assessments that are individualized to the child and monitored for each child’s learning targets.

Issues that will Influence Assessment Practices in the Future

Five issues were raised that could have a significant impact on policy, practice, and research in assessment practices in ECI. Those issues include:

1. Portable technology for ongoing authentic assessment: the use of video and computer-based-technology will allow practitioners to better document data on authentic assessment observations and skill development;
2. Unified early learning standards/outcomes: the development of a set of federal early learning standards could enable professionals to implement assessments for all children thereby integrating the nations ECI system (e.g., Early Head Start, Head Start, Early Intervention, public and private early care and education);
3. High-stakes testing for accountability: professionals in ECI strongly opposed the use of high-stakes assessments and instead promote policies that support “data on programmatic variables, such as type and intensity of intervention ... over time to promote intraindividual child progress” (p. 251);
4. Preparing qualified professionals: a variety of university and professional development approaches must be taken to prepare high quality personnel in ECI practices. Community based mentoring and coaching models hold much promise;
5. Scalability of individualized instruction: practitioners must find a way to implement evidence-based practices while working in authentic settings with fewer resources and greater demands for accountability.

Conclusion

The article provided an overview of assessment practices that have been implemented since the passage of PL 99-457, and the influence of practice-based research on assessment methodologies. The field of ECI faces several issues that will influence assessment, intervention, and progress evaluation practices in the future, including the use of technology, adoption of national early learning standards, the use of high-stakes

testing, the need for personnel preparation, and the dilemma of scaling up intervention practices.

About Research-to-Practice Briefs

Research-to-Practice Briefs provide summaries of key studies that inform practice related to early childhood special education. The series is designed specifically to support community college faculty who prepare candidates to work with children with special needs in the early childhood setting.

About the ACCEPT Project

The ACCEPT (Advancing Community College Efforts in Paraprofessional Training) Project is a federally-funded cooperative agreement between the U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte College of Education. The focus of this effort is the inclusion of special education content in the coursework and experiences provided within the associate degree program in early childhood education at targeted state-supported community colleges in North Carolina.

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