

Authentic Child Assessment

Authentic child assessment practices include methods and strategies for identifying the contextual and adult behavior that promote a child's participation and learning in everyday activities. The assessment practices involve observing children's engagement in everyday activities, the learning opportunities that occur in the activities, child strengths and abilities displayed in the activities, and the adult behavior that can support child participation and learning in the activities.

Learning Guide:

Using Authentic Assessment to Promote Children's Learning

- Observe each child in the classroom and talk with parents and other caregivers to identify the kinds of everyday activities that make up the child's life. What are each child's activities and routines in home, community, and classroom settings? What are their play activities (e.g., drawing, painting, doll play, sand and water play), music/movement activities (e.g., singing, playing Simon Says), physical activities (e.g., playing chase, swinging, climbing, playing ball), adult-child activities (e.g., looking at books, playing lap games), and everyday routines (e.g., toileting, dressing, washing hands, mealtime)?
- Identify each child's strengths and interests in everyday activities—the materials, people, events, and actions that are a child's favorites or preferences, that make the child smile and laugh, that get the child excited, that capture the child's attention, and that keep the child engaged.
- How does a child participate in everyday activities? What types of abilities does the child use in interactions with toys, materials, and people? Pay particular attention to skills and abilities that are just emerging.
- Note the activities and conditions (e.g., where, when, what materials, what adult interactions, etc.) under which the child stays engaged and does his or her best in the activities. Identify the different types of learning opportunities that are or could be available in the activities. For example, playing at the water table provides a child opportunities to splash in the water, pour and measure it, experiment with what floats and sinks, compare the amount of water in different containers, share containers with friends, and so forth.
- Use the assessment information to identify classroom activities and adult-child interactions that can be used to promote a child's engagement in the activities, maximize the child's learning opportunities, and promote child participation and learning in classroom activities.
- Monitor each child's learning over time by continuing to observe child behavior and participation in everyday classroom activities for signs of growth, new abilities, and child pleasure in accomplishment.
- Use all of the above information to determine whether classroom activities should be continued, modified, or changed to maximize child interest, participation, and learning in the classroom.

Watch a video of this Learning Guide

You'll know the practice is working if ...

- Children participate in more everyday classroom activities
- Children are engaged in multiple learning opportunities in everyday classroom activities
- Children use new behavior for interacting with people and materials

A Quick Peek

Iker, who has visual impairments, is a new member of Dan's preschool class. Dan observed Iker in classroom activities to gather information for planning activities that would encourage Iker's participation with the other children. On a hot summer morning, he watched the children playing outdoors around a lawn sprinkler and noticed Iker scooting across the grass toward the sprinkler, then covering it with his body and laughing with joy. Other children, initially annoyed at Iker's interruption of their play, softened at Iker's continuing laughter and began to laugh with him. Dan observed Iker's strategy, his ability to move about the yard, and the opportunities he had to experience the water and interact with others. Recalling how much Iker had enjoyed the water table earlier in the week, Dan made a mental note about Iker's general interest in water play. He shared his observations with the other teachers, and they made plans to engage Iker in additional activities with water (e.g., washing toy cars and trucks in a dishpan, painting the playground equipment with a bucket of water, using the hose in the sandbox). They discussed how they could help Iker and his classmates interact during the activities in fun and interesting ways to encourage all of them to participate.



Learn more about authentic assessment in everyday activities from online resources such as:

- [Assessment, the big picture: What is it? Why do it?](#) (Penn State)
- [Authentic Assessment in Infant & Toddler Care Settings: Review of Recent Research](#) (Muskie School of Public Service)