Contract No.: 233-02-0086; HHSP233200700001T
MPR Reference No.: 6337-420

# Learning from Assessment Toolkit

***March 2009***

Submitted to:

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Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
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# LEARNING FROM ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

Together, Head Start program directors, managers, teachers, home visitors, and other staff strive to improve the well-being of a diverse group of children with unique learning and emotional needs. A first step in meeting those needs is to identify clearly what they are—by engaging in ongoing child assessment activities throughout the Head Start year. The ultimate purpose of collecting child assessment information is to use it to improve outcomes, either at the child, classroom, or program level. The *Learning from Assessment Toolkit* is designed to support Head Start staff in these assessment activities. This kit contains a wealth of materials, including presentations, handouts, guided practice exercises and descriptions of additional resources intended to support program staff in designing, conducting, and interpreting child assessments. All of these materials are focused on the use of child assessments for local program purposes.

We have developed this toolkit with the needs of adult learners in mind. We recognize that directors, teachers, coordinators, and other staff members bring their own set of experiences and knowledge to the assessment process, and we hope to build on that background. We offer flexibility in the selection and use of the activities. The best learning experiences are those that actively engage the learners, either by reflecting or by doing, and that connect with learners' personal experiences to make the content meaningful. Our approach is to ensure that the materials include multiple points of entry and that learning objectives are revisited in additional exercises. These materials are designed to promote interactions, discussions, and dialogue that tap the expertise contained in the learning group. We envision that teachers will work together with a manager in groups to develop and evaluate strategies for assessment and for extending children's learning. Small discussion groups (6-10 teachers) allow greater opportunity for all teachers to be actively involved in the exercises, though all materials can be adapted to work with larger groups.

This toolkit can support Head Start programs regardless of the assessment system already in place or the degree of assessment experience staff members have. No matter what tools you use to assess the children in your program, the materials can enhance your capacity to gather and use information to identify your program's needs and improve outcomes for children. Further, they will help staff develop additional expertise in conducting and interpreting assessments regardless of their background knowledge.

## How to Use the Materials in the *Learning from Assessment Toolkit*

Much like the needs of the children and families you serve, the learning needs of any program are unique. We encourage your program to use toolkit materials selectively to design trainings that will meet your particular needs. Below, we provide a brief introduction to all of the materials included in the toolkit and describe what aspects of assessment they address. We then outline a few suggested training sessions that are tailored both to staff members' skill levels and to programs' key challenges. If none of the suggested sessions suit your needs, we encourage you to design your own, selecting from the materials available in the toolkit. When designing your training, consider the following questions:

- What are your goals for the training session? For example:
    - Provide motivation for doing and using assessment
    - Provide general overview of assessment
    - Ensure that staff learn specific techniques for assessment
    - Provide practice in interpreting and using assessment data

- How much time have you allotted?

- What are the characteristics of the participants? For example:
    - Experience with assessment
    - The size of your group (Can you break down large groups for some of the activities? How many leaders/trainers are available to help facilitate?)
    - Diversity of learning needs

- Which media are you most comfortable using?

- What adjustments do you need to make to the materials you have selected so that they suit your program's needs? Are there examples from your program that would make the activity more meaningful?

With the answers to these questions in mind, you will be able to design a positive learning experience for the members of your staff.

## I. Overarching Slide Presentations:

We have developed five overarching presentations that discuss the importance of conducting frequent child assessments and that highlight key strategies and concepts for gaining the most from the information you collect. Each presentation has an associated script. If only one segment of a particular presentation is necessary for your training session, feel free to break it apart.

- ***Rectangle Exercise (i.e., We're in the Money): Observing to Learn.*** This fun, light-hearted exercise is a kind of warm-up that can be used in any session. The exercise highlights the importance of making focused observations and documenting what you observe. Without looking, participants are asked to recall the details of a familiar object: a $20 bill. The presentation demonstrates that detailed characteristics of something or someone that we encounter in our daily lives—currency or the children in our classrooms—can be difficult to remember unless we purposefully observe and find ways to record our observations. The exercise can be completed in 5-10 minutes.

- **Presentations aimed at Head Start managers** (directors and education coordinators, for example) – The two presentations described below were created to complement one another. Both provide information important for enacting leadership roles in assessment such as developing key assessment systems and communicating with key stakeholders about your program.

    - ***Getting Ready to Get the Most out of Your Child Assessments.*** This presentation provides information important for enacting a leadership role in assessment. In

the first half, it focuses on key preparations for developing an effective assessment system including (1) planning for assessment, (2) organizing for assessment, and (3) assuring assessment quality. Methods for supporting teachers' assessment activities are discussed. In the second half, the presentation focuses on how to use information at a group level to make decisions and identify how to best use resources or what additional resources may be needed to support children's development. Depending on how many suggested discussions are conducted during the presentation, it can be completed 1 to 1 ½ hours.

- ***But What Does It All Mean? Key Concepts for Getting the Most out of Your Assessments.*** This presentation defines and describes a number of important terms associated with research and assessment in a clear, user-friendly manner. The information is intended leave managers feeling empowered to make the best decisions for the children in their programs and to take part in the discussions that shape the priorities of their program. Knowing a handful of key research and assessment concepts will allow managers and other interested staff to take part in discussions at the local, regional, and national levels that focus on the needs of and setting priorities for Head Start programs. By effectively communicating about their programs, managers deepen others' investment in their success. Depending on how many suggested discussions are conducted during the presentation, it can be completed in 1 ½ to 2 hours.

- **Presentations aimed at teachers and other staff**

  - ***Ongoing Assessment: Capturing the Progress of Children's Learning.*** This presentation is aimed primarily at teachers, but also works well as a refresher for managers. It introduces the assessment-instruction cycle: To improve children's learning, teaching should proceed in a cycle of instruction, observation, documentation, and interpretation/hypothesis setting. An introduction to each stage of the cycle as well as an overview of how those stages flow from one to the next is provided. Teachers are encouraged to plan focused observations and identify documentation strategies as they plan instruction. Organizational strategies are discussed. This presentation can be completed in 45 minutes to 1 ¼ hours.

  - ***Documenting Observations.*** Frequent observations and documentation allow program staff to adjust strategies or curricula to improve child outcomes. This presentation, aimed primarily at teachers, identifies multiple strategies for efficiently documenting behavior and development over time and illustrates some of the advantages of different techniques. Strategies discussed include: anecdotal records and forms, journals, checklists, level of assistance records, time samples, language samples, parent information, functional behavior assessment, photographs, videos, and work samples. Programs are encouraged to consider what they need to know and select the documentation tool they deem the best option for efficiently gathering important information. Hyperlinks are provided for publicly available documentation tools. This presentation can be completed in 30-45 minutes.

## II. Guided Practice Exercises

Through guided practice, individuals build on their own experience and expertise to bring their understanding and skills to a new level with the aid of a trainer or facilitator. The guided practice exercises developed for this toolkit are intended for use by managers and education coordinators in training sessions with small groups of teachers, although they can be adapted for larger groups as needed. The exercises are not meant to be used as handouts, but instead as starting points for dialogues and group conversations. These exercises provide teachers the opportunity to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of varied observational assessment techniques that can be used throughout the year to build on what is learned in the periodic assessments conducted to meet federal requirements.

**Exercises have a user-friendly format.** All of the exercises have the same format, and all have accompanying slide presentations and handouts. Each exercise begins with a description of an observational assessment that includes one or more documentation techniques. After the trainer describes the observation, teachers are asked to:

- Reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the documentation technique.
- Work together to interpret the observation.
- Identify areas of Child Outcomes Framework addressed in the observation.
- Discuss next steps for large group and individualized instruction.
- Link those next steps for instruction back to assessment.

Notes and sample responses are provided for all questions to assist the trainer in prompting and guiding discussion.

**Exercise content varies widely to meet unique program needs.** Although the guided practice exercises all follow the same format, the content varies widely in terms of the type of child outcome being assessed, the documentation technique employed and the complexity of the exercise. Some of the exercises address special groups (for example, dual language learners, children with disabilities, infants and toddlers, home visitors), and many address considerations highlighted in our overarching presentations, such as planning ahead, assessing over time, and the need to assess in multiple settings. Many of the characteristics addressed in each guided practice are outlined in the table below. Managers and trainers can select activities that will serve the information needs of the program and that respond to teachers' current level of expertise in assessment. Keep in mind that all of the assessment techniques can be adapted to collect information in any domain of the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework.

**Exercises vary in length from 15 to 40 minutes.** Although the guided practice exercises vary in length, they can all be shortened or extended to match the time you have available. Some of the simpler exercises can be completed in 15 minutes while those that address more complex documentation techniques or multiple variations of techniques can be extended to 30-40 minute time slots.

**Exercises work best with small groups but can be adapted for larger groups.** We expect that teachers will gain the most from the guided practice exercises when working in small groups, where each member of the session has an opportunity to offer insights and opinions and to ask questions. When working with large groups of teachers, or with groups that combine

classroom teachers and home visitors, for example, it may be best to select exercises that provide techniques useful for assessing either individual children or groups. Alternatively, try breaking into smaller groups if additional trainers are available. The trainer should plan ahead by considering how a specific guided practice could be adapted for use in large groups with diverse staff whose assessment needs may vary.

For a brief overview of the domains of the Child Outcomes Framework, the types of documentation, and any special groups addressed in each exercise, see Appendix A.

## III. Handouts

- ***Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording – Behavioral Descriptions.*** This handout provides an overview of how to avoid subjective language when recording information about children's behaviors. The accompanying exercise gives teachers the opportunity to identify objective and subjective language in anecdotal records.
- ***Portfolios.*** This brief handout describes the purpose of portfolios and identifies possible content.

## IV. Annotated Bibliography

The annotated bibliography highlights sources for additional information about various aspects of assessment. Whenever possible, hyperlinks to the materials are provided. Additional resources fall in the following categories:

- Background Materials for Teachers and Practitioners
  - Planning for Assessment
  - Observational Assessment – General
  - Observational Assessment – Portfolios
  - Assessing Specific Populations – Dual Language Learners
  - Assessing Specific Populations – Children with Special Needs
  - Assessing Social-Emotional Development
  - Developmental Continua
- Policy/Assessment Standards and Position Papers
- Head Start Resources
- State Assessment Reports
- Additional Web Resources

## V. Suggested Training Sessions

Below, we outline four sample training sessions using materials from the toolkit. This is not an exhaustive list, but rather provides suggestions exemplifying the varied, creative ways the tools can be integrated into your inservice and training programs. We strongly encourage you to design individualized sessions that meet the specific needs of your program in terms of the information you hope to impart, your staff's current level of expertise in assessment, and the time you have available for training.

***Sample Session I: Introduction to Assessment***
**Timing**: Fall pre-service training, half-day session (approximately 3 hours)

**Audience**: Teachers who all have some experience with assessment but who may need additional assistance in planning assessment systems and getting the most out of specific documentation techniques.

**Goals**:

1. Motivate the importance of assessment.
2. Introduce the assessment-instruction cycle.
3. Guide teachers in identifying the range of information that can be drawn from work samples.
4. Introduce teachers to checklists as a documentation tool.

**Agenda**:

I. Presentation (10 minutes): ***Rectangle Exercise (i.e., We're in the Money): Observing to Learn***

II. Presentation (1 hour): ***Ongoing Assessment: Capturing the Progress of Children's Learning***

III. Discussion (15-30 minutes): Give teachers an opportunity to discuss what kinds of organization techniques they will employ for gathering assessment information and how they will plan to integrate more frequent assessment into their regular classroom activities. Alternatively, have teachers reflect on the need to be objective in assessment. Give them the handout ***Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording–Behavioral Descriptions*** and work together to identify what language is appropriate.

Break (15 minutes)

IV. Guided Practice Exercises (30-60 minutes):

If possible, work in small groups so that each teacher has an opportunity to speak up.

***Name That Tune.*** This guided practice uses a simple checklist to assess a group of children's language development while singing during circle time.

***Drawing Rainbows.*** In this activity, teachers review work samples from one child that have been collected over time (fall and spring). It discusses the importance of combining

jottings with work samples and gives teachers the opportunity to design a checklist that would be helpful for summarizing information in the work samples.

V. Discussion: Give teachers an opportunity to discuss what kind of work samples they might collect during the year or areas of development where checklists might be useful. Teachers with more experience with assessment may be able to share excellent tips.

**Follow-up**: At teacher in-service sessions later in the year, conduct additional guided practice exercises such as ***Angel's Avocado*** to give teachers more practice with interpreting work samples or ***Morning Message*** to introduce teachers to another type of checklist. Alternatively, if you feel your teachers need to learn additional documentation techniques, present ***Documenting Observations*** and select guided practice exercises that highlight the techniques most useful for your program.

***Sample Session II: Building Expertise in Developing Checklists and Coding Schemes***

**Timing**: Monthly inservice sessions (45-60 minutes each)
**Audience**: Teachers with varied expertise in using checklists to record assessments.

**Goals**:

1. Help teachers see how they can use checklists for recording information about groups of students—or individual students—efficiently and flexibly.
2. Introduce teachers to coding schemes they can use in checklists.
3. Once teachers have built expertise in using coding schemes, introduce a greater variety of information that can be collected using coding schemes.
4. Increase teachers' comfort in using and developing codes and checklists to gather information efficiently.

**Agenda**: At each monthly session, conduct a guided practice exercise focused on checklists. As the months progress, vary the type of checklist and coding scheme you describe and discuss. Work in small groups whenever possible so that each teacher has an opportunity to contribute to the discussion. If time permits, discuss with teachers how they might apply the technique addressed in the guided practice exercise in their own classrooms. Work with teachers to develop some coding systems that will be used across classrooms.

September:

Before conducting the guided practice exercise, complete the presentation ***The Rectangle Exercise (i.e., We're in the Money): Observing to Learn*** in order to motivate the importance of recording children's development (5-10 minutes).

***Gripping, Moving, and Pouring.*** In this exercise, a teacher uses a simple checklist to record the dates when children in the classroom demonstrate certain fine motor development skills (15-30 minutes).

October:

***All Kinds of Movement.*** In this activity, teachers are first asked to reflect on a series of anecdotal records that capture motor development in one child. Next, they work together

to plan a sample checklist to capture key milestones they hope all children in their classrooms can achieve (15-30 minutes).

**Discussion.** Give teachers an opportunity to discuss how they typically use anecdotal records and how checklists might be a useful, alternative way to gather the same information. Teachers with more experience with assessment may be able to share excellent tips (15-30 minutes).

November:

***Answering Questions.*** In this exercise, a teacher uses a complex coding scheme to track several children's answers to "wh" questions (what, when, why, etc.) during story time with the help of an assistant teacher. Teachers are also shown how the checklist can be reformulated to capture information on individual children for use in the classroom or in home visits (30-45 minutes).

**Discussion.** Work with teachers to develop some coding systems that will be used across classrooms (15-30 minutes).

***Sample Session III: Assessing Language and Literacy Development in Dual Language Learners***

**Timing**: Half-day inservice that occurs during the summer or winter break, or monthly inservice sessions (45-60 minutes each)

**Audience**: Teachers with varying experience in assessment who have, or soon may have, dual language learners in their classrooms. The number of dual language learners in each classroom may vary.

**Goals**:

1. Introduce teachers to a variety of documentation techniques.
2. Stress the importance of documenting growth and change.
3. Highlight how parents can be involved in various stages of the assessment-instruction cycle.

**Agenda** (if you are using monthly inservice sessions, simply conduct one segment of the agenda in each month):

I. Presentation (45 minutes): ***Documenting Observations***

II. Guided Practice Exercises (1 hour)

***Flowers that Bloom.*** In this exercise, a teacher examines three work samples from one child on which she has jotted a child's statement about the picture. The child's remarks are in both English and Mandarin. Strategies for addressing vocabulary in English and the home language are discussed.

***Cali, Juan, and Carlos at Dramatic Play.*** This exercise presents a running record of three children's interactions in the dramatic play area. Children respond to one another in both English and Spanish. Strategies for extending discussions in both English and Spanish are discussed.

Break (15 minutes)

III. Guided Practice Exercises (75 minutes)

***Watching Dual Language Learners Grow.*** In this activity, the teacher uses a checklist to tally the number of English words identified by children who are dual language learners (each child is shown a group of four pictures and told the name of the item in one of the pictures in English; the child must identify the picture with the named item). The activity is repeated at three points during the year. Suggestions for involving parents in assessment and extending learning are discussed.

***Houses and Homes.*** In this activity, a teacher uses a checklist with a coding scheme to track children's language development in both English and Spanish in a unit on houses and homes over a two-week period. Strategies for involving parents in assessment and extending learning are discussed, as well as how to present information to individual families.

IV. Discussion (15-30 minutes): Give teachers time to plan assessment activities that look at vocabulary and language development. Teachers will share experiences on useful strategies about when and how to collect this information efficiently and reliably in multiple contexts.

***Sample Session IV: Regional Meeting of Head Start Directors/Managers***

**Timing**: Single session (2-2 ½ hours)

**Audience**: Managers who oversee assessment activities in their programs who would like additional information on how to prepare their programs to collect high quality information and how to use the information they collect to learn about program needs.

**Goals**:

1. Provide an overview of key ways that managers can prepare their programs/teachers to collect high quality assessment information.
2. Introduce strategies for interpreting and using aggregated assessment information.

**Agenda**:

I. Presentation (1 ½ hours): ***Getting Ready to Get the Most out of Your Child Assessments.***

II. Discussion (15-30 minutes): Give managers an opportunity to discuss their concerns and challenges when it comes to assessment and to share strategies that they have each found work well. Consider conducting a guided practice exercise so that managers can become familiar with a new approach for training teachers and other staff in assessment.

III. Discussion (15-30 minutes): Provide copies of the annotated bibliography and discuss ways to get more information regarding assessment as needed. Review the other materials in the *Learning from Assessment Toolkit* and decide which ones provide the most appropriate opportunities for enhancing the skills of teachers in their programs.

APPENDIX A

GUIDED PRACTICE ROADMAP

| Guided Practice Exercise | Primary Domain from Child Outcomes Framework | Secondary domains from Child Outcomes Framework(s) | Type(s) of Documentation | Emphasis on Special Groups[1] | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Dual Language Learners | Infant/Toddler | Home Visiting |
| All Kinds of Movement | Physical Development | Social and Emotional Development, Approaches to Learning | Anecdote, Checklist | | | |
| All Newts are Good Newts | Approaches to Learning | Language Development, Science | Verbal Vignette, Running Record | | | |
| Angel's Avocado | Science | Creative Arts, Physical Development | Work Sample | | | |
| Answering Questions | Language Development | Literacy, Mathematics | Checklist | X | | |
| At the Post Office | Language Development | Social and Emotional Development | Work Samples with Dictation | X | | |
| Cali, Juan and Carlos at Dramatic Play | Creative Arts | Language Development, Social and Emotional Development | Running Record | X | | |
| Circles, Circles, Circles | Language Development | Mathematics, Creative Arts | Verbal Vignette | | | |
| Diamond's Diner | Creative Arts | Language Development, Literacy | Checklist, Jottings, Tape Recording | X | | |
| Drawing Rainbows Fall and Spring | Physical Development | Creative Arts, Language, Mathematics | Work Samples with Dictation, Checklist | | | |
| Flowers that Bloom | Science | Creative Arts, Approaches to Learning, Language Development | Work Samples with Dictation | X | | |

[1] Although most of the guided practice exercises can inform work with these special groups, the exercises checked in this section highlight assessment with these groups.

| Guided Practice Exercise | Primary Domain from Child Outcomes Framework | Secondary domains from Child Outcomes Framework(s) | Type(s) of Documentation | Emphasis on Special Groups[1] | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Dual Language Learners | Infant/Toddler | Home Visiting |
| Gripping, Moving, and Pouring | Physical Development | | Checklist | | | |
| Hallie and Hassan: How many are there? | Mathematics | Language Development | Anecdote | | | |
| Houses and Homes | Language Development | Creative Arts | Checklist | X | | |
| I'm a Big Kid Now | Literacy | Social and Emotional Development, Physical Development, Science, Approaches to Learning, | Picture, Jottings | | X | X |
| I'm Just Blowing Bubbles | Physical Development | Approaches to Learning, Language Development, Science | Picture, Jottings | | X | |
| Let's go to the Videotape | Mathematics | Social and Emotional Development | Videotape, Checklist, Chart | | | |
| Maya's Speech | Language Development | | Verbal Vignettes, Jottings | | | |
| Morning Message | Literacy | Approaches to Learning | Anecdotal Record, Checklist | | | |
| Moses and Joannie at the Water Table | Social and Emotional Development | Language Development, Physical Development | Anecdotal Record | | | |
| Ms. Gwendolyn and the Big Book | Literacy | | Checklist | | | |
| Ms. Ramirez's Class at the Water Table | Science | Physical Development, Approaches to Learning, Language Development, Social Emotional Development | Anecdotal Record | | | |
| Name that Tune | Language Development | Creative Arts, Approaches to Learning | Checklist | | | |
| Random Acts of Kindness | Social and Emotional Development | | Event Sampling | | | |

| Guided Practice Exercise | Primary Domain from Child Outcomes Framework | Secondary domains from Child Outcomes Framework(s) | Type(s) of Documentation | Emphasis on Special Groups[1] | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Dual Language Learners | Infant/Toddler | Home Visiting |
| Rhyme Time | Literacy | Language Development | Table | X | | |
| Rosa and Julio in the Library | Literacy | | Checklist | | | |
| Sand Table Selflessness | Social and Emotional Development | Physical Development, Language Development | Anecdotal Record, Checklist | X | | |
| Sharing Stories | Literacy | Social and Emotional Development, Approaches to Learning, Physical Development | Pictures, Anecdotal Record | | X | X |
| Story Style and Structure | Literacy | Language Development | Anecdotal Record | | | |
| Watching Dual Language Learners Grow | Language Development | | Tally Sheet | X | | |
| What Was Your Favorite Part? | Literacy | Language Development, Creative Arts | Work Samples, Jottings, Chart | | | |
| What's Going on at the Math Center | Mathematics | | Time Sampling | | | |
| What's in a Name? | Literacy | Physical Development | Writing Samples | | | |
| Where's the Bear? | Mathematics | Social and Emotional Development | Video, Table with Coding Scheme | | | |
| Wheels on the Bus | Creative Arts | Physical Development, Literacy, Approaches to Learning | Work Samples | | | |