



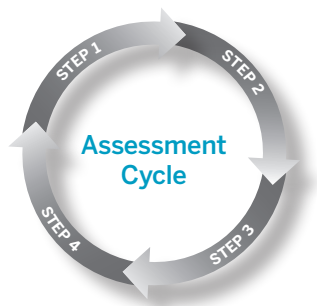
The Importance of the Assessment Cycle in *The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool*

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In early childhood education, assessment is the process of gathering information about children in order to make decisions. Assessment is often equated with the notion of testing to judge a child's abilities, but in actuality, it is a four-step cycle that helps teachers individualize learning for every child. Assessment has four primary purposes:

- to support learning
- to identify special needs
- to evaluate programs and monitor trends
- to respond to program and school accountability requirementsⁱ

Having a process in place for ongoing assessment is essential, as it enables teachers to gather information about each child in order to plan instruction and ensure that every child is making progress. *The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool* has 38 objectives for children's development and learning that serve as a guide for making the assessment process systematic and meaningful. Each objective contains a color-coded progression of development and learning, which includes indicators and examples based on widely held expectations for children from birth through kindergarten.



STEP 1
Observe and Collect Facts

STEP 2
Analyze and Respond

STEP 3
Evaluate

STEP 4
Summarize, Plan,
and Communicate

The Assessment Cycle

Observing and collecting facts is the first of the four steps in the cycle. A teacher's daily job involves continual observations of children. "There is always something new to learn about a child—even a child you think you know well."ⁱⁱ When a teacher observes a child's knowledge, skills, and behaviors and records these observations systematically, she discovers what is unique and special about that child; this forms the basis for building a positive relationship in which teachers can plan experiences that allow the child to flourish.

Analyzing and responding, the second step in the assessment cycle, involves using the information gained during the first step to respond to each child and scaffold his/her learning appropriately. Knowing what each child can do in relation to the objectives for development and learning helps a teacher decide how much support an individual child needs, as well as whether the classroom routines and rules are working for the group as a whole. Teachers use this knowledge to help decide when, what, and how to teach.

Evaluating, the third step, means deciding which indicator of an objective best describes the child's knowledge, skills and behaviors. By consistently analyzing and evaluating their observation notes and portfolio samples, teachers are able to determine each child's level of development in relation to each objective.

Summarizing, planning, and communicating comprise the final step of the assessment cycle. Teachers summarize what they know about each child, develop plans for individual children and the group, and then communicate their findings to families and administrators.

When a teacher shares a child's success with families, whether it is face to face, with a note home, or in a phone call, the child feels validated both by her family caring and by her teacher acting as her advocate.ⁱⁱⁱ

How The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool Supports the Assessment Cycle

Volume 5 of The Foundation, Objectives for Development & Learning, describes in detail the 38 learning objectives in *The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool*. This volume includes the research behind each objective, progressions of development and learning, and practical classroom strategies for promoting children's learning as it relates to each objective. The indicators and examples for each age or class/grade guide teachers in what to look for when making observations. Because the objectives describe widely held expectations for children birth through kindergarten, this resource can be used with all children: those developing according to expectations and those who are advanced, have a developmental delay, have a disability, or lack experience in a particular area.

Volume 1: The Foundation offers a detailed explanation of the four steps of the assessment cycle and suggests strategies to help teachers in each of the cycle phases. *Volume 2: Interest Areas* discusses development in each of the 10 interest areas and the outdoors. This volume and other curricular resources offer specific guidance on observing and responding to children in each of the interest areas, as well as collecting work samples for children's portfolios. These portfolios can later be shared with families and administrators

to demonstrate children's development over time. For instance, in the Toys and Games area, teachers could take a video to document a child connecting three interlocking cubes and saying, "One, two three." As the child's numeracy skills develop, the teacher can record the child counting to a higher number of cubes.

Teachers spend about a quarter to a third of their time in assessment-related activities.^{iv} On the basis of what teachers learn from their review of children's development and learning, they can identify which children would benefit from more focused instruction and practice. Intentional *Teaching Cards™*, one of the Daily Resources of *The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool*, are experiences that support social-emotional, physical, and language development, as well as development and learning in literacy and mathematics. They are typically offered during small-group time, but many are also appropriate for large-group, outdoor, and one-on-one experiences. Each card explains how to implement an activity and includes the objectives addressed by the activity, a list of materials, suggestions to help teachers include all children, and questions to guide observations. One of the most important features of the bilingual *Intentional Teaching Cards™* is the color-coded teaching sequence. It explains how to individualize the learning experience to meet the strengths and needs of every child in the classroom. The color-coding is meant to give a starting point for the activity. For example, in Intentional Teaching Card LL07, "Letters, Letters, Letters," a teacher carrying out this activity with a three-year-old at the beginning of the year may include 10 letters, including those

in the child's name, and ask him to identify familiar letters. If the teacher uses this same *Intentional Teaching Card™* with a four-year-old at the end of the year, she would include all letters and encourage the child to spell his name. In addition, once the teacher has completed an assessment checkpoint, she can use her assessment data to inform her starting point on the teaching sequence. For teachers who use *Teaching Strategies GOLD®*, the color-coding on the teaching sequence matches directly with the color-coding of the assessment system.

Having quick, intentional activities that are rooted in the curricular objectives equips teachers to support children's development and learning during brief moments throughout the day. *Mighty Minutes™*, another of the Daily Resources, explain short activities with songs, chants, rhymes, and games. They can be used anywhere to teach language, literacy, math, science, social studies, or physical skills during "in-between" times, such as when preparing to go outside or gathering children for large-group time. For example, if a teacher has evaluated his observation notes and realizes that some of the children need additional support with Objective 15, "Demonstrates phonological awareness," he may choose from one of the several *Mighty Minutes™* that address phonological awareness. *Mighty Minute 44, "Two Plump Armadillos,"* for example, prompts the teacher to recite the nursery rhyme found on the card and then invite the children to join him in saying the rhyme and adding hand motions. By doing this, the teacher is responding to the need for additional support of children's phonological awareness skills based on earlier observations.

General Information About The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool

The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool encourages exploration and discovery as a way of learning, thus helping children develop confidence, creativity, and lifelong critical thinking skills. It supports children's development and learning in relation to 38 objectives that include predictors of school success and that are aligned to state early learning standards and to the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. Several curriculum resources are devoted to early language and literacy development.

References

- ⁱ Bowman, B.T., Donovan, M.S., & Burns, M.S. (Eds.). (2001). *Eager to learn: Educating our preschoolers*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- ⁱⁱ Jablon, J. R.; Dombro, A.L., & Dichtelmiller, M.L. (2007). *The power of observation* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, LLC. and National Association for the Education of Young Children.
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