



Authentic Assessment and Early Childhood Education— an Update and Resources

The education of young children is at center stage in state and national conversations about school reform.

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Political and educational leaders in Washington, Springfield, and across the country recognize that strong early childhood education programs must be moved toward the top of funding and professional development priorities. Brain and developmental research studies show, that how a child learns before reaching the age of five or six, is basic to his or her educational success throughout life. Fundamental cognitive, physical, emotional, and social skills develop very quickly during a child’s first five years. A preschool teacher, therefore, might be the most important teacher in a child’s life.

A profound and encouraging implication is that early childhood educators – teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and child care providers alike – have grown as professionals. Preschool teachers must now understand research-based child development models, complete rigorous certification training, use effective teaching methods, and participate in ongoing professional improvement.

Authentic assessment – a system of observation, documentation, and analysis that helps track a child’s progress toward meeting early learning expectations or standards – is one of the most important professional tools that early childhood educators use in the classroom. Authentic assessment must go beyond tracking progress. It is considered a crucial part of a good teacher’s curriculum planning and instructional strategy. Indeed, many early childhood educators can now say, “Assessment is not something you do on top of teaching – authentic assessment *is* teaching!”

This edition of *Little Prints* defines authentic assessment and puts it into the larger context of educational testing; describes key features and best practices at the early childhood education level; reports the observations of some of the leading Illinois assessment developers, trainers, and practitioners; and highlights some of the available resources and training.

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Standardized Testing

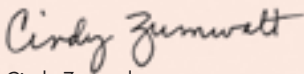
continued from **Authentic Assessment** page 1

Illinois should be proud of its leadership in early childhood education and authentic assessment. Dr. Samuel J. Meisels, President of the Erikson Institute in Chicago, was a pioneer in the development of work sampling, a key part of authentic assessment. Other Illinois leaders involved in assessment have included nationally and internationally recognized educators such as Dr. Lilian Katz, Professor Emerita at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, Dr. Judy Harris Helm, President of Best Practices, Inc., and Kay Henderson, Division Administrator of Early Childhood Education at the Illinois State Board of Education from 1995 to 2011.

Ten years ago, the State adopted Early Learning Standards to align with those for K-12 education. Preschool for All was passed by the State Legislature with the goal of eventually providing early childhood education for all Illinois children. Online and smart phone or tablet tools for recording assessment observations have been piloted in Illinois and include I-TEACHe, created by The Center: Resources for Teaching and Learning with the support of the Illinois State Board of Education.

Whether you are a veteran, or new to the field, we hope that this issue of *Little Prints* is of value to you. Again, we are convinced that the effective use of authentic assessment at the preschool level is central to what it means to be an early childhood education professional.

Best regards,



Cindy Zumwalt

Division Administrator
Illinois State Board of Education
Early Childhood Education



ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Please direct comments about *Little Prints* to: Cindy Zumwalt, Division Administrator
Early Childhood Education, ISBE, 100 North First St., Springfield, IL 62777-0001

telephone: (217) 524-4835 email: czumwalt@isbe.net

Americans expect a lot from schools because our democracy relies on literate, productive, and thoughtfully-educated citizens. Employers want employees who have the knowledge, skills, and adaptability needed in a changing world. Parents look for assurance that their children are making good progress in line with some sort of norms. Governments and the public, in general, insist on the most “bang for the buck,” particularly during tough economic times. Educational accountability has been, and will likely remain, a significant factor behind K-12 state learning standards, development of core curricula, and new requirements in teacher qualifications and training.

At the K-12 grade levels, the search for accountability has led mostly to standardized testing – what some critics call “high stakes testing.” Such tests measure whether students, individually or grade-wide, have mastered a specific body of knowledge and skills. This formal approach is a relatively efficient type of measurement because it involves periodic pencil-and-paper tests given to everyone in a particular grade at the same time. It may yield information about



**A Snapshot
of Preschool
Education
in Illinois***

Has Been the Norm

A B C D E

for K-12 Assessment

whether or not a student or a school measures up to learning standards determined to be the norm by national, state, or local authorities.

Standardized tests or student assessments are sometimes used to help make decisions about personnel and schools. Merit pay, ongoing employment, reassignment, and opportunities for professional development for teachers and principals hinge on whether there is or isn't "adequate yearly progress." Schools are ranked, given supplemental resources, sometimes rewarded, put on watch lists, or closed based on information collected from the results of standardized tests.

Testing or assessing student learning is a key part of such powerful governmental education initiatives as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA), Race to the Top, Illinois State Learning Standards, and the current interest in developing a Common Core Curriculum.

Student assessment is complex and often controversial. It is not limited to only one type of test or purpose. Assessment can be diagnostic and

point toward the need for specialized support for students with language challenges, developmental delays or potential for gifted programs. Most standardized assessments are summative and measure how well students have already met pre-established benchmarks of learning at specific points in time. Finally, some assessments are formative and give the teacher the information needed to adjust curriculum for a class, or for an individual student.

Authentic assessment falls most closely into the formative category. However, it is never based on the administration of a once-a-year test. Authentic assessment is the documentation and analysis of a student's actual work collected over time in his or her real world environment. It tracks students' successes rather than failures. Most importantly, work sample portfolios combined with a well-trained teacher's observations and knowledge about research-based authentic assessment programs, drives instruction. ●



- **140,466** three- and four-year-olds are enrolled in state funded Preschool for All programs, Early Childhood Special Education programs, and federally funded Head Start programs. This includes **30%** of all three-year-olds and **43%** of all four-year-olds in Illinois.

- Illinois ranks **1st in access** to preschool for three-year-olds and **15th in access** to preschool for four-year-olds among all 39 states that have state-supported preschool programs.

- Illinois meets **9 of 10 preschool quality benchmarks** established by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) and ranks within the top 14 states in this regard.

- Illinois ranks **28th** in terms of state dollars spent per child (**\$3,449**) among the 39 states with state-supported preschool programs.

- Preschool for All curricula must be aligned with the **Illinois Early Learning Standards**; Head Start curricula align with **Head Start Performance Standards**.

- Preschool for All programs are required to measure child progress through approved evidence-based **Authentic Assessments**; Head Start agencies assess specific indicators of literacy, numeracy, and language skills as part of the **Child Outcomes Framework**.

- The Illinois **Prekindergarten Program for At-Risk Children**

was created statewide in 1985. The **Early Childhood Block Grant** system began in 1998 to fund Pre-K at-risk programs. The current **Preschool for All** began in 2006, with the goal of providing access to a preschool education for every three- and four-year-old child in the state by 2012. Beginning with the 2009-2010 school year, Preschool for All programs were also required to offer **bilingual education, or transitional language accommodations** to English Language Learners. Priority for admission to Preschool for All programs is given to those children determined by local school districts to be at-risk of school failure. An adequate budget of state money has not yet been made available to offer preschool programs for all families that qualify.

**Based on The State of Preschool 2011. National Institute for Early Education Research and the State of Illinois Early Childhood Program Matrix. The points made above do not include numerous child care services in Illinois offered by federal, state, or local agencies or by private individuals or organizations.*



Early Childhood Assessment Is Different

It's Authentic

Preschool or early childhood assessment can be seen in the context of the larger push for accountability. It can indicate which skills children in a particular preschool classroom or program have that are needed for the academics associated with elementary education beginning in first grade. State Early Learning Standards are partly an attempt to put early childhood learning on a continuum that leads to higher and different expectations of achievement. The use of formal research-based student assessment is a requirement for funding of all state-supported Preschool for All and Early Childhood Special Education programs.

Early childhood assessment cannot follow the standardized testing or student assessment model that may be appropriate for higher grade levels. Children who are three to five years of age are developing rapidly, at individual paces, and with different interests. It is important to document their successes and their progress, rather than their failures or lack of progress, as they grow. Some formal testing, of course, is appropriate for diagnostic purposes to prepare for special interventions that may be needed to deal with physical, psychological, or behavioral circumstances. Evaluation for diagnostic or special education eligibility purposes should be distinguished from "authentic assessment." Young children learn through play; authentic assessment aims to document a child's development and progress in a way that is non-intrusive and captures how a child uses his or her skills while engaging with materials, teachers, parents, and peers.

Authentic assessment involves the teacher as an observer and a researcher – working from a background of solid education and specialized training, collecting data over time, selecting and organizing evidence (the portfolio), preparing a hypothesis that can be tested (the curriculum), sharing conclusions with parents and others to refine what will work best in guiding a child to develop to his or her potential, and developing lesson plans that will help students individually progress toward meeting learning expectations.

John Dewey, the progressive educational reformer who spent an important part of his career in Illinois more than one hundred years ago, recognized that education strikes a balance between imparting necessary knowledge and letting students pursue their own learning interests as individuals. He would have been fascinated by the modern trend in early childhood education which recognizes a child at play as a child who is learning, the preschool teacher as guide and facilitator rather than dispenser of information, and the use of authentic assessment as an appropriate way to document development and guide a child's education. ●

Authentic assessment involves the teacher as an observer and a researcher.



Good Policy & Best Practice in Early Childhood Authentic Assessment

Early childhood education researchers, trainers, and teachers agree on the overall characteristics of good policy and best practice for authentic assessment. Professional organizations like the National Institute for Early Education Research and educators interviewed for this publication emphasize that those using an effective authentic assessment process should:

- Recognize that early childhood development is rapid, individual, and foundational for future school success.
- Understand learning goals or benchmarks, such as those included in the Illinois Early Learning Standards or Head Start Performance Standards.
- Focus on a child's accomplishments and progress rather than on his or her deficits, delays, or challenges.
- Use a portfolio with student work samples and other evidence from multiple sources collected unobtrusively that reflect real-world authentic activities. The portfolio documents a child's efforts, interests, progress, and achievement in a given area or areas.
- Involve students, teachers, and parents in a collaborative venture. Even young children can help make decisions about what samples of work will be included in the portfolio. Teachers and parents review the portfolio, exchange observations from their unique perspectives, and make suggestions about activities in the home and school that will support and promote the child's development.
- Adopt a research-based assessment that is reliable, valid, and appropriate for the children who will be assessed. Observations cannot be random or haphazard; there must be an assessment framework that helps guide the collection and interpretation of appropriate portfolio materials.
- Know that it takes time to become proficient in the best uses of authentic assessment.
- Commit to training and ongoing professional development.

**Observations
cannot be random
or haphazard;
there must be
an assessment
framework.**

Conversations with Researchers and Teacher Trainers



“As authentic assessment proves its worth, it will be based on ever more sophisticated and professional understanding about how the brain develops at an early age.”

– Dr. Judy Harris Helm

Dr. Judy Harris Helm

Neuroscience and Best Practice in Early Childhood Assessment

Judy Harris Helm is the founder and president of Best Practices, Inc. (www.bestpracticesinc.net), a consulting and training company focused on early childhood and elementary schools. Past president of the Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children, Dr. Helm is a prolific author of books and training materials that integrate research with best practice. She is a particularly strong advocate for understanding the contributions of neuroscience to early childhood education and to the appropriate use of assessments.

“Brain shaping starts right away,” Dr. Helm points out, and “more and more, we have come to understand that the brain is shaped by ‘how it thinks’ – we aren’t doing much good for the young child if our assessment just measures narrow achievement outcomes.” The traditional assessment, she notes, looks at a child’s performance in several areas and attempts to measure standardized achievements such as the ability to read at a certain level or understand a graph. “But this sort of ‘left brain/right brain’ approach is passé now. Recent neuroscience research indicates that early learning is complex and difficult to measure well. It’s more important that a child find a way to take an experience or challenge and develop solutions in that context.” Dr. Helm notes the example of children planting a flower garden. Perhaps a child is asked how many seeds altogether should be planted in a designated area and then how many seeds each child in the class should get. “Think of the skills that child calls on – counting (data analysis), communication (with the teacher and with other children), using references (looking at the seed packet), and developing a plan of action. Plus the child must have the willingness or emotional interest to do all these things. And, of course, what you discover is that preschool children have diverse learning styles and each child brings his or her strengths to problem-solving – when he or she is ready.”

Authentic assessment is central to a teacher’s crafting of a curriculum that can accommodate different learning styles in an early childhood classroom. “Real-life” observation of a child at play and in the classroom, regular meetings with parents to review their child’s portfolio of accomplishments, ongoing professional development and sometimes years of experience – all these elements of authentic assessment “bring the child into the decision” about how lessons are planned and how activities are designed. “Professionalism in early childhood education requires, above all, curiosity on the part of the teacher about why and how children learn.”

Dr. Sallee Beneke

Authentic Assessment, Pre-Service Training, and Professional Development

Sallee Beneke teaches at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa, and specializes in birth to third grade and early childhood special education. She has been a consultant/trainer for Work Sampling System Illinois (WSS IL) and for Illinois’ Tool for Early Childhood Excellence (I-TEACHE), the web-based technology tool that helps in the collection and organizing of children’s portfolios.

When asked about the purpose of authentic assessment of young children, Dr. Beneke notes how important it is to use skilled observation and collection of work samples to help drive curriculum and

individualize instruction. "Authentic assessment has evolved," she says. "At higher grade levels, assessment is dominated by standardized testing and there has been a 'pressure pushdown' to institute something similar for young children. But we know that good assessment must be developmentally appropriate." Early childhood educators need to be systematic, intentional, and focused on the whole child, and on his or her temperament, disposition to learn, and interaction with others. "We used to look for what's wrong [through assessment]; now we are more focused on how we can adjust our teaching to respond to each child."

Beneke has interesting observations about the impact that skilled authentic assessment practice has had on teachers themselves, and on the growth of early childhood education generally as a profession. Assessment instruments have achieved greater and greater validity, she believes, but teachers must continue to develop reliability in their use of assessment as well. That takes ongoing training, experience, and time – just as in other essential professions. "We can teach pre-service students the importance of observation and how to use assessment tools, but it takes a couple of years of actual on-the-job experience to develop real expertise and self-confidence." As in other professional fields, research and practice become intertwined, and the teacher shares in the sophisticated challenge of collecting data, analyzing it, and using it to improve practice. The teacher, as documenter, contributes to his or her own professional development. "You become a student of your own teaching – that's an important part of being a professional."

"Intentional observation in a controlled environment [authentic assessment] is like being a detective of patterns in a child's learning and behavior."

- Sallee Beneke

Pat Kluzik-Stauch

Resource Specialist with STAR NET Region II

STAR NET provides statewide technical assistance, training, and resources to early childhood professionals and families with young children that have special needs. Based on federal mandates, the Illinois State Board of Education requires that teachers of young children with special needs use one of several research-based authentic assessment tools to measure the progress children make toward three outcomes. The relative newness of the Early Childhood Outcomes Project and the use of authentic assessment for young children with special needs have led many teachers in Illinois to participate in ongoing staff development that supports and enhances their knowledge base about the use of authentic assessment in the classroom. "When children with special needs leave early childhood for Kindergarten, they receive an exit rating from the Early Childhood team that knows the child," explains Pat. "The Early Childhood Outcomes exit rating allows districts to measure the progress that young children with special needs have made in the early childhood program." ●



"Because of the passage of IDEA's 'least restrictive environment' mandate, the skillful use of early childhood authentic assessment and portfolio analysis is crucial in providing the greatest educational opportunities possible for all our students."

- Pat Kluzik-Stauch

“Families of Dual Language Learners are a particularly valuable resource in collecting information for authentic assessment purposes. Parent interviews, questionnaires, home visits, and family artifacts add an important additional dimension for portfolios.”

- Pat Chamberlain

Dual Language Learners and Authentic Assessment

Many early childhood centers in Illinois serve students for whom English is a second language, and most authentic assessment products include some Spanish or other non-English language supports. Pat Chamberlain, former Director of Early Learner programs at District U-46 in Elgin, now teaches at the Erikson Institute. She emphasizes that assessment portfolios should include documents that track language proficiency – in both languages if possible. Since a child’s language proficiency varies greatly based on background, interests, emotional state, and experiences, language samples should be collected across a variety of tasks, partners (adults and children), and settings. When analyzing English language

proficiency in an authentic assessment process, it should be in a way that is appropriate for young second language learners. Data collection and interpretation should be viewed in culturally and linguistically responsive ways. This includes, for Dual Language Learners, always documenting language when reporting progress on curricular goals. This position was emphasized in 2005 when the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) adopted a supplement to their Joint Position Statement on Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation. ●



Keys to Success

as Seen Through the Eyes of Program Directors and Classroom Teachers

During the fall of 2011, several Illinois preschool directors and teachers shared their experiences with authentic assessment. All strongly agreed that good authentic assessment practice is central to a preschool teacher’s effectiveness, but each noted particular aspects that were especially important to them.

“When you say assessment, you really need to build a relationship with the child and the family to know what their needs and interests are.”

- Diane Richey

Diane Richey coordinates the Southern Region Early Childhood Programs for 27 half-day, full-day and blended programs in four rural counties. She particularly emphasizes the importance of strong and intentional parent/family involvement. “I hope we are not distinctive in this, but we do value the parent as a partner in the education of their child and that is most evident in our assessment system,” she notes. “We’ve always involved parents in the traditional ways – conferences, home visits, field trips, etc. – but this year we wanted to do a better job at it. We found that in all our interactions we were ‘giving’ all the information and doing most of the talking. We wanted to have parents help us establish a knowledge baseline early in the year.” New families now get an eligibility packet that includes an Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) appropriate to the age of the child. Parents complete the questionnaire and have it ready for the first home visit when it is scored in their presence. Based on the conversation that follows, the parents and teacher develop goals that build on the screening results and can be measured. “Parents really like this approach. They have input both at the beginning and at later parent/teacher meetings. They no longer fear the conversations about their children’s abilities.”

Christa Thompson is an experienced teacher in a southern region prekindergarten public school classroom in Du Quoin. She too believes in the importance of family being part of the assessment process, but is impressed with how assessment can help individualize a child’s learning experiences. She works closely with an Early Childhood Special Education teacher. “Some kids may not be as ready as early as others to do the work. The way we set up our room (manipulatives, etc.), takes into account that individual learners work at different paces.” Thompson doesn’t minimize the time that observation, documentation, skillful analysis, and writing narrative summaries involves. She counsels those new to authentic assessment to “get training, ask a lot of questions, and find the easiest way that works for you!”

“As a pre-kindergarten teacher, I think about assessment every day and throughout the day. It’s just what I do.”

- Christa Thompson

“Using authentic assessment effectively is a process. The more you use it, the better you become at using it.”

- Kathy Davis

Kathy Davis is Pre-K Programs Coordinator for the Springfield Public Schools. The programs are part of a school district that is urban and serves a large number of children whose families are financially disadvantaged. There are 680 preschool children at three locations. Springfield was a pilot site in the late 1990s for the Work Sampling System Illinois assessment program and Kathy continues to put a great deal of emphasis on training. Both the lead teachers and the assistant teachers get training and “all the critical components” of authentic assessment are in place.

One of the more experienced teachers in the program, **Kevi Jackson**, explains that authentic assessment “really does drive what I do in the classroom and helps me develop a curriculum that is individualized.” Jackson notes that effective use of authentic assessment puts the emphasis “not so much on teaching as learning. We need to recreate how to teach young children most effectively – and that means we start with understanding and experiencing child development.”

“Understanding child development is the foundation of successful assessment.”

- Kevi Jackson



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“My advice to new teachers is to focus on limited pieces of assessment at first – do the tasks step-by-step – and realize that it will take a couple of years before you become proficient.”

– Natalie Doyle

Natalie Doyle is Early Childhood Program Coordinator for the Rock Island County Regional Office of Education. Her program serves about 660 children at 33 child care and preschool sites. Several things, however, are unique about the program. First, it collaborates with the local Early Childhood coalition and serves both public and privately-run certified centers. Second, a significant portion of families who have children enrolled in the programs (perhaps one-seventh) are refugees from Africa who speak various French dialects, or one of dozens of other languages. The children qualify for services based on family characteristics that can include low-income and at-risk factors. Finally, the program’s certified teachers travel from one site to another and are paired with co-teachers or paraprofessionals who usually do not have training in using authentic assessment. As one can imagine, this environment provides some interesting challenges.

Still, **Shirisha Bhosale**, one of the certified “home child teachers” in the program notes that she works closely with the site-based instructors who share observations and help collect student work samples and photos for portfolios. “It’s a daunting task, particularly because of the very high mobility of the families we serve, but the results of the assessment are shared with parents, and they come to understand that their children are learning.”

“Parents are really happy in conferences with their teachers now. They like to look at the ‘evidence’ of how their child is learning.”

– Shirisha Bhosale

“Quality standards traditionally focused on monitoring environment and safety. Assessment of child learning outcomes will be increasingly useful for demonstrating the quality of a child care experience.”

– Lori Longueville

Lori Longueville is Director of the Child Care Resource and Referral Center based at John A. Logan College in Carterville and Past President of the Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children. She works with a wide variety of programs, from licensed and unlicensed child care to state funded Preschool for All and Head Start. She provides assistance to caregivers whose education credentials range from the GED to associate and bachelor degrees. “In child care programs, there is still a lot of variety, but there is a trend toward establishing the core values of what young children need for healthy development. Still, these are ‘baby steps’ in the right direction.” Longueville believes that knowledge and training in authentic assessment will expand in all types of child care. ●



Commonly Used Authentic Assessment Programs in Illinois Preschools

State funded Preschool for All Programs in Illinois are required to use “evidence-based authentic assessment systems.” In practice, almost all early childhood programs choose among three existing

commercially available products, although several more are also approved by the Illinois State Board of Education. The most commonly-used assessments are Work Sampling System Illinois (WSS IL) distributed by

Pearson Assessments, Teaching Strategies GOLD™, and the HighScope Preschool Child Observation Record (COR). A promising new addition to the family of early childhood authentic assessment systems, called the Early Learning Scale (ELS), is described later in this publication.

The assessment product that is chosen, is largely a local decision, driven by such things as familiarity with one of the products, cost, ease of use, the availability of training and support, and whether or not a site wants a curriculum developed by the same company or just the assessment tool itself. All three assessment tools are aligned with the Illinois Early Learning Standards. WSS IL, designed for use with three and four-year-old children, does not include a specific curriculum component, and focuses more on

individual child development than aggregated data for an entire class. Teaching Strategies GOLD can be used for children from birth to age six. GOLD may be used with Creative Curriculum, or with other developmentally appropriate curricula, and is both web- and print-based. HighScope COR assesses preschool children between the ages of two and six, although it also offers an assessment program for younger children. The COR can be used with the HighScope Preschool curriculum or other developmentally appropriate curricula and is both web- and print-based. More detailed information on all three assessment systems can be found at websites listed in the resource section at the end of this publication.

The Early Learning Scale (ELS) A New Choice is Rolled Out This Year



Dr. Ellen Frede is Senior Vice President of Early Learning, Research and Training at Acelero Learning, a company that brings innovative approaches to supporting Head Start programs. Until recently, she was Co-Director of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) and investigated the relationship of program quality to early childhood learning outcomes. She has been instrumental in helping to develop and field test the Early Learning Scale (ELS), a new addition to the family of early childhood authentic assessment.

“In the past five years,” she notes, “performance-based assessment has become more systematized and widespread because of the development of early childhood learning standards.” With the parallel movement toward accountability, assessment instruments have tried to strengthen both validity and reliability. Teachers find them immensely helpful for guiding their own teaching, “but we still have too little solid sense of reliability – particularly when some assessments attempt to cover so many areas.”

The new ELS aims to improve on what all research-based early childhood assessment programs emphasize as quality indicators: authenticity (observation-based and embedded in everyday classroom activities); flexibility (aligned with any preschool curriculum and appropriate for all students), manageability (easing data collection and analysis); and reliability (high inter-rater agreement). ELS does not have its own curriculum as such, although ideas for teaching are included in the package. The assessment system can be used with all students, including English Language Learners and children with special needs.



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“I’m really impressed with the fact that ELS was developed with support from NIEER and I especially like the rater reliability component.”

– **Kathy Villano**
Program Director of ECDEC
(Early Childhood Developmental
Enrichment Center

The Early Learning Scale explicitly helps guide instruction along a “developmental continuum” measuring progress toward meeting state early learning standards and national expectations such as those found in the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework. Only three domains are scored in the ELS: Math/Science; Social-Emotional/Social Studies; and Language and Literacy. These domains were selected because of their critical relationship to future learning, according to ELS developers. Within these three domains there is a total of ten items. While data for the arts and for physical development can be collected for portfolio purposes, they are not scored in the ELS. The developers believe that progress is difficult to document objectively in the arts and that a checklist format is a better approach to use for tracking physical development.

Early childhood classroom educators will be interested to know that ELS also responds to a common observation by teachers: using authentic assessment requires a major time commitment and a lengthy learning curve. “The Early Learning Scale is focused, lean and mean, in comparison to some other assessment approaches,” says Dr. Frede, “and we have produced materials that make it much easier for teachers to know how to observe, collect samples for a portfolio, and share the results with parents and others. And again, we want to reinforce the teacher’s reliability through solid training in how to use the assessment.” ●

Portfolios

All authentic assessment systems make use of an individual child’s portfolio - documentation collected as evidence to show a child’s growth over time. Terminology for each assessment system varies. A portfolio typically includes samples of a child’s work including anecdotal notes, photographs of a child’s activities accompanied by a teacher’s narrative and teacher observations. A portfolio can show evidence of a student’s learning and progress. When used as part of a research-based assessment system, a portfolio is a tool which teachers should use to drive their lesson plans and help them make decisions about next steps for students.

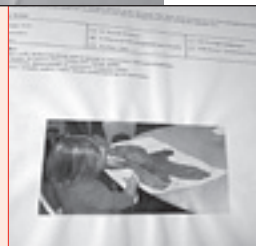
To meet the requirements of developing a portfolio that demonstrates student progress over time, teachers will, at the beginning of the program year, review the Illinois Early Standards and determine two Learning Areas/Domains they will document to show growth over time (e.g., Mathematics, Social/

Emotional); choose two benchmarks from each Learning Area/ Domain to focus on; and ensure that the materials needed to demonstrate growth are available in all interest areas of the classroom. These steps will assist the teacher and assistant teacher in collecting authentic documentation. As the teaching staff become more comfortable with collecting authentic samples for these two Learning Areas, additional Learning Areas and benchmarks can be added. A portfolio will also contain other samples of an individual student’s work to reflect the child’s participation in the classroom. ●



Portfolio Journals

Example of authentic assessment showing growth from September to May



I-TEACHe

An Online Tool

to Support the Assessment Process

I-TEACHe (Illinois' Tool for Early Childhood Excellence) is an online observation and documentation system that uses a hand-held computer or portable media device such as an iPod Touch, iPad, or other smart phone. Several hundred school districts, Head Start sites, and community-based early childhood education programs in Illinois have adopted I-TEACHe because it greatly simplifies data gathering and also produces graphic reports showing a student's progress toward meeting Illinois Early Learning Standards. I-TEACHe is a professional tool that teachers, administrators, and parents find helpful in the authentic assessment process.

I-TEACHe is adaptable to any curriculum and is assessment system neutral. Teachers can quickly and unobtrusively collect photographic samples of a student's work, add anecdotal comments, and record a child's progress toward meeting learning goals. Essentially, a teacher is able to create a digital portfolio that can be shared with parents and school administrators. Plus, it is helpful for fine-tuning lesson plans that will work for both individual and class-wide learning. An expanding lesson plan component offering examples of developmentally appropriate learning activities for both school and home is included. Classroom teachers are encouraged to add to this learning experiences library. I-TEACHe includes Spanish versions of many of the documents generated by this valuable tool.

Four Steps to Utilizing I-TEACHe

1

Record



Recording Observations

Teachers use a mobile device to record student activities as they happen. Multiple entry formats make recording fast and easy. For example, a teacher might want to record that some students cooperated by putting all their learning materials away before putting on their coats to go outside for playtime, indicating that some social/emotional and fine motor skills benchmarks had been demonstrated.

2

Synchronize

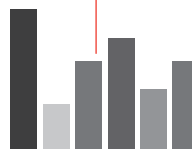


Synchronizing Data

Once observations have been entered on the mobile device, teachers synchronize their data with a secure centralized database accessible via the Internet. Information is transferred electronically to the main data analysis program where observations are automatically categorized by learning area, skill set, and benchmark. The teacher can edit the observations, add photos, add or delete benchmarks, and create printable reports to put in the student's portfolio or to share with parents or administrators.

3

Track



Tracking Progress

Because it's important for teachers to record an adequate number of observations for all students in benchmark categories, graphic progress reports in I-TEACHe help the teacher get an instant overview of learning standards that need to be covered more thoroughly.

4

Assess & Report



Assessing & Reporting

Finally, teachers use the information they've recorded about each student to write narrative evaluations. Each observation the teacher, aide, or co-teacher creates is associated with the relevant benchmarks. That way, when the student is assessed, all relevant data is available to provide the teacher a truly accurate picture of the student's ability and progress as a report that can be shared.

Authentic Assessment in Early Childhood Education:

Resources You Can Use

The resources listed below represent only a sampling of the agencies and resources available for those interested in authentic assessment. New research, publications, assessment systems, and tools are appearing regularly.

NATIONAL AND STATE AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

U.S. Department of Education

www.ed.gov/parents/earlychild/ready/resources.html

This web address will lead you to a page that describes the federal government's policies, programs, and resources related to early childhood education. Further links lead to information about specific early childhood programs that support professional development, parent involvement, Even Start, English Language Learners, children with disabilities and special needs, and Head Start, which is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services. The issues of early childhood education program accountability, learning standards and assessment are also addressed.

Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)

www.isbe.net/earlychi/

217/524-4835

This is the main source for information about ISBE-supported early childhood education programs, including Preschool for All, Early Childhood Special Education, Even Start Family Literacy, and Kindergarten Corner. Updates on Illinois early childhood education policies, grants, professional development opportunities, Early Learning Standards, and other matters are available. The ISBE website is a good starting place for authoritative information about statewide early childhood education assessment.

Illinois Network of Child Care Resources and Referral Agency (INCCRRA)

www.inccrra.org

INCCRRA partners with its 16 Child Care Resources and Referral agencies and is the recognized leader, catalyst and resource for making high quality, affordable early care and education options available for children and

families in Illinois. Depending on the nature of childcare settings, authentic assessment of learning and progress may not always be part of all sites in their referral network.

National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)

www.nieer.org

NIEER conducts research for those who support high quality, effective, early childhood education for all young children. Their publications include many policy statements, articles and research pieces related to appropriate assessment of young children so that they may be successful in school and later life. Recently, NIEER partnered with Lakeshore Publishing to develop a new assessment system, the Early Learning Scale (ELS) which has been piloted in Illinois and elsewhere and is scheduled to be released in 2012.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

www.naeyc.org

NAEYC is the world's largest organization working on behalf of the educational needs of young children. In addition to its conferences, National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development, Public Policy Forum, advocacy, and accreditation work, NAEYC is the source for periodicals, books, and other materials that it produces.

Educational Testing Service (ETS)

www.ets.org

In February, 2012, ETS issued a Policy Information Report entitled State Pre-K Assessment Policies: Issues and Status. The document, which describes state-funded Pre-K across the nation, focuses particularly on the variety of approaches that the states use in assessing young children's learning. The report in both print and electronic formats is available through the ETS web site.

BOOKS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

Bagnato, S., Elliott S., & Witt, J. (2007). *Authentic Assessment for Early Childhood Intervention Best Practices*. The Guilford School Practitioner Series.

Beneke, S., Helm, J. & Steinheimer, K. (2007). *Windows on Learning: Documenting Children's Work*. 2nd ed. Teachers College Press.

Cohen, D., Stern, B., Balaban, N., & Gropper, N. (2008). *Observing and Recording the Behavior of Young Children*, 5th ed. Teachers College Press.

Curtis, D. & Carter, M. (2000). *The Art of Awareness: How Observation Can Transform Your Teaching*. RedLeaf Press.

Galinsky, E. (2010). *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs*. HarperCollins.

Gronlund, G. & James, M. (2005). *Focused Observations: How to Observe Children for Assessment and Curriculum Planning*. RedLeaf Press.

Gronlund, G. & Engel, B. (2006). *Focused Portfolios™: A Complete Assessment for the Young Child*. RedLeaf Press.

Gullo, D. (2004). *Understanding Assessment and Evaluation in Early Childhood Education*, 2nd ed. Teacher's College Press.

Jablon, J. R., Dombro, A.L. & Dichtelmiller, M.L. (2007). *The Power of Observation for Birth through Eight*. Teaching Strategies, Inc.

Koralek, D., ed., (2004). *Spotlight on Young Children and Assessment*. National Association for the Education of Young Children.

McAfee, O., Leong, D. & Bodrova, E. (2004). *Basics of Assessment: A Primer for Early Childhood Professionals*. National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Meisels, S. (2010). *Using Observational Assessment to Evaluate Young Children's Learning: The Technical Quality of the Work Sampling System*. Erikson Institute.

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS MOST WIDELY USED IN ILLINOIS OR IN DEVELOPMENT

There are several authentic assessment systems for early childhood education programs. The following represent the most commonly used research-based products in Illinois.

HighScope Preschool Child Observation Record (COR)

www.highscope.org

Teaching Strategies GOLD (GOLD replaces the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum)

www.teachingstrategies.com/

Work Sampling System Illinois (WSS IL)

www.pearsonassessments.com

Early Learning Scale (ELS)

www.lakeshorelearning.com

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

The Center: Resources for Teaching and Learning – IRC: Early Childhood

www.thecenterweb.org/ec

The Center's Early Childhood Professional Development office provides professional development for early childhood professionals across Illinois, with special emphasis on Preschool for All programs. Observation, documentation and assessment workshops and webinars are among the topics regularly offered as well as on-site workshops. The Center also maintains an easily accessible major collection of Early Childhood resources at The Center's Library (www.thecenterweb.org – click on "Library").

I-TEACHE

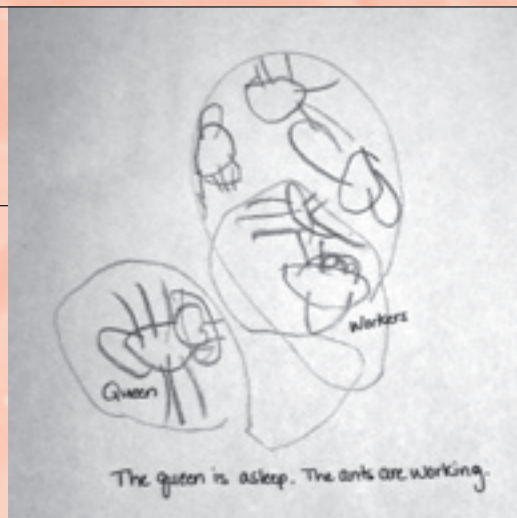
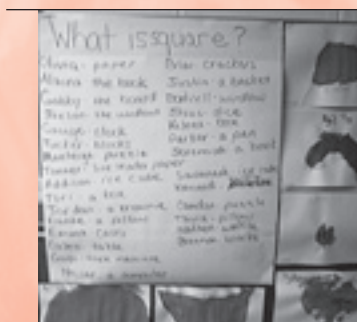
www.i-teache.org

If you are interested in learning more about I-TEACHE, signing up for the software system, or being part of workshops and webinars, check the I-TEACHE website or call The Technology Center for Teaching and Learning at 224-270-2186. I-TEACHE was developed with funding from the Illinois State Board of Education: Early Childhood Education.

Illinois STAR NET

www.starnet.org/about/statewide.php

Illinois STAR NET offers many opportunities for personal and professional growth for those who touch the lives of young children, birth through eight, with emphasis on children who have special needs. STAR NET supports family-centered, researched and effective practices in early childhood education and care. Among their workshops are those that focus on observation and assessment. STAR NET also offers on-site technical assistance. Six regional offices serve the needs of professionals and parents throughout Illinois. Refer to the website address given above to find your regional STAR NET office.



Little Prints

The Center:

Resources for Teaching and Learning

2626 S. Clearbrook Dr.
Arlington Heights, IL 60005
www.thecenterweb.org

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