

Introduction

As children enter the classroom on their first day of school, May greets them and their parents. She invites the children to find their name cards on the table and bring them to the cubbies, choosing one for their belongings. She tapes the name cards to the cubbies; permanent labels will be made later. May then invites the children to select books from the reading corner and go to the carpet to read. She joins the children on the carpet as they 'read' their books.

May observes the children and notes how they enter the room (with confidence or reluctantly), their interaction with adults, their use of language, how they follow instructions, their recognition of their name, their choice of book, engagement with the book, and their book-handling skills. She observes how they approach and associate with other children. May also looks for what the children are paying attention to as they come into the classroom so she can incorporate this information into her planning. This will be her focus over the entry period.

As children first enter the classroom and go about their daily activities, May is learning about this new group of children and engaging in the process of 'kid watching'. In essence, her data collecting has begun.

Planning for Assessment

Educators start gathering information about their children from the first day of school. By doing so, they create a baseline of information that enables them to see an individual child's growth and progress over time. This initial assessment information is part of the 'getting to know you' phase and reveals a great deal about the children,

such as their interests, strengths, learning styles, social skills, habits, and the prior knowledge they are bringing to school experiences.

Planning **for** assessment begins before school starts. There are decisions to be made and concrete tasks to be done to be ready for children's entry.

Before school starts, Lily prepares for her new group of children. She reviews the information gathered at registration on those entering junior kindergarten. As well, she reads the files of children coming into senior kindergarten from other classrooms or schools, noting any needs or concerns. Christopher, in particular, has some developmental delays and Lily has already met with his parents to plan for his entry.

Lily has made up her assessment binder with a page for each child. Each page lists the six areas of learning, with space for recording notes. She prefers this system as it keeps everything in one place. Each child will have a portfolio and Lily has prepared these in advance. From the very beginning, she likes to collect some of the first samples of drawing/writing. She knows she will have to photocopy some, as the children like to take them home. As she gathers these beginning samples, Lily keeps track by crossing out names on a prepared class list. Already, she has thought about what she wants to learn about the children. In particular she makes notes on their social and emotional development: How are they feeling about coming into the classroom? What are they interested in? Who are their friends? How do they react to transitions? How do they relate to other children? How do they attend to group activities? How well do they follow the instructions? How do they handle the materials?

Lily will be asking the children to bring packaging from home that has some print on it. The children's contributions will be the focus for group discussions and will form the beginning of an environmental print wall. She will use this focus to gather information on children's knowledge of print, such as: What do they notice about the print? What similarities are they noticing? What comparisons are they making? What do they know about letters?

Lily has attended a number of workshops and has been reading about the process of documenting children's learning. She is particularly interested in the work of the Reggio Emilia schools.¹ Her focus will be to incorporate this into her practice and to develop her skills in this area.

Jim prepares for the start of school by going through the files for the new senior kindergarten children. He notices that some have not been in school before, and some for only part of junior kindergarten. This means that he may have to spend more time developing classroom routines and familiarizing children with the program.

Jim makes multiple copies of At-A-Glance sheets, which are his preferred way of collecting information. He attaches the sheets to a clipboard and uses them for general information. Some are labelled specifically, such as Independent Book Time, Math, Inquiry, etc. and dated for the Week of _____. These sheets enable him to see the whole class at once and help him identify which children to spend more time observing, as well as areas where he needs to focus more of his attention.

Jim has planned a simple sign-in for the first few days. Children will enter and move their magnetized name cards from the Home side of the chart to the School side of the chart (picture labels identify the words). This will make it easy to see who is present or absent. The focus of Jim's observations during sign-in and through group discussion will be: Who recognizes their name? What are the children noticing as they create the data? What is their knowledge of numbers? What comparisons are they making? This initial activity will be repeated over a number of days and will give him information about the class as a whole, and about individual children. Jim will build on this experience, finding other practical ways to use children's experiences to collect data. This data collection will be part of an ongoing collection of children's mathematical understandings throughout the year.

Jim also likes to track children's choices for centres and has prepared a table that charts a class list on one axis and all centres on the other axis. As children indicate their choice, Jim records it on his chart. He only does this once a day, keeping the sheet for two weeks each month to monitor children's preferences, especially by gender, to see if there are patterns. He finds that he is too busy to do it more than once a day.

Jim's focus for the year will be on using a digital camera as part of evidence gathering. He wants to use the photos for children's retelling and reflection. He also wants to use technology to capture demonstrations of children's learning.

Why Assess?

As educators, one of our key responsibilities is to assess and evaluate the children in our care. There are a variety of reasons for this.

1. Children entering kindergarten vary in their development based on their past experiences and their maturational level. Through ongoing assessment and evaluation, educators obtain a wealth of information about children in areas
2. Children are unique in their approaches to tasks, their thinking and processing of

such as physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language development. Although there are generally understood developmental pathways for children, each child is unique in his or her position along the pathway. By understanding the child's particular development, educators can individualize and modify instruction accordingly.

information, the ways in which they solve problems, and the strategies they use to construct knowledge. As educators gather as much information as possible about each child, they monitor the child's progress in relation to curriculum and learning experiences, as well as the child's progress over time. Through monitoring, educators understand what children know and can do and, therefore, what they need to learn next.

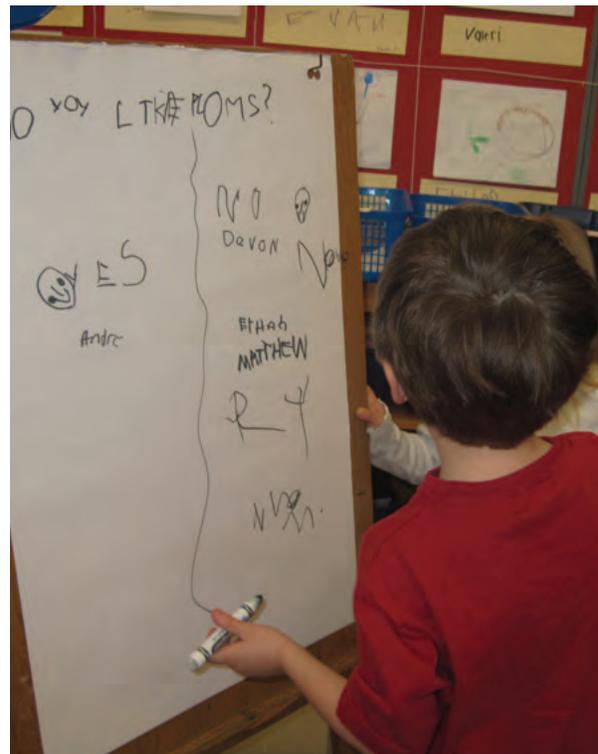
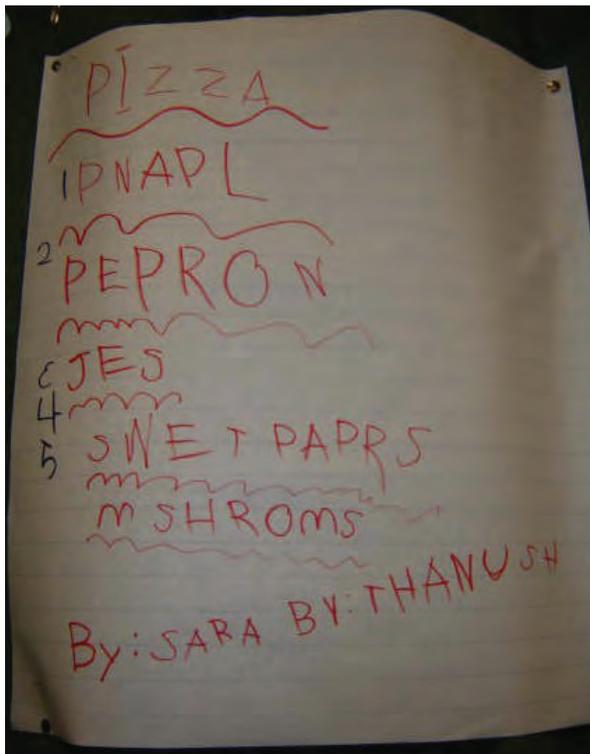
3. Assessment information may be used to identify children at risk or to identify children who have special needs. Educators' understandings of child development, their ongoing monitoring, and their anecdotal evidence provide insights into children's particular needs. Once identified, these needs will determine the educator's approach: in-class strategies, additional support, or a specialized program.



Adapting the Program

If there are questions about the progress of English Language Learners, it may be important to gather information about their development through discussions with parents and through a first-language assessment.

Over time, educators begin to note a pattern of strengths and areas of challenge for individual children. Gathered through assessment, this information is used to inform future planning, enhance reporting to parents and caregivers, and to help identify children who may require specialized support services.





Adapting the Program

The focus of assessment should be on the 'whole child', not just on one particular area such as language.

In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education launched the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-K (ECLS-K)². This survey explored the patterns of 20,000 kindergarten students over several years. Findings revealed that, upon entry into kindergarten at age five, 66 percent of the

students knew their alphabet letters, and 29 percent had initial sound-symbol correspondence. Ninety-four percent of children could identify basic shapes, recognize some numerals, and count more than ten objects. When educators gather information about the children at the beginning of the school year, they avoid teaching concepts to the whole class that many children have mastered already. With this assessment knowledge, educators can differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of their students and move all children forward in their learning.

In the first week of school, Cathy asked her senior kindergarten children to sign in by writing their name on a large sheet of paper. Through observing, she could see that the majority of the children knew their names and wrote them quickly, without referring to their name cards or asking others for support. She also noticed that Justin and Theo were unsure and had to use their name cards; Chantelle needed encouragement to try; Lucy had some problems with directionality (going right to left); and Tristan and Sara had some difficulty with letter formation, particularly the letter S and control of the size of letters.

From this initial task, Cathy knew she could spend more time on children learning their names and supporting children with putting names on writings/drawings and paintings. She could begin by focusing on similarities and differences in names; learning what the children were noticing and paying attention to. She knew she would need to spend some time with Justin and Theo to find out what they knew about their names; time with Tristan and Sara individually to help them with the troublesome letters; and individually with Lucy on directionality.

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) have

also weighed in on the issue of assessment. In 2003, they adopted a revised position statement that highlighted the need to:

“Make ethical, appropriate, valid, and reliable assessment a central part of all early childhood programs. To assess young children’s strengths, progress, and needs, use assessment methods that are developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children’s daily activities, supported by professional development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes: (1) making sound decisions about teaching and learning, (2) identifying significant concerns that may require focused intervention for individual children, and (3) helping programs improve their educational and developmental interventions.”³