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# Alternative Assessment: Assessment for Learning



Angela Notari Syverson and Angela Losardo  
*Journal of Communication Disorders, Deaf Studies  
& Hearing Aids*  
September 12, 2014

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# **A Linked Systems Approach to Learning**

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# Assessment is...

An ongoing and comprehensive process of collecting information about children and families for the purpose of making informed instructional decisions

(Meisels, 2001)



# Recommendations for Appropriate Assessment Practices



- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
  - National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE)
  - Division for Early Childhood (DEC)
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# Recommendation 1:

- Assessments should be authentic with evidence obtained from observing children engaged in actual tasks during everyday activities



# Recommendation 2:



Assessment evidence should be used to understand and improve learning and instruction



# Recommendation 3:



- Families should have the opportunity to participate actively in the assessment process

# Recommendation 4:

- Assessment systems should include multiple assessment methods, measures, and sources of information



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# Approaches to Assessment

## **Quantitative perspective**

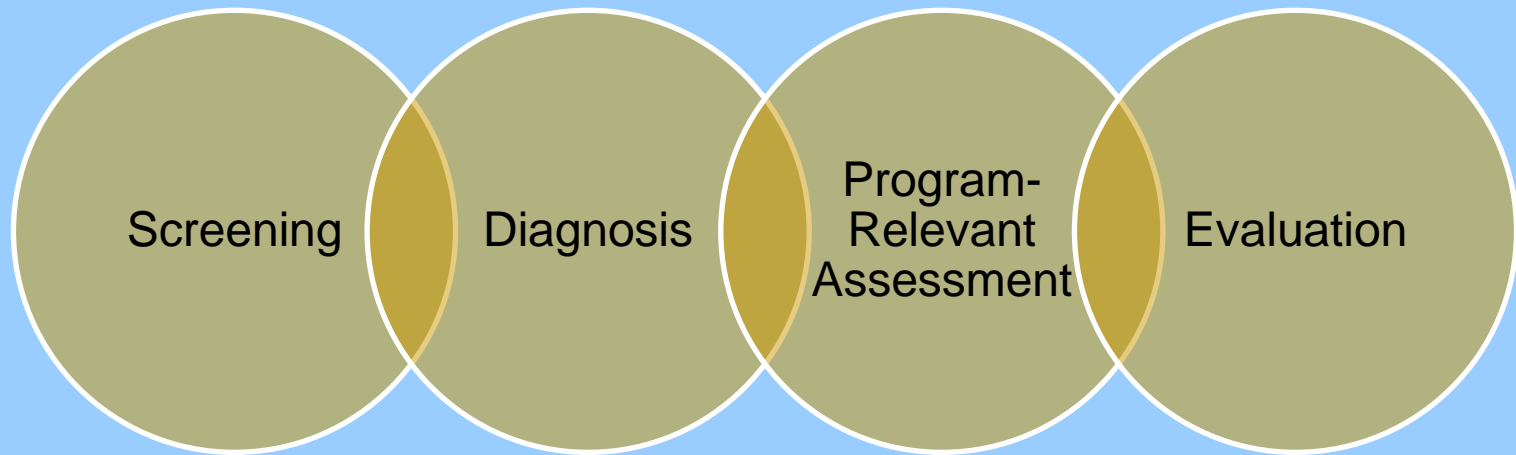
Assessment is viewed as an objective measurement process that results in a numerical representation of children's behaviors and abilities.

## **Qualitative perspective**

Assessment is viewed as the documentation of more broadly defined behaviors as they occur in natural environments and provides information on qualitative aspects of behaviors.

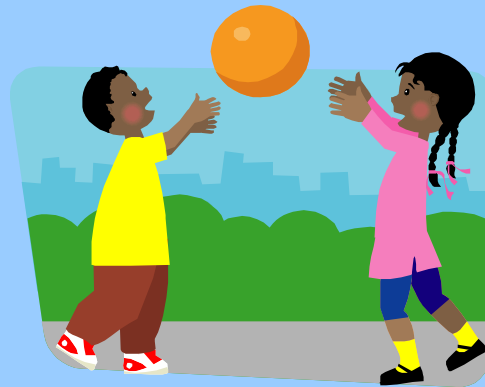
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# Purposes of Assessment



# Screening

- To determine whether the need for further assessment in one or more areas of development



# Methods

- Standardized, norm-referenced tests



# Diagnostic Assessment

- To determine whether a problem exists
- To identify the nature of the problem
- To determine eligibility for specialized services



# Methods

- Standardized, norm-referenced tests
- Clinical observations





# Program-Relevant Assessment

- To determine a child's current skill level or baseline skills before intervention
- To develop IFSP/IEP goals and objectives
- To plan curriculum
- To monitor progress
- To refine/adapt instruction



# Methods

- Curriculum-based assessments
- Interviews
- Running records
- Anecdotal notes
- Work samples
- Portfolios
- Tallies, counts, time sampling



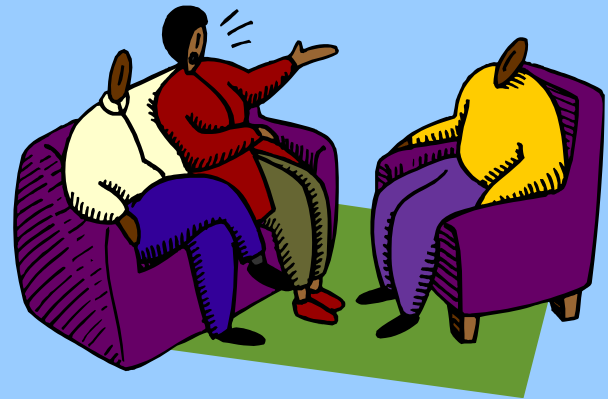
# Program Evaluation

- To determine the effectiveness of a program
- To provide accountability for meeting desired results (e.g., standards, outcomes)



# Methods

- Standardized, norm-referenced tests
- Curriculum-based measurement
- Surveys
- Interviews
- Portfolios



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# **Alternative Assessment: Assessment for Learning**

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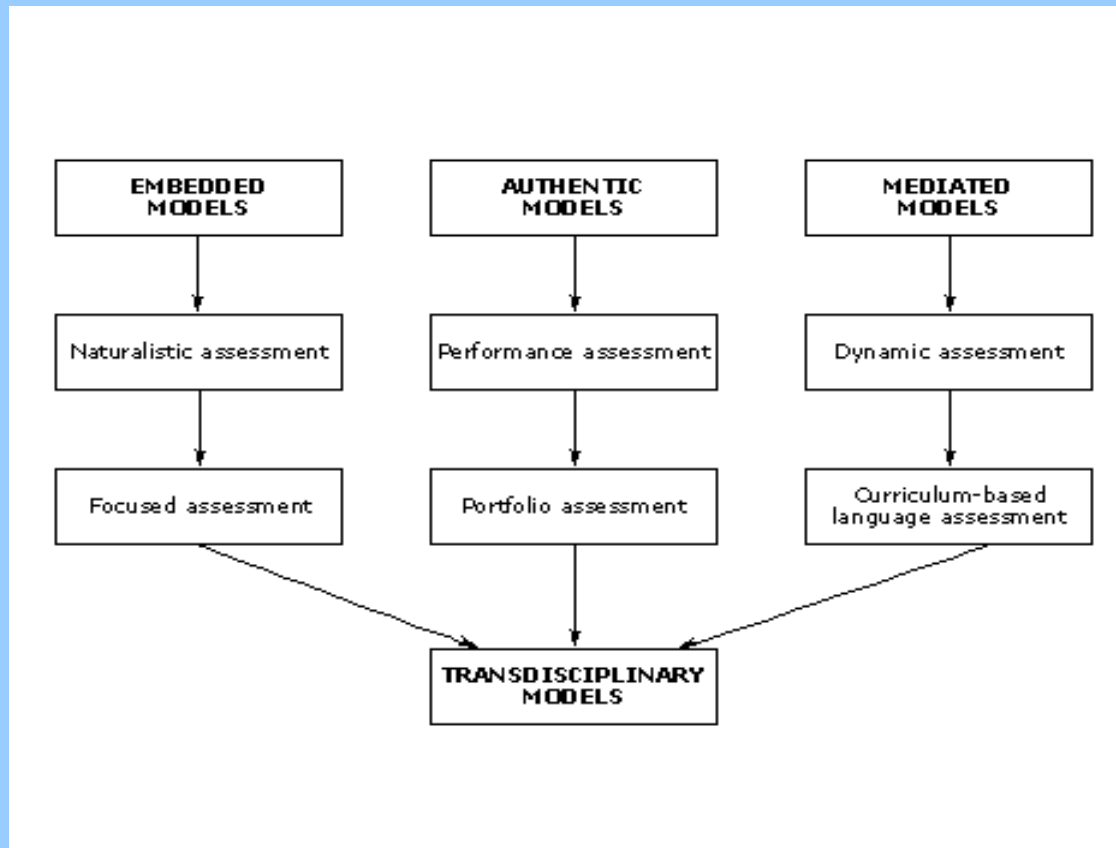
# Alternative Assessment is...

- Designed to observe functional and meaningful behaviors across a variety of settings, individuals, and materials



- Alternative to standardized assessment

# A Framework for Alternative Assessment Models



*Alternative Approaches to Assessing Young Children* by Angela Losardo and Angela Notari-Syverson

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# Embedded Models

- Assessment approaches in which opportunities to observe children's behavior are embedded within the natural context



- The focus of this approach is to provide children with multiple opportunities to demonstrate skills across areas of development with different people, using different materials, in multiple settings



# Authentic Models

- Assessment approaches in which a profile of the abilities of children are documented through completion of real-life tasks



- The focus of this approach is to document how and why instructional procedures work, or do not work, in real-life contexts to achieve "authentic" changes in learning

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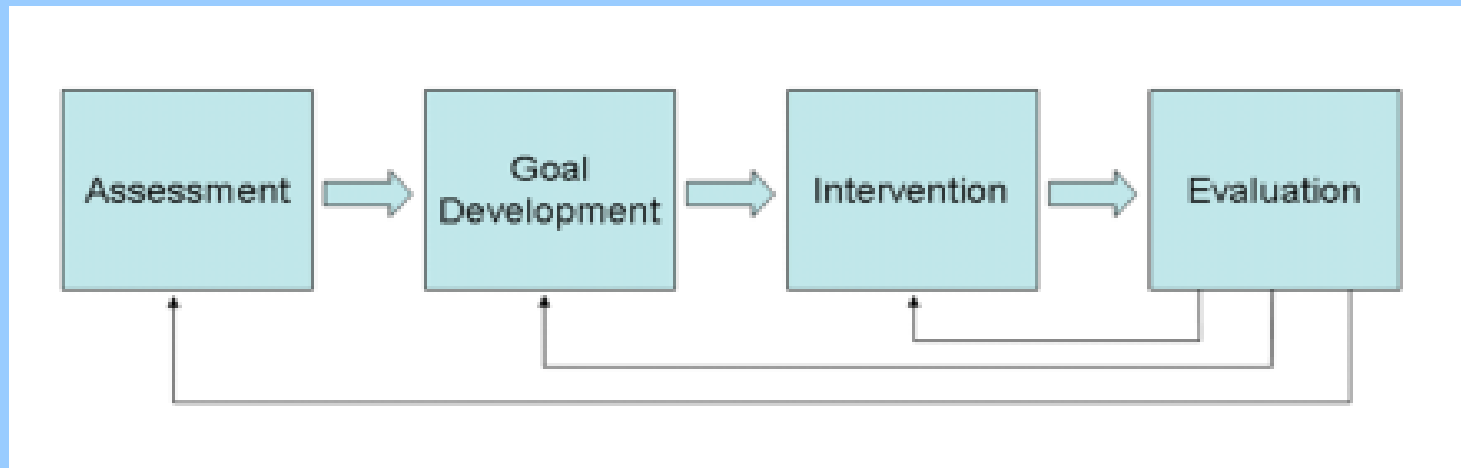
# Mediated Models

- Assessment approaches in which guided teaching is used to provide information on children's responsiveness to instruction and their mastery of the language of instruction

## Test - Teach - Test

- The focus on process and learning potential over mastery makes this approach extremely appropriate for testing in cross-cultural settings
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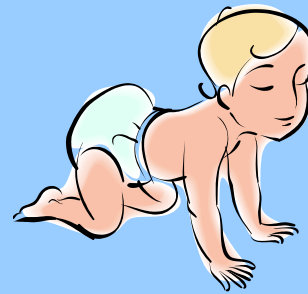
# Assessment for Learning: A Linked Approach



Four Components of a Linked Systems  
Approach to Learning

# Phase 1: Assessment

- An initial assessment, usually curriculum-based, is used to identify children's strengths and areas of concern



- The initial assessment should have functional items that address critical areas of development and link directly to associated intervention content (i.e., curriculum)

# Phase 2: Goal Development

- Caregivers and practitioners share assessment results, collaboratively select and prioritize relevant goals and objectives for children



- Identify which types of documentation will be used for each goal and objective and criteria for evaluation

# Phase 3: Intervention

- Determine which tasks and activities are most appropriate for practicing targeted skills and gathering documentation

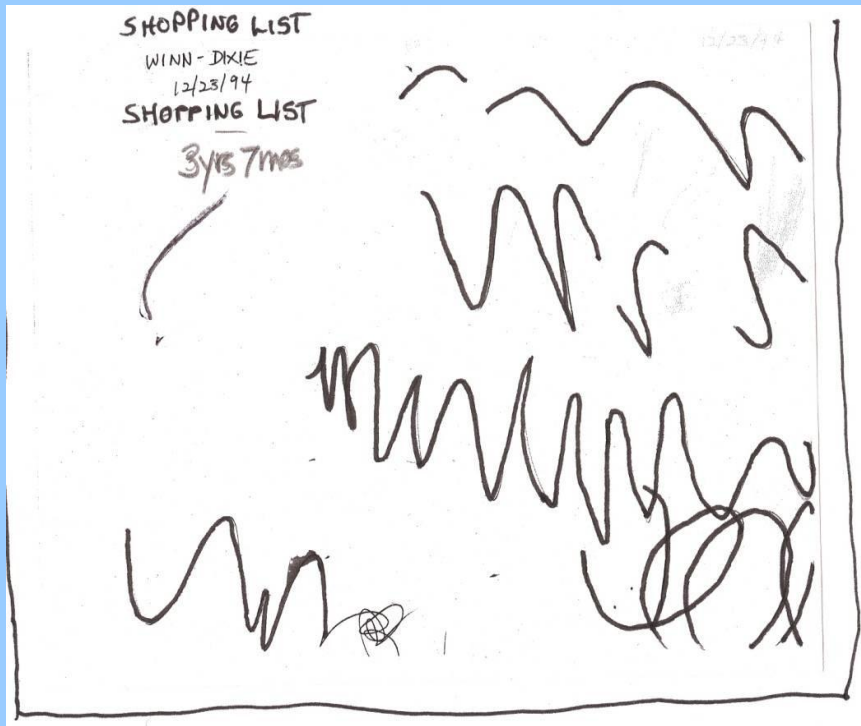


# Phase 4: Evaluation

- Evaluate progress on skills, strategies, errors, and effectiveness of various types of supports
- Review data on a regular basis during team meetings and modify instructional program if progress does not meet expectations
- Conduct comprehensive assessments at the beginning, middle and end of the school year



# Using Work Samples to Determine Developmental Levels and Identify Educational Goals



Step 1: Collect work samples for each child at beginning of year

Step 2: Record date artifact was collected and contextual information



Step 3: Evaluate artifacts at predetermined intervals (e.g., quarterly)



Step 4: Determine children's developmental levels using appropriate standards and milestones

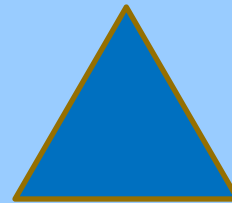
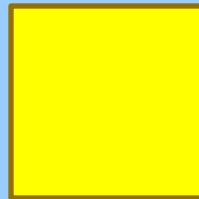
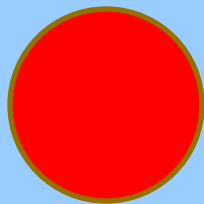
- Early writing begins when the child makes scribbling marks on paper. Eventually, the child begins to draw recognizable figures, recognizes that print can serve different functions, begins to recognize the names, sounds, and shapes of letters and words, starts to use invented spelling, and finally uses formal writing conventions.

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Step 5: Share artifacts and developmental information with families

Step 6: Identify developmentally appropriate educational goals

- The child will draw recognizable figures



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# **Cultural and Linguistic Diversity: Assessment Issues**

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# Cultural Biases of Traditional Assessment Tools



- Content reflects formal language used in dominant, mainstream culture
- Standardized tests do not take into account contextual influences on the measurement of children's behavior
- Standardized tests do not take into account cultural differences in values, beliefs and attitudes

# Test Adaptation Issues

- Normative samples of some tests do not include various ethnic groups
- Inadequate knowledge of development across various ethnic groups
- Dialect specific scoring may lower standards and expectations
- Test translations based upon monolingual view of bilingualism



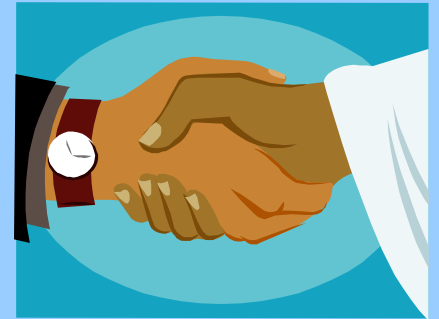
# Culturally Sensitive Assessment Requires...



- Awareness of the importance of collaboration with families
- Awareness of cultural characteristics of individuals involved
- Awareness of culturally appropriate materials and activities
- Awareness of the influence of culture on performance

# Awareness of the Importance of Collaboration with Families

- Relationships based upon trust and mutual respect
- Recognition that primary caregivers are experts about their children
- Appreciation of a family's role in children's development
- Respect of individual preferences for levels and degrees of involvement



# Awareness of Cultural Characteristics of Individuals Involved



- Cultural characteristics or rules for social interactions
- Cultural expectations regarding children's interactions with adults and/or strangers
- Types of play-based activities typical in the home environment
- Possible differences between one's own cultural expectations and those of the family



# Awareness of Culturally Appropriate Materials and Activities



- Ethnic dolls, and toys
- Books depicting different culturally fitting manners, customs, and clothing
- Pictures depicting different skin tones, family compositions, neighborhoods, and dwellings
- Activities involving the cultural characteristics of individuals involved

# Awareness of the Influence of Culture on Performance

- Children's familiarity with materials used for assessment and learning
- Children's familiarity with the content and structure of assessment and learning tasks
- Levels of acculturation
- Unspoken expectations for behavior and rules for taking tests



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# English-Language Learners

- Young children learn a second language easily
  - Learning more than one language places a child at-risk
  - Risk of mislabeling
-

# Learning a Second Language

- Takes time
- Children with a strong foundation in their native language learn a second language faster
- Basic communication skills: An ELL child requires about 2 years to reach native speaker proficiency
- Academic language (e.g., reading for information, writing logically, speaking formally)
- Reaching native speaker proficiency can take up to 7-10 years for a preschool-age ELL child

# Assessing Children From Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds

## Before the assessment

- Learn about children's and family's cultural and linguistic background and children's learning style

## During the assessment

- Explain the purpose and procedures for the assessment to children and family members
- Provide children with meaningful and culturally appropriate learning experiences

## After the assessment

- Avoid making assumptions
- Take time to reflect
- Ask caregivers for their opinions about results and recommendations

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# **Using Data for Instructional Decision Making**

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# Using Data for Instructional Decision-Making

- Embedded Models - Where to Assess?  
...In the context of child-initiated, routine and planned activities in home, daycare, and preschool contexts
- Authentic Models - When to Assess?  
...When children and caregivers are engaged in real-life tasks and activities
- Mediated Models – How to Assess?  
...Using scaffolding, mediation, and guided teaching



# Analyzing Data

- Look for patterns, trends
- Graphs
- Displays, panels
- Narrative summaries
- Scores



- Grisham-Brown, Hemmeter, & Pretti-Frontczak, 2005



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# Instructional Supports

- Curriculum modifications
- Child-focused instructional strategies



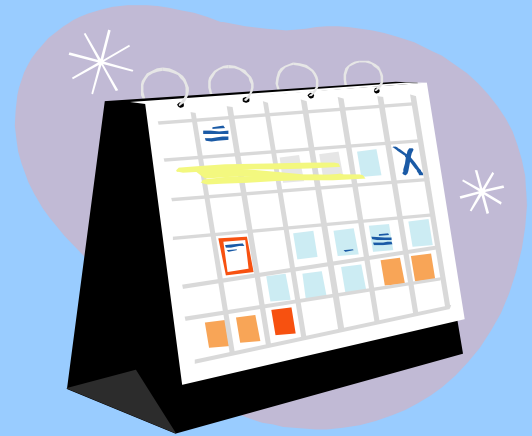
Building Blocks (Sandall & Schwartz, 2008)

Ladders to Literacy (Notari Syverson, O'Connor & Vadasy, 2007)


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# Curriculum Modifications

- Environmental support
- Adapt materials
- Simplify activity
- Use child preferences
- Peer support
- Special equipment

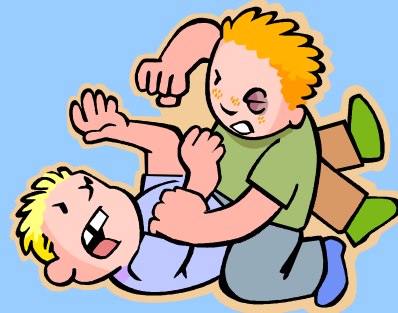


# Child-Focused Instructional Strategies

- Ask guiding questions
  - Provide encouragement and feedback
  - Explain, make task more explicit
  - Provide hints and reminders
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- Direct Instruction (model, prompts, time delay)

# Interpreting Data

- Child is making progress
- Child is not progressing
- Challenging behavior
- Dependent on prompts
- Inconsistent



# In Summary....



- Assessments should be authentic with evidence obtained from observing children engaged in actual tasks during everyday activities
- Assessment evidence should be used to understand and improve learning and instruction
- Families should have the opportunity to participate actively in the assessment process
- Assessment systems should include multiple assessment methods, measures, and sources of information

# References

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