

TATS eUpdate
Evaluation & Assessment of Young Children

**Differentiation of Terms:
Screening, Evaluation, & Assessment**
2007

The terms screening, evaluation, and assessment are often used interchangeably. However, in special education, they have very specific meanings. Teams involved in implementing screening, evaluation, and assessment of young children should have a clear definition of, and understand the terminology. The decision about when to use screening, evaluation, or assessment depends upon what is to be learned about the child and how the results will be used. There are a many instruments and methods that can be used for screening, evaluation, and assessment. Personnel from each school district or service agency should refer to their agency's policies and procedures to determine which instruments are appropriate for use and who is qualified to administer them. The following definitions may help clarify what those terms mean.

Best Practice

Screening:

Preschool children often enter special education as a result of the Child Find process. Child Find assists families to access screening services in their community. Screening is a first step in the process evaluation and assessment. It is a way of determining if a child needs comprehensive, individual evaluation. There are several components to a comprehensive screening process. These include the use of formal standardized screening instruments, as well as observation of the child, interviews with parents, collection of medical history data and screenings for vision, hearing, and communication functioning. Screenings instruments:

- provide general information about skills and ability
- guide planning for further evaluation and assessment if the family gives consent for such activities
- are NOT used to identify delays, determine eligibility, or make decisions for placement

Evaluation:

Evaluation is a way of collecting information about a child's learning needs, strengths, and interests. Evaluations are performed by qualified professionals. They are used to help decide whether a child has a disability and is eligible for Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs and services. No decision about ESE services can be made until an individual evaluation has been finished, reviewed, and an eligibility meeting has taken place. The evaluation may include giving individual tests, observing the children,

reviewing records, and talking with the child and parents. Prekindergarten children (ages 3-5) who have been identified as having a developmental delay may also be eligible for ESE Programs and services. This process includes the use of standardized or criterion referenced instruments, systematic observation, functional skills assessments, or other procedures selected in consultation with the parent(s); or informed clinical opinion and parent report. Some characteristics of evaluations procedures:

- They are used to determine eligibility for services
- They look at all the areas in which a child may have a special need
- They look at the child in more way than one, i.e. not just one test may be used
- They are culturally and linguistically appropriate
- They involve the use of multidisciplinary teams in the evaluation process, including parents as members of the team

Evaluations can also be used for other purposes. In order to fulfill reporting requirements from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) for child outcome indicators (Part C and Part B), one standardized instrument, (Battelle Developmental Inventory - BDI-2) is being used in Florida to evaluate progress as children move through the Part C and Part B programs. The BDI-2 is being used to gather entry and exit data on children birth to five as they enter and exit the Part C (Early Steps) program, and the prekindergarten disabilities program.

In addition to the BDI-2, there are many other standardized evaluation instruments. A report for the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the U.S. Department of Education contains an extensive list of measurement tools (Parrish and Phillips, 2003). The list may be accessed at:

http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ECO/pdfs/OSEP_Report_AppC.pdf

Assessment:

Assessment is a way of collecting information about what a child knows, what the child can do, and what the child still needs to learn. Assessments collect information from more than one source. They may include giving tests, observing the student, and looking at a child's portfolio or work samples. Some assessments are done in the classroom, others are given to all the children in the district or throughout the state. They help teachers and parents know what a child has learned and what he or she still needs to learn. Some characteristics of assessments:

- They are ongoing and are used to measure change and progress
- They help determine the child's strengths and needs
- They can be used for program planning and implementation
- They may be used to enhance a particular area of development
- They may provide information about how a child learns

- They collect information on a range of indicators of a child's development

Reflection:

1. Does your program, agency or school district use the terms as defined above?
2. Do you know how to access the criteria for eligibility that are applicable to your program?
3. Are the assessments of your children done on a regular and on-going basis?

Expecting all children the same age to learn from the same materials is like expecting all children the same age to wear the same size clothing. – Madeline Hunter

References and Resources

Boone, H. A. & Crais, E. (2002). Strategies for achieving family-driven assessment and intervention planning. In M. Ostrosky & E. Horn (Eds.) *Assessment: Gathering meaningful information. Young Exceptional Children Monograph No.4*. Longmont, Co: Sopris West, pp 1-14.

Cook, R.E., Klein, M.D., & Tessier, A. (2004). *Adapting Early Childhood Curricula for Children in Inclusive Settings 6th Edition*. Merrill Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Developmental Screening Indicators and Recommendations for Effective Practices for 3, 4, & Pre-K 5-Year Old Children. (2005). *Effective Policies Brief 1*. North Carolina Office of school Readiness. Retrieved August 28, 2007 from http://www.governor.state.nc.us/Office/Education/_pdf/DevelopmentalScreeningHandout0306.pdf

Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO) Center

A 5-year collaborative project funded by OSEP providing research and technical assistance to promote the development and implementation of child and family outcome measures for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities for use in local, state, and national accountability systems.

<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/index.cfm>

Florida Department of Education. (2001). An introduction to exceptional student education for parents of Florida's students with disabilities. Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services: Tallahassee, Florida.

Florida Rule 6A-6.03026 Florida Administrative Code (FAC) Special Programs for Prekindergarten Children with Disabilities and 6A-6.03027 (FAC) Special Programs for Children Three Through Five Years Old Who are Developmentally Delayed.

<https://www.flrules.org/gateway/readFile.asp?sid=0&tid=1062846&type=1&file=6A-6.03026.doc>

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Ostrosky, M.M. & Horn, E. (2002). Young Exceptional Children Monograph Series No 4, *Assessment: Gathering Meaningful Information*. The Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children. Sopris West: Longmont, Colorado.

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SERVE

The SERVE Center is one of ten Laboratories providing research-based information and services nationwide. These Laboratories form a nationwide education knowledge network, building a bank of information and resources shared and disseminated nationally and regionally to improve student achievement. Resources and information are available on a variety of topics for Pre-K programs, including transition, early literacy, and evaluation and assessment.

<http://www.serve.org/>

Technical Assistance & Training System (TATS)

Statewide project providing technical assistance and training to programs in Florida serving prekindergarten children with disabilities. Website provides information and resources on curriculum and instruction, evaluation and assessment, family involvement, inclusion, program effectiveness/quality, and transition, as well as, linking early childhood partners. www.tats.ucf.edu



TATS eUpdates are a service of the Technical Assistance & Training System Communities of Practice. The TATS eUpdates are intended to provide current information related to best practices or trends in the education of young children with special needs in the areas of Transition, Program Effectiveness, Inclusion, Curriculum & Instruction, Evaluation & Assessment, and Family Involvement. For more information about the TATS Communities of Practices and the TATS eUpdates, please log on to <http://www.tats.ucf.edu/practice.php>.