CUR117: Authentic Assessment in Early Care and Education

Handout

Welcome to CUR117:

What is authentic assessment, and what makes it different from other forms of assessment? Why is authentic assessment so important in the early childhood education environment? How can authentic assessments be used to improve individual outcomes and overall program quality?

In this course, participants will learn what authentic assessment means and why and how to utilize various methods and instruments to learn about the whole child and make informed, purposeful curriculum decisions.

Objectives:

By taking notes on the handout and successfully answering assessment questions, participants will meet the following objectives as a result of taking this course:

- Identify appropriate methods and uses of assessment in the early care and education environment
- Compare and contrast formal and informal assessments as well as traditional and authentic assessments
- Identify characteristics of authentic assessment
- Demonstrate an understanding of NAEYC’s indicators of effective assessment
- Demonstrate an understanding of the observation process
- Identify characteristics and proper application of observation assessments involving checklists and rating scales
- Identify the purpose and characteristics of anecdotal records, running records, frequency count, and event/time sampling
- Identify the purpose and recommended practices for using child interviews as a form of assessment
- Identify the purpose and recommended practices for portfolio-based assessment
- Demonstrate an understanding of the difference between objective and subjective observation records and characteristics of appropriate, effective recordkeeping

References:


Additional Resources:


Course Notes:
Use the space provided to record important information for each section.

Assessment: What it is and is Not

At its most basic, the word assess simply means:

Assessment refers to the act of:

In ECE, Assessment is Not...

A Note about Screening

The Purpose of Assessment in Early Childhood Education

The purpose of assessment, according to NAEYC, is three-fold:

1. To help educators make sound decisions about teaching and learning.
2. To assist in identifying significant concerns that may require intervention for individual children.
3. To help programs improve their educational and developmental interventions.
Assessment Forms: The Big Picture

Formal Assessment

*Standardization* is:

Informal Assessment

Informal Assessment is Never Standardized

Informal Assessment has No Scores or Grades

Informal Assessment is Not for Comparison

Informal Assessment is Mostly Observation and Interaction

Informal Assessment is Based in the Normal Learning Environment
Traditional and Authentic Assessment Forms

It is Not Either/Or

What is Authentic Assessment?

*Authentic assessment* is intended to provide:

In higher grades, teachers often evaluate authentic assessments using a formal *rubric*:

Traditional/Authentic Comparison

This table highlights the basic differences between traditional and authentic assessments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Assessments</th>
<th>Authentic Assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Select a Response</td>
<td>Perform a Task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artificial or Contrived</td>
<td>Real-life, Genuine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recall/Recognition</td>
<td>Construction/Application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-structured</td>
<td>Student-structured or student-teacher collaboration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indirect Evidence (The student does well on the test but do they *really* know it?)

| Direct Evidence (I know they can do it because I saw it with my eyes.) |

Characteristics of Authentic Assessment

Children are assessed based on their actual work.

Children are assessed based on what they are actually doing with or through the curriculum.
Children are assessed as individuals.

Assessment is part of the learning process.

The teacher assesses the "whole child."

The family is involved in the assessment process.

Assessment is ongoing and continuous.

The teacher utilizes a wide variety of assessment tools.

Activities elicit higher-order and critical thinking skills.

Authentic assessment allows the possibility of multiple outcomes and ideas.

**NAEYC Indicators of Effective Assessment Practices**
1. Ethical principles guide assessment practices.

2. Assessment instruments are used for their intended purposes.

3. Assessments are appropriate for ages and other characteristics of children being assessed.

4. Assessment instruments are in compliance with professional criteria for quality.

5. What is assessed is developmentally and educationally significant.

6. Assessment evidence is used to understand and improve learning.

7. Assessment evidence is gathered from realistic settings and situations that reflect children’s actual performance.

8. Assessments use multiple sources of evidence gathered over time.

9. Screening is always linked to follow-up.
10. Use of individually administered, norm-referenced tests is limited.

11. Staff members and families are knowledgeable about assessment.

**Observation**

It is also important to remember that *observation and supervision are not the same.*

- The purpose of *supervision* is:

- The purpose of observation is:

**The Observation Process**

1. **Plan the Observation**

   **Who?**

   **What?**

   **How?**
2. Conduct the Observation

Be objective!

- **Objective:** I asked David if he could name the animal in the picture, and he did not respond. He stared at the picture for a few seconds and then looked over at the block center, where his friends Paul and Matt were playing.

- **Subjective:** I asked David if he could name the animal in the picture, but he ignored me because he really wanted to play with Paul and Matt at the block center at that moment instead.

3. Interpret the Data

4. Take Action

Assessment Tools and Methods

Checklists

*Checklists* are:

- Developmental Checklists

*Checklists are useful for recording information about specific developmental milestones.*
Here are examples of broad developmental checklists that cover all domains for specific age ranges. Here is one focused on Motor, Adaptive, and Sensory Processing Skills.

Environment Observation Checklists

For example, here is an example of a fairly typical playground safety checklist.

Child Behavior Checklists

Try This!

Explore Resources

Take a few minutes to research some checklists. Please open a separate browser with a search engine, or simply click here, which will open a new window.

A simple Google search of "Developmental Checklists" or "ECE Environment checklists" will yield all kinds of beneficial results. You can further refine your search with terms like "early literacy checklists," "early language checklists," or "social skills checklist."

Search around until you find a checklist that might be useful in your current classroom or one in which you have taught or observed in the past.

Rating Scales

Rating scales are similar to checklists, but instead of simply checking yes or no, the observer has a broader range of options, such as Almost Always, Often, Sometimes, and Almost Never. This allows an observer to gather more detailed assessment data.

The purpose of a rating scale is to determine a rating or score for a specific item or group of items. Typically, each option on the scale has a point value.

Below is a section from an actual social skills rating scale. As an example, imagine "Almost Always" is 3 points, "Often" is 2, "Sometimes" is 1, and "Almost Never" is 0. What score would the observer record for the following group of items? Note: this is only a sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL PLAY &amp; EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>Almost Always</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Almost Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintains proximity to peer within 1 foot</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observes peers in play vicinity within 3 feet</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically imitates peer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbally imitates peer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total rating for this group of items is 6 (3 + 2 + 0 + 1). Placed in the context of the full rating scale, this would help provide a total rating for a child’s social play and emotional development.

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale®, Third Edition (ECERS-3™) and its companion scale for infant/toddler environments (ITERS-R™) are:
An anecdotal record is:

The anecdotal record should describe the behavior observed, as well as relevant details, including:

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- 
- 
- 

Here is an example of an anecdotal record from *Child Care Today*:

Four-year-old Sari entered the classroom, clinging to her father’s thigh. As her father signed her in on the attendance sheet, Sari cried quietly into her father’s pant leg. Sari’s father bent down and asked her why she was crying. She said she wanted him to stay with her for a while. Her father said he would. Without talking, Sari led him to the double easel in the art center. Sari stood at one side of the easel. Her father pulled up a child’s chair and sat on it at the other side of the easel. They both picked up paintbrushes and began to paint.

Sari told her father she was painting the sun. Sari’s father told her it was the best sun he had ever seen. Sari smiled and asked what he was painting. Her father said he was painting a tree. Sari said she could paint a tree, too. He responded, "I bet you can make really good trees." After two minutes passed, Sari’s father said he had to go to work. Sari said, "Can’t you paint another tree?" Her father put his arm around her back and around her waist and said he would like to, but his boss would be upset if he was late for work. Sari lowered her head a bit and whispered, "Okay." Her father knelt down, and Sari hugged him around the neck. Her father walked out the door. Sari returned to the art easel and continued to paint her sun picture.
Running (or Narrative) Records

A **running record** is:

The following is an example of a running record involving social interaction between 2 children. This record covers 5 minutes of observation. Each number represents 1 minute.

1. Tina walked over to the easel and picked up a brush with blue paint on it. The teacher’s aide said, "Tina, you need to put on a smock to paint at the easel." Tina put the paintbrush back into the paint container.
2. She reached for a smock and put it on. Tina tried to tie the smock but could not. She asked Chad, age 5, who was on the other side of the easel, to tie it for her. Chad put down his paintbrush and tied Tina’s smock.
3. Tina went back to her side of the easel. She picked up the paintbrush with blue paint and began painting large blue circles on her paper.
4. Tina continued painting circles. Then she walked back to Chad’s side of the easel and said, "What are you painting, Chad?" Chad answered, "A tree." Tina said, "I am making blue suns." She went back to painting circles.
5. Tina put the brush with the blue paint back into the container. She said, "Got to have some red, some red." She picked up a brush with red paint and began making dots on the paper.

**Frequency Count**

A **frequency count** is:

**Sampling**

**Time Sampling**
Event Sampling

Interviews

Child Interviews

Through child interviews, a teacher can encourage a child to:

- 
- 
- 
- 

Family Interviews

Child Self-Assessments

Like any assessment, a self-assessment should serve the 3 basic purposes:

1. To help educators make sound decisions about teaching and learning.
2. To assist in identifying significant concerns that may require intervention for individual children.
3. To help programs improve their educational and developmental interventions.
Invite Children’s Input!

Drawings or writing samples are the first things people usually think of when they hear the word portfolio, but it can also include:

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The portfolio does not have to fit in a binder or even a box. Some teachers scan everything and create digital portfolios. Whatever you decide to include, consider these questions when planning to use portfolios as effective assessment:

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Tips, Recommended Practices, and Reminders

Can Traditional Methods Play a Role in Authentic Assessment?
Authentic Assessment as an Appropriate Alternative to Formal Assessment

Be as Objective as Possible!

Consider each of the following:

Which are objective and which are subjective? How do you know?

1. Jenny sets the table for her dolls and counts "you...one...you...one... ME!"

2. Toby is very bossy in the dramatic play area and is probably imitating behaviors he sees at home.

3. Michelle has been crying because she misses her mom and is afraid she will not come back. She curls up under the table with a teddy bear for comfort.

4. Langston kisses his father goodbye and smiles, but then he cries after the door closes and tugs on Ms. Sylvester's skirt.

You Need a Tracking System

Do Not Be Hasty

Assessment Informs Curriculum, Curriculum Informs Assessment

The Necessity of Professional Knowledge
Engaging Curriculum: Let Children Do What Children Do Best

Time Management

Choose the Best Assessment for your Purpose

Document and Reflect