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Authentic Assessment for Early Childhood Intervention: In-Vivo and Virtual Practices for Interdisciplinary Professionals.

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What you need to know

The paper focuses on outlining a step-by-step model for authentic assessment which supports developmentally appropriate practice quality standards for both in-vivo and virtual practices. Standards are proposed for natural environments; observational methods; family centred practice interdisciplinary teamwork; and the essential link between assessment and intervention.

The paper was motivated by the 'lessons learned' from the Covid pandemic about implementing authentic assessment for early childhood intervention and infuse the results from the LINK forum research to shape the proposed step by step process.

What is this research about?

This research explores how interdisciplinary professionals can effectively assess and support young children with developmental delays or disabilities. It emphasises the use of authentic assessment (AA), which involves real-life, developmentally appropriate, and individualised evaluations rather than standardised tests. The study highlights the importance of integrating both in-person (in-vivo) and virtual practices to support a holistic approach for assessment linked to intervention.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers synthesized findings from the LINK Forum, which brought together international and interdisciplinary experts to establish consensus on best practices for authentic assessment. They developed a step-by-step model that incorporates observational methods, natural environments, family-centred practices, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The model also integrates technology to enhance assessment without replacing in-person observations.

What did the researchers find?

The study found that authentic assessment is most effective when it occurs in natural settings, involves families and interdisciplinary teams, and is closely tied to intervention planning. Technology can support these assessments, but the human element remains crucial. The research supports a shift from standardised testing to meaningful, individualised assessments that inform tailored interventions.

The step-by-step model for authentic assessment in early childhood intervention presented includes the following key components:

1: Use technology as the basis and integral feature for all assessments of children's competencies.

Leverage platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and mobile devices to observe and document children's behaviours in natural settings. Video portfolios help track progress and validate observations over time.

2. Reframe the assessor's role as "Orchestrator" of authentic assessment processes via others.

Shift from being the sole evaluator to a facilitator or "orchestrator" who coordinates input from families, caregivers, and educators. This collaborative approach enriches the assessment process.

3. Choose a teamwork model with parents that fits the child's needs and family cultural preferences.

Select an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary model based on the child's needs and family preferences. These models promote shared responsibilities and integrated service delivery.

4. Select a developmental profile to record functional competencies that link to curricular goals.

Use validated developmental assessment tools that align with curriculum goals and allow for tracking progress across domains like communication, motor skills, and social-emotional development.

5. Employ "family-friendly" materials that are jargon-free and common language for all.

Ensure all assessment tools and communication are accessible, jargon-free, and culturally sensitive so families can actively participate and understand the process.

6. Observe first children's natural competencies in play/classroom routines.

Focus on observing children during typical activities such as mealtime, playtime, and transitions. This provides a more accurate picture of their abilities and challenges.

7. Record videos of child's play to validate and archive observations of status/progress.

Encourage families or educators to record short videos of the child engaging in play or routines. These clips serve as valuable data points for analysis and team discussions.

8. Observe/record child capabilities across multiple settings, people, and occasions using multiple methods.

Gather data from various settings (home, childcare, community), people (parents, teachers, therapists), and times to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the child's development.

9. Partner with Parents and Caregivers.

Engage families as co-assessors by valuing their insights, encouraging their observations, and involving them in decision-making. This builds trust and ensures relevance.

10. Partner with Teachers and Team Members.

Collaborate with educators and specialists to share observations, validate findings, and co-create intervention strategies that are consistent across environments.

11. Engage in child play to probe specific skills.

Use play-based interactions to assess targeted developmental skills such as problem-solving, communication, and motor coordination in a natural and engaging way.

12. Select familiar toys/peers to prompt child play.

Incorporate items and people the child knows well to elicit authentic responses and assess how skills generalize across familiar contexts.

13. Interview caregivers about child competencies and needs.

Conduct structured or informal interviews with caregivers to gather detailed information about the child's strengths, needs, preferences, and daily functioning.

14. Use clinical judgment and consensus team decision-making as an essential IDEAm mandated assessment component.

Use informed professional judgment and collaborative decision-making to interpret data, determine eligibility, and plan interventions, in accordance with IDEA guidelines.

How can you use this research?

This research is valuable for practitioners, policy makers, and service planners involved in early childhood intervention. It encourages involving children in setting and evaluating their own goals, which can improve outcomes in health, wellbeing, independence, social engagement, and future learning. The findings support policy changes and professional development to align with best practices in authentic assessment.

Practitioners can apply the step-by-step process for authentic assessment by:

- * Conducting assessments in natural environments where children feel comfortable.
- * Using observational methods during everyday routines to capture authentic behaviours.
- * Engaging families as active partners in the assessment and goal-setting process.
- * Collaborating with interdisciplinary teams to interpret data and plan interventions.
- * Integrating technology such as video recordings and virtual platforms to supplement in-person assessments.

- * Linking assessment findings directly to individualized intervention plans.
- * Continuously monitoring progress and revising goals based on the child's development.

This paper is relevant to any person involved in early childhood intervention that is involved in assessment for intervention.

Where to from here

This research presents an opportunity to rethink how assessment and intervention are approached. ECI Professionals can:

- **Embed authentic assessment** into everyday practice by observing children in natural environments and using those observations to inform meaningful goals and strategies.
- **Empower children** to participate in setting and evaluating their own goals, fostering autonomy, engagement, and self-awareness from an early age.
- **Strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration** by ensuring that educators, therapists, and families work together to create holistic and individualized support plans.
- **Leverage technology** to complement in-person assessments, making services more accessible and flexible, especially for remote or underserved communities.
- **Advocate for policy and training reforms** that support authentic assessment practices and recognise the value of child-led goal setting.
- **Focus on equity and inclusion** by tailoring assessments to the diverse cultural, developmental, and linguistic needs of children and their families.

This is a call to action for practitioners, planners, and policymakers to prioritise child voice, family partnership, and evidence-based practices in all aspects of early childhood intervention.

This Research Snapshot was prepared by Trisha Wachtel, PRECI committee member, Developmental Educator, and current Practice Operations Manager for Early Childhood Australia Northern Territory program delivery.

In the spirit of reconciliation PRECI acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.