Standards and Assessments in Early Childhood

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Maggie Brown, left, a kindergartner at Osborn Hill School in Fairfield, Conn., works on patterns with blocks.

No Time for Napping in Today’s Kindergarten
The Littlest Test Takers

Preschoolers can be thrown off their games by a stomachache or an itchy shirt. Assessment can be highly unreliable. And yet there it is. **BY SUSAN BRENNA**

In this era of testing and accountability, preschool is the last frontier. Most preschool educators are coming to accept that with more states getting into the business of educating 3- and 4-year-olds, the political demands for accountability — for showing that preschools and kindergartens work — are inevitable. This means that children as young as 3 have to be observed, evaluated and in some way tested.

![Image](Laura Pedrick for The New York Times)

The most reliable tests of social and emotional abilities, he adds, are ones designed to diagnose developmental problems in young children, and they are expensive and time-consuming to administer. There are well-researched as-
States Move Toward Closer Scrutiny of Preschools

Texas’ system tracks how well a program’s alumni do when they get to kindergarten.
...this week we took a test to see if we're ready for the test that tests our test skills...

...wait until kindergarten!
Our Goal
To focus on how standards and assessments can be used to enhance learning and improve the teaching of those working with young children.
Three Types of Standards

1. Program standards
2. Content standards
3. Performance standards
Program Standards

- Primarily describe the form or the structure of the early childhood setting.
- Not directly related to what children are taught, or how they are taught it.
Content Standards

• Knowledge, skills, and competencies children are expected to master.

• Define what children should know and be able to do in different domains.
Content Standard

“Children will read with understanding and fluency.”
Performance Standards

• Concrete examples of competent, skilled, or knowledgeable behavior.

• Often associated with a rubric, or scoring framework that provides performance criteria.
“Children will identify labels and signs in the environment.”
The critical issue about standards in early childhood is not whether to have them, but how specific they should be.
How to Best Link Standards and Assessments
Observational Assessments

Assessments based on information obtained from children’s typical classroom activity.
What Standards-Based Observational Assessments Can Teach Us

- What children are learning and have begun to master
- How well children are doing in relation to learning goals and expectations
- How to guide instructional decision-making
How Do Standards and Assessments Connect?
Illinois Early Learning Assessment
Developmental Guidelines

Illinois State Board of Education:
Division of Early Childhood Education
Language Arts

STATE GOAL 1:
Read with understanding and fluency.

Learning Standard A:
Apply word analysis and vocabulary skills to comprehend selections.

BENCHMARKS

1.A.ECa Understand that pictures and symbols have meaning and that print carries a message.

1.A.ECb Understand that reading progresses from left to right and top to bottom.

1.A.ECc Identify labels and signs in the environment.

1.A.ECd Identify some letters, including those in own name.

1.A.ECe Make some letter-sound matches.
## Language and Literacy

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Listening</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gains meaning by listening. (p. 5)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Follows two- or three-step directions. (p. 5)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Demonstrates phonological awareness. (p. 5)</td>
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Listening and Understanding

“Gains Meaning by Listening”

NOT YET

• Has difficulty listening to picture books for more than a few minutes or regardless of the type of text.
• Does not retell, dramatize, draw about, or discuss stories, even very simple ones.
• Does not express preference for favorite books.
Listening and Understanding
“Gains Meaning by Listening”
IN PROCESS

• Listens to a picture book for about 5 - 10 minutes at a time.

• Demonstrates partial comprehension of stories comprised of one or two events and characters by retelling, dramatizing, drawing, or discussing.

• Identifies one or two favorite books.
Listening and Understanding
“Gains Meaning by Listening”
PROFICIENT

- Listens to a variety of texts, such as folk/fairy tales, contemporary fiction, humor, poetry, science and nature for more than 10 minutes at a time.
- Demonstrates comprehension of stories made of several events and characters by retelling, discussing, dramatizing, drawing,
- Identifies, talks about, and enjoys hearing specific books, authors, and/or illustrators.
The best way to evaluate a child’s performance is to study performance, not something else.
The best way to improve a child’s performance is to teach the child, not test the child.
Understanding the child within context is key to understanding the child.
In this presentation Dr. Meisels mentions several assessments. He is an author of one of them—the Work Sampling System—and a consultant to the company that publishes it, Pearson Early Learning. These assessments will be cited solely to illustrate the points raised in the lecture, rather than to promote the assessments or imply an endorsement by any particular institution.