

Asking the Right Questions, Getting the Right Answers: Evaluating Young Children for Special Education Services

Collecting and Using Information

This section provides Tip Sheets relating to the collection of assessment information. These sheets can be used individually or collaboratively with team members to take a closer look at the match between current and recommended practices.

The following Tip Sheets are provided:

- Making Assessment Decisions – This table matches the type of assessment decision with the type of assessment activity (e.g., screening, evaluation, intervention planning, progress monitoring), and the corresponding assessment questions.
- IDEA Requirements – Outlines State and Federal requirements in assessment
- Issues in Data Collection – Team considerations when collecting data
- Review of Existing Data Form – This form provides examples of where/how assessment data can be gathered (e.g., record review, interview, observation, tests)
- Tool Selection Grid – Matches specific tools & methods with questions that may come up in the evaluation/assessment process.
- Watching and Recording Children's Behavior – provides an overview of observational techniques that can be used to document specific skills and develop baseline to be used in the Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance and subsequently Measurable Annual Goals.
- Report Document Template – Provides an outline of what must go into the final evaluation/eligibility report that is submitted at the end of the evaluation process.

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Making Assessment Decisions

Decision	Assessment Type	Relevant Question
Determine whether to refer the child for additional assessment	Screening	Does developmental screening indicate potential for developmental delay or disability?
Determine whether the child has a developmental delay or disability. Determine whether eligible for special services.	Evaluation	Does a developmental delay or disability exist? If so, what is the nature and extent of the delay or disability? Does the child meet the criteria specified by the state to receive specialized services?
Determine what the child should be taught.	Assessment for intervention planning	What is the child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance? What does the child need to be more competent in the preschool setting, home and/or community? What are the effects of adaptations and assistance on child's performance? What are the usual patterns of responding and what relationships with environmental variables appear to be influencing the child's performance?
Determine whether the child is making adequate progress in learning important skills.	Progress monitoring/curriculum based assessment	What is the child's initial performance of important skills? What is the child's present performance of important skills? Is the child using these skills across contexts?
Determine whether the program is providing a quality learning environment	Environmental assessment	Is a high quality learning environment being provided? Are all children making important learning progress?

Adapted from: Wolery, M., Strain, P., & Bailey, D. B. (1992). Reaching potentials of children with special needs. In S. Bredekamp & T. Rosegrant (Eds.) *Reaching potentials: Appropriate curriculum and assessment for young children* (pp. 92-111). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

IDEA Requirements

1. Use a variety of assessment tools and strategies.
2. Include relevant functional and behavioral data.
3. Other considerations (legal requirements for evaluation or reporting)
 - a. Relevant behavior
 - b. Impact on educational performance
 - c. Data collected in all areas of suspected exceptionality
 - d. Exclusionary factors
 - Lack of instruction in reading or math
 - Limited English proficiency
 - Category specific (e.g., LD, ED, TBI)
4. Include information from the parents.
5. Include information related to enabling the child to participate and progress in the general curriculum.
6. Assess the student in all areas of a suspected exceptionality.
7. Consider the need for a functional behavioral assessment.

Issues in Data Collection

Issue	Points	Notes
1. Data Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the data address the presenting concerns? • Does the data answer the three questions? 	
2. Existing Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider what information may already exist that tells you about important aspects of the student's functioning. If that information already exists, then there is no need to conduct additional assessment. Avoid replication of already existing data. 	
3. Functional Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the data describe the degree of match between the student and his educational environment? • Does the data provide information about the student's present levels of performance and educational needs? • Will the data enable the team to select and design an intervention? 	
4. IDEA Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider whether all requirements for the evaluation have been met. 	
5. Data Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you using a format for describing the data that will enhance the team's ability to use the data? • Are you able to interpret the data in a way that is meaningful and understandable to both professionals and parents who will be using it as a basis for decision-making? 	

Davis, K., Davis, C., & McVey, D. (2003). *Evaluation and eligibility training*. Materials developed by the Kansas Assessment Project and the Kansas Program Evaluation Project.

Review of Existing Data

When reviewing data using RIOT, keep asking:

1. Is sufficient data available to completely understand the issue?
2. What additional data is needed so the team can better understand the issue?

Data Source	Key Questions	Notes
<p>R Record Review</p>	<p>What does the information tell the team about whether the difficulties have been present over time and across settings?</p> <p>Has the team located and reviewed all information that exists for the student? Includes screening information.</p>	
<p>I Interview</p>	<p>What are the perceptions of the significant adults in the student's life?</p> <p>What are the perceptions of the student?</p>	
<p>O Observation</p>	<p>What are the student's learning behaviors in a variety of settings and circumstances?</p>	
<p>T Test/Assess</p>	<p>To what extent are the student's learning skills or behavior different from peers?</p> <p>To what extent are the student's learning skills or behavior different from age or grade level standards?</p>	

Tool Selection Grid

R I O T

Evaluation Questions	Records	Interviews	Observations	Checklists	Rubrics	Norm	CRT CBA
In one year how much progress do you expect this child to make without intervention? What will peers be able to do in one year?			X	X			X
What are the strengths of the child? Can these be utilized during intervention? How?		X	X			X	X
Is there a convergence of data that indicates a delay across settings, people, situations?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Are the resources needed to support the child to participate in activities appropriate for students of the same age beyond those available through general education or other resources?	X	X	X				
Is there a need for specially designed instruction? If so, what?		X	X				X

Nelson, C., & Goosen, M. (2004, January). *Asking the right questions, getting the right answers: Evaluating young children for special education services*. Presentation at Iola, Kansas. Parsons, KS: Kansas Inservice Training System, Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities.

Tool Selection Grid

RIOT

Evaluation Questions	Records	Interviews	Observations	Checklists	Rubrics	Norm	CRT CBA
What is the presenting concern(s)?	X	X	X				
Has the concern been present since birth.	X	X		X			
Is the child's development significantly different from other children the same age?	X	X	X			X	
What might be keeping the child from doing what is expected?		X	X			X	X
With extra support does the child continue to make minimal/no progress?	X	X	X				
If there is a delay, how is it keeping the child from participating in appropriate activities?		X	X	X			X
With regard to skills how much, how often, to what level, and under what circumstances does the child exhibit the skill?			X	X	X		X
Given the skill level of the child, what should come next?			X	X	X		X

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WATCHING AND RECORDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR

Anecdotal Observations

This method of assessment relies on defining the incidence or behavior to be observed. Often times a data sheet is created to help organize and record each occurrence of a specified behavior as well as reporting the antecedent and consequence of the behavior. Anecdotal observations are useful for recording the content of the behavior. They help to provide hypotheses about the causes or reinforces of the behavior.

Frequency Counts

Sometimes it is helpful to see how many times a behavior occurs within a specific time frame. In recording frequency data the observer first writes down the specific behavior to be counted. Frequency can be listed or graphed. Frequency rates are calculated by dividing the number of times the behavior occurred by the number of minutes in the observation. A future goal may include either decreasing or increasing the frequency rate of the specific behavior.

Duration

At times it is helpful to assess how long a behavior lasts. For example a team could assess how long a tantrum lasts, or the amount of time it takes from instruction to the child actually participating in the activity. A percentage is calculated by dividing the total amount of time the child exhibits the behavior by the total amount of time provided for the specified activity.

Intensity

At times we may need to know not only the frequency or duration of a behavior, but also the intensity with which the behavior is performed. To what degree is the behavior exhibited, how hard, how strong, how loud, how well? This information is added on to either a frequency or duration recording method with the additional measure of intensity such as volume (whisper, conversational speech, shouting), degree of protest (whining, crying, tantruming) level of prompting (physical, verbal, environmental cue).

Time Samples/Interval Recording

When it is not feasible to continuously observe and record a behavior, a time sampling method can be used. Recording the occurrence or nonoccurrence of the target behavior at the end of specified time segments or intervals is how a time sampling procedure is done. The observer makes a tally mark at the end of each time interval if the behavior has occurred. If the behavior occurs before the end of the time interval, the behavior is not recorded. The behavior is only recorded at the end of the interval.

Checklists

Checklists provide a quick answer to whether or not a specific behavior is performed. Specified behaviors are listed and a space is provided to either check or make comments beside each skill. Published curriculums often provide formal checklists, however, checklists can also be created by teachers or others on the evaluation team.

Rubrics

A rubric is a scoring guide that seeks to evaluate a student's performance based on the sum of a full range of criteria rather than a single numerical score. Rubrics can be used to define behaviors that involve qualitative judgements (attention, engagement, independence, etc.). A rubric is very similar to a checklist in that specific behaviors have been selected to observe that help define the expectations of a given task. Rubrics are created by task analyzing a related set of behaviors, placing them on a grid in a linear fashion and then assigning a numeric value to each behavior. Criteria are generally set on a 3 to 5 point scale. Rubrics can only be used to assess a single set of highly related behaviors. They are not appropriate to assess broad categories such as pre-academic, communication, fine motor skills, etc. Rubrics are best used when they are constructed around the presenting concern and will, therefore, vary with each child and situation.

Report Documentation

The purpose of the evaluation/eligibility report is to summarize the data collected during the evaluation, to document the eligibility determination and the basis for that determination, and to record the agreement/disagreement of team members regarding that decision.

Evaluation/Eligibility Report Requirements

Upon completion of an evaluation and determination of eligibility, the Evaluation Team must prepare a written report that includes statements of the following:

- 1) Each team member must certify in writing whether the report reflects the member's conclusion. If it does not reflect the member's conclusion, the team member may submit a separate statement presenting the member's conclusion.
- 2) The determination of whether the child has an exceptionality.
- 3) The basis for making the determination.
- 4) The relevant behavior noted during observation of the child; the relationship of that behavior to the child's academic functioning.
- 5) Educationally relevant medical findings (if any).

*If the child has a **Specific Learning Disability**, the report must also include:*

- 6) The determination of whether there is a severe discrepancy between achievement and ability that is not correctable without special education and related services.
- 7) The determination of the team concerning the effects of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.