

## ❧ A Message for Teachers, Parents, and Administrators ❧

Assessing children in the earliest years of life—from birth to age 8—is difficult because it is the period when young children’s rates of physical, motor, and linguistic development outpace growth rates at all other stages. Growth is rapid, episodic, and highly influenced by environmental supports: nutrition, parents, quality caregiving, and the learning setting.

- Because young children learn in ways and at rates different from older children and adults,
  - we must tailor our assessments accordingly.
- Because young children come to know things through doing, as well as through listening, and because they often represent their knowledge better by showing than by talking or writing,
  - paper-and-pencil tests are not adequate.
- Because young children do not have the experience to understand what the goals of formal testing are,
  - testing interactions may be very different from those that would be possible to structure appropriately.
- Because young children develop and learn in fits and starts,
  - tests given at one point in time do not give a complete picture of learning.
- And because young children’s achievements are the result of a complex mix of their ability to learn and past learning opportunities,
  - it is a mistake to interpret a test score as evidence of what could be learned.

For these reasons, how we assess young children and the principles that frame such assessments need special attention. What works for older children and adults will not work for younger children; they have unique needs that, as adults, are often difficult to recognize if we are to optimize their development.

Educators and child development specialists have long recognized the uniqueness of the early years. Informal assessment has been a part of the early childhood field. Early educators have observed and recorded children’s behavior by watching children in their natural environments as young children carry out everyday activities.

These observations have proven effective for purposes of chronicling children’s development, cataloging their accomplishments, and exploring programs and activities within the classroom to meet young children’s learning needs.

The most important reason for assessing young children is to help them learn. To this end, assessments should be closely tied to curriculum, and should be a natural part of instructional activities.

Excerpt from **PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSESSMENTS**

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