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Assessment of Children in Early Childhood Centres

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education at Massey University

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Assessment of Children in Early Childhood Centres

Report to the
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Assessment of Children in Early Childhood Centres.
Contract between Palmerston North College of Education and Ministry of Education.
Abstract

This study examined the procedures and methods of assessment of children used in kindergartens and childcare centres throughout New Zealand.

Through the use of questionnaires to 269 centres followed by structured interviews at 24 centres, and an observation exercise at 12 centres, information was gathered on:

- the aim or purpose of assessing children in early childhood centres
- the types of procedures used for assessing children
- the areas of development covered by the various methods of assessment; and
- the use to which the assessment information was put once it had been collected.

Staff in centres were also asked about their perceived current needs for carrying out assessment of children.

The study found that a diversity of approaches were used for assessing children. While 41% of centres had written assessment of all children, the remainder either did not have any written assessment or only assessed some children. Observations were the main form of assessment used and this was usually supplemented by other assessment procedures. Some children were more likely to be observed than others. Those children who had a special need or were a concern for some reason featured more in observations than the quieter or busy children.

The main purposes for assessing children were for record keeping (accountability) and to help plan a programme. Respondents to the questionnaire said their assessment information was used for planning programmes to cater for individual needs and working on or filling gaps
in the development of children. In structured interviews, staff reported that 
assessment information was used mostly ‘to plan a programme’ or ‘to work 
with parents’.

Assessment information was shared with a variety of other people but mostly 
other staff and parents. The questionnaire and interview data showed that 
staff believed that physical, social, emotional, cognitive and language 
development were the areas of development that they covered most, with less 
emphasis on aesthetic/creative and cultural development. The observation 
exercise showed that social, emotional and socio-emotional development were 
observed more than the other areas of development.

Many centres saw the value in assessment however some were quite worried 
about how it could be practically carried out.

Comments specifically about the assessment of children were found in the 
charter of 46% of centres interviewed.

The frequency of assessment ranged from daily to yearly.

Information from the study was used in conjunction with the literature 
review to critically evaluate what was happening in the area of assessment of 
children in kindergartens and childcare centres in New Zealand.

The components needed in order for assessment to be beneficial to children, 
teachers, parents/whanau and the community were highlighted. 
Recommendations were made and guidelines formulated on the principles 
that need to be present if worthwhile assessment of children is to be carried 
out in early childhood centres.
Preface and Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the support given by the Ministry of Education in providing the funding to enable this research to be carried out. I also thank Palmerston North College of Education for the support they provided throughout the project.

I would like to thank Don McAlpine who was my supervisor and also the members of the Advisory Committee, Arohia Durie, Colin Gibbs, Colleen O'Brien, Ngaire Bennie and Carol Garden who all provided input into the project as well as encouragement.

To the early childhood staff in centres who helped me gain an inside view on assessment of children through their involvement in questionnaires, interviews and the observation exercise I am grateful for their time and enthusiasm throughout the study. Responses displayed a high level of commitment to their profession and trust in me to accurately portray these views. It is hoped the information will assist them in further developing this important aspect of early childhood education for the benefit of children and their families.

I wish to also thank the many other professional colleagues who gave permission for centres to be used, or provided feedback along the way concerning the work.

I am appreciative to everyone who showed great interest in the work as they provide me with the impetus to apply myself to complete the study.
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